GENERATING NEWNESS: THE THIRD SPACE MODALITY IN THE BUDDHA 
OF SUBURBIA, FRUIT OF THE LEMON AND WHITE TEETH

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Rhonda Elaine Helman

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Rhonda Elaine Helman, candidate for the degree of Master of Arts in English, has presented a thesis titled, **Generating Newness: The Third Space Modality in The Buddha Of Suburbia, Fruit of the Lemon and White Teeth**, in an oral examination held on March 31, 2014. The following committee members have found the thesis acceptable in form and content, and that the candidate demonstrated satisfactory knowledge of the subject material.

**External Examiner:** Dr. Val Mulholland, Faculty of Education  
**Supervisor:** Dr. Lynn Wells, First Nations University of Canada  
**Committee Member:** Dr. Dorothy Lane, Luther College  
**Committee Member:** Dr. Garry Sherbert, Department of English  
**Chair of Defense:** Dr. Darlene Juschka,  
Department of Women’s & Gender Studies
Abstract

In *The Location of Culture*, Homi Bhabha introduces his concepts of the third space, in-between spaces, the beyond and hybridity to explore how subordinated people – including colonized people, minorities and migrants – resist the dominant group’s power and generate newness. Newness, as presented by Salman Rushdie in *The Satanic Verses*, is difference that derives from immigration and hybridity, specifically, constructive changes in the way people think and behave in relation to immigration, hybridity, culture and people of colour. By examining Bhabha’s concepts in relation to the identity crises of four fictional second-generation immigrants of colour – Karim Amir in Hanif Kureishi’s *The Buddha of Suburbia*, Faith Jackson in Andrea Levy’s *Fruit of the Lemon* and Irie Jones and Millat Iqbal in Zadie Smith’s *White Teeth* – I show how the medium of late twentieth-century British fiction can generate newness for and through its readers. I consider Karim, Faith, Irie and Millat’s mental, physical and social spaces from Henri Lefebvre and Edward Soja’s interconnected perspectives about space. I examine how the disconnect between how Karim, Faith, Irie and Millat conceive of their spaces and how white Londoners – a term I use to reference all characters in the novels with white skin regardless of their national heritages and, in some cases, immigrant histories – conceive of these same spaces creates identity crises. Through a thorough character analysis, I argue that the potential for newness is created as Karim, Faith, Irie and Millat identify and articulate their cultural differences and attempt to dismantle dichotomies to turn “us” and “them” into hybrid identities. As these characters actively question and address persisting colonial and racist ideologies and behaviours, they reinforce the ability of readers to do likewise. Readers become aware of the gaps between how daily life for
British citizens of colour has been portrayed in fiction by white Britons versus by immigrants and citizens of colour, which encourages them to reconsider how they and other citizens participate in multicultural societies. Through my study, I demonstrate that newness is embedded in late-twentieth century British literature, waiting for the right people to read the novels and then insist on instigating positive cultural change.
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Dedication

I must thank my husband, Chris, for reminding me every day why my thesis mattered to me and ensuring that I remembered to take breaks. Thank you to my beautiful, hilarious daughter, B, for barging into my office for comic relief when I needed it the most. Thank you, also, to my parents, Mona and Allie, for always believing in me no matter how small or large the journey on which I was embarking. I’m also blessed to have amazing siblings – Cat, Les and Allison – who watched B, listened to me vent when I was stuck and encouraged me to keep going. Thank you to my friends, particularly, Renee, Marie, Shane, Cristine and Joy, for their patience and support as I neglected them to finish this. Last, I thank my manager, Jean McLuhan, for her continual support and encouragement throughout my degree.
Table of Contents

Abstract ................................................................................................................................ i

Acknowledgements ............................................................................................................ iii

Dedication .......................................................................................................................... iv

Table of Contents ................................................................................................................ v

CHAPTER ONE: Introduction .......................................................................................... 1

1.1 Newness ......................................................................................................... 1

1.2 Identity, culture, nationality and postcolonialism .......................................... 7

1.3 Methodology ................................................................................................ 13

CHAPTER TWO: Third space modality.................................................................... 36

2.1 In-between spaces, the beyond and hybridity .............................................. 36

CHAPTER THREE: Novels’ settings ........................................................................ 44

3.1 The city ..................................................................................................... 44

3.2 London ......................................................................................................... 47

CHAPTER FOUR: Character studies ......................................................................... 53

4.1 Family history .............................................................................................. 53

4.2 In-between spaces ........................................................................................ 64

4.3 Going beyond ............................................................................................... 73

4.4 Dwelling in the beyond .............................................................................. 111

CHAPTER FIVE: Conclusion .................................................................................... 124

5.1 Newness ..................................................................................................... 124

WORKS CITED ............................................................................................................ 129

**CHAPTER 1: Introduction**

1.1 Newness

The epigraph, which is from Salman Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses* (1988), is spoken by an omnipresent narrator as the main characters Saladin Chamcha and Gibreel Farishta fall to earth after the commercial airplane they are on is hijacked and blown up en route to London. Their fall symbolizes their “transmutation” and “reincarnation” (Rushdie, *Satanic 5*) from Indian Muslim men into various iterations of themselves as they begin new lives and construct new identities in 1980s London. Saladin and Gibreel learn that becoming part of London society is an extremely complicated task since they are negatively labelled as Indian Muslim immigrants of colour as soon as they land on British soil. For the duration of the novel, Saladin and Gibreel struggle to answer the question “Who am I?” (*Satanic 10*) as they waver between embracing British culture¹ and maintaining their Indian heritage.

Saladin and Gibreel struggle with their identities since, as Rushdie states,

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¹ Culture can be a contested and complex concept, so I will clarify how I am using it. Culture, as first defined by anthropologist Edward Tylor in *Primitive Culture* (1871), is “that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man [or woman] as a member of society” (1). It includes the predominant social behaviours, attitudes, languages, religions, customs, food and other traits that characterize a group. Culture is not connected to genetics or race. It is learned human behaviour; it is “social identity” (Sherbert 2).
a migrant suffers, traditionally, a triple disruption: he loses his place, he enters into an alien language, and he finds himself surrounded by beings whose social behaviors and codes are very unlike, and sometimes even offensive to, his own. . . . Roots, language and social norms have been three of the most important parts of the definition of what it is to be a human being. The migrant, denied all three, is obliged to find new ways of describing himself, new ways of being human. (“Günter” 277-78)

Interestingly, Karim Amir in Hanif Kureishi’s *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990), Faith Jackson in Andrea Levy’s *Fruit of the Lemon* (1999) and Irie Jones and Millat Iqbal in Zadie Smith’s *White Teeth* (2000) – who are fictional second-generation immigrants of colour and, therefore, should not “suffer a triple disruption” – are depicted as experiencing similar identity crises due to their skin colour.² As British-born citizens, Karim, Faith, Irie and Millat rightfully feel that they should have the same sense of belonging as and equality as white Londoners³ – a term I use to reference all characters in the novels with white skin regardless of their national heritages and, in some cases, immigrant histories. However, almost every white Londoner in these novels labels them as immigrants, subjects them to racial prejudices and frequently abases them with racist remarks related to their skin colour.

² Although Rushdie’s triple disruption includes language, Karim, Faith, Irie and Millat do not have language barriers since they solely speak British-English. Therefore, I focus on “roots” and “social norms” in relation to their identity crises.

³ I chose “white Londoners” to blatantly show these characters’ shared citizenship with Karim, Faith, Irie and Millat. This term also mimics the simplistic and outdated dichotomy of “us” (white) versus “them” (not white) perpetuated by most white Londoners in these novels.
In this context of immigration, alienation and identity creation, the epigraph comprises three critical questions regarding how newness is created plus the implied question of what is “newness.” While discussing The Satanic Verses, Rushdie indicates that “mélange, hotchpotch, a bit of this and a bit of that is how newness enters the world” (“Good” 394). Rushdie, who is an immigrant, is suggesting that newness is generated from immigration and its resulting hybridity – a mix of “this” and “that” that already exists. However, hybridity is not a guarantee of newness. Rushdie states that newness involves “change-by-fusion, change-by-conjoining” (“Good” 394); it is “the transformation that comes of new and unexpected combinations of human beings, cultures, ideas, politics, movies, songs” (“Good” 394). The words “change” and “transformation” are key to defining newness. Newness does not literally mean new or original. Rather, newness is difference that derives from hybridity. This new kind of newness, newness as difference, is reflected by constructive “changes” and “transformations” in the way people think and behave in relation to immigration, hybridity, culture and people of colour.

Rushdie presents hybridity as “the great possibility that mass migration gives the world” (Hensen and Petry 129) because it promotes newness – the “productive difference” (129) that can occur when cultures meet, clash and combine. Newness involves creating dialogue and spaces of negotiation and mediation between seemingly incommensurable groups such as London citizens by birth and by immigration. Newness requires significant changes in societal mindsets and relationships. It requires political

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4 Although newness is “born” and could arguably have a biological component, its genetic implications are not of interest in this scene of the novel or in my thesis.
change and people to dismantle archaic beliefs such as those that promote the primacy of one culture, one race or one skin colour. Newness is more inclusive societies that understand their heterogeneous histories, current cultural landscapes and potential sociological and cultural environments. It is cultural transformations and integrations, an acknowledgement and acceptance of hybrid identities, and hybrid understandings of what it means to be British.

Since Saladin and Gibreel endure mental, physical and social struggles as they attempt to create, embrace and have others accept their hybrid identities, their abilities to generate newness require the mental, physical and social “fusions, translations, conjoinings” (Rushdie, *Satanic* 8) of conflictual and seemingly incompatible cultures. Karim, Faith, Irie and Millat’s similar struggles with their hybrid identities suggest that they also share the immigrant’s ability to generate newness from their hybridity. Although it appears that newness is solely being created and explored within fictional contexts, Rushdie emphasizes the power of the written word to generate newness outside of the text. He knows that some novels “attempt radical reformulations of language, form and ideas . . . [and] attempt to do what the word *novel* seems to insist upon: to see the world anew” (“Good” 393). Newness, then, depends on whether the medium of fiction can generate hybrid thinking and identities, positive cultural changes, and difference in and through its readership. By examining the identity crises of four fictional second-generation immigrants of colour, Karim, Faith, Irie and Millat, I will show how *The Buddha of Suburbia, Fruit of the Lemon* and *White Teeth* can generate newness for and through their readers.
Karim, Faith, Irie and Millat are British citizens of colour who were born in London to middle-class families and have at least one immigrant parent but are not immigrants themselves. Karim has a brown Indian father, Haroon, and a white British mother, Margaret, and has brown skin; Faith has two Jamaican parents, Mildred and Wade, and has black skin like them; Irie is born to a black Jamaican mother, Clara, and a white British father, Archie, and has black skin; and, Millat has two Bangladeshi parents, Samad and Alsana, and has brown skin like them. \(^5\) Karim, Faith, Irie and Millat have British accents and speak British-English – they do not speak their immigrant parents’ native languages. They are, in many respects, stereotypical adolescents: their identities fluctuate based on with whom they are interacting; they struggle to find love and acceptance with their peers; and, they are confused about who they are and who they are meant to become personally and professionally. Their struggles become unique and more complex since they are second-generation immigrants of colour.

White Londoners treat Karim and Irie, who each have one white British parent, the same as Faith and Millat, who both have two immigrant parents, since their skin is not white. Karim, Faith and Irie feel pressure from their parents to live in accordance with British culture and are raised not knowing their Indian and Jamaican cultures. Millat feels pressure from his parents to live in accordance with Bangladeshi culture and dismiss British culture, even though his parents inconsistently adhere to Bangladeshi culture. Karim, Faith, Irie and Millat have in-between identities in which their sense of

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\(^5\) I acknowledge that colour-coding the characters “brown,” “white” and “black” is problematic. However, the novelists use these labels since solely referencing the characters’ cultural backgrounds, nationalities or countries of birth does not clearly indicate their skin colour. Due to the significance of skin colour throughout these novels and my study, these labels are the clearest identifiers.
culture and history wavers between their parents’ immigrant pasts and their own British cultural presents. They struggle to align their perceptions of white Londoners, London and themselves with white Londoners’ perceptions and expectations of them. Karim, Faith, Irie and Millat attempt to live lives unaffected by racism, their skin colour and their minimally known ancestral histories, but these factors loom, permeating and negatively affecting their daily interactions. They display distorted senses of self and belonging, skewed concepts of home and community, as well as unnecessarily tense relationships and interactions with everyone in their lives, regardless of their skin colour.

Like their characters, Kureishi, Levy and Smith are second-generation immigrants of colour who were born and live in London and identify with both their British and ancestral histories. These authors have first-hand experiences with racism, displacement and belonging and recount them in their writing. Kureishi has a Pakistani father and a British mother. He began writing plays and screenplays largely focused on homosexuality, and now he writes novels, short stories and non-fiction that address race, immigration, and the challenges and opportunities created by multicultural societies.

Levy, who has Jamaican parents, writes novels that reflect the experiences of Britons of colour – both immigrants and their British-born children – and that examine Britain’s changing population, how its history connects with that of people of Caribbean descent, and the struggling relationships between British citizens and Jamaican immigrants.

Smith, who has a Jamaican mother and a British father, writes novels, short stories and non-fiction that interrogate the concept of postcolonialism, deconstruct notions of race and explore the complexity of having a biracial identity. Kureishi, Levy and Smith do not “accept the easy binaries offered by racist (and classist) discourses” (Finney). They “take
it for granted that Englishness now inevitably involves ethnic multiplicity and that racism is simply a symptom of the reluctance of the old guard to accept the new hybrid nature of Britain’s population, a mélange which intensifies with the passing of each year” (Finney).

*The Buddha of Suburbia, Fruit of the Lemon* and *White Teeth* signify an important shift in British fiction by challenging what it means to be British in late twentieth-century London. Kureishi, Levy and Smith emphasize that being British should not instantly be equated with white skin. As Smith states in *White Teeth*, “it is still hard [for people] to admit that there is no one more English than the Indian, no one more Indian than the English” (327). Kureishi, Levy and Smith strategically make Karim, Faith, Irie and Millat, who would have been considered unlikely heroes in pre-1990s fiction, their protagonists. They depict them living borderline existences and crossing the artificial boundaries between “us” and “them” to explore their identities, cultures and nationalities in an often degrading and verbally abusive postcolonial London.

### 1.2 Identity, culture, nationality and postcolonialism

Identity is a key concept throughout these novels. In the introduction to *Canadian Cultural Poesis*, Garry Sherbert states “that all identity is socially, or culturally, constructed” (2) and it “is always a mixture” (4). In other words, all identities are hybrid constructs of different cultures. Sherbert also suggests that identities are continuously changing – people cannot achieve stable, singular or pure identities as their mental, physical and social spaces are continuously changing and influencing their identities. He further explains that “identity is relational, meaning that a group’s identity is defined by its similarity to and difference from the identity of another group” (3–4). For a group to
define itself as different from another group, it must know the other group well enough to identify their differences, which means that it must internalize the other group. Therefore, even people that claim to be part of a pure culture are doing so by comparing themselves to cultures that they deem to be impure. By highlighting the impure culture’s specific differences, they are acknowledging that they know parts of the impure culture, which inadvertently makes their cultural identities comprised of both their own “pure” culture and the other’s “impure” culture.

In *Philosophy in a Time of Terror*, Giovanna Borradori interviews Jacques Derrida regarding terrorism and then reflects on their discussion, expanding on Derrida’s belief that pure cultures are impossible: “Self-relation produces culture; but there is no culture without a relation to the other. No culture has a single origin: it is the very nature of culture to explore difference and to develop a systematic openness toward others within one’s culture as well as in other cultures” (170). A culture, to exist, must be in contact with other cultures as this allows it to create difference from and in relation to itself and these others cultures. In *The Other Heading*, Derrida explores the issue of defining European identity and focuses on the integral role of difference in a culture’s survival: “what is proper to a culture is to not be identical to itself” (9). To be itself and create an identity, a culture can never remain itself, that is, “identical” to the culture it is. Derrida expands on this theory by highlighting the necessity of a culture’s self-reflexivity in establishing difference from itself:

There is no culture or cultural identity without this difference with itself. . . 

. . In this case, self difference . . . that which differs and diverges from
itself, would also be the difference (from) with itself. . . . In truth, it would gather this centre, relating it to itself, only to the extent that it would open it up to this divergence. (9-10)

A culture becomes other than itself by intentionally and frequently examining itself to create difference from and within itself as a means to remain hybrid. A culture also needs to pursue and embrace hybridity from exposure to other cultures. In other words, a culture survives by revealing its own differences – what it is, was and wants to be – and by determining it differences from other cultures as they are, were and could be.

The idea of a pure identity or culture is impossible since all identities and cultures are exposed to other identities and cultures and inherently reflect them. However, purity remains a central problem in cultural politics. People are not aware of their own hybridity; they deny their hybridity due to hybridity’s historically negative connotations; or, they propagate the idea that pure cultures and identities still exist and are superior. Rushdie has observed British society, noting that a “gulf in reality has been created. White and black perceptions of everyday life have moved so far apart as to be incompatible” (“New” 134). In other words, “white and black perceptions” became opposites, which perpetuated the notion of “us” versus “them,” “better” and “worse,” and “pure” versus “impure.” As the narrator in The Satanic Verses states, “Such distinctions, resting as they must on an idea of the self as being (ideally) homogeneous, non-hybrid, ‘pure,’ – an utterly fantastic notion! – cannot, must not, suffice” (427). Rushdie sees the danger in purist thinking as it generates racist stereotypes and hinders newness from being born. Newness is not purity – it is difference. When people do not acknowledge
their or others’ hybrid identities and cultures, they cannot recognize and share their differences from themselves and others, which means that they cannot generate newness.

Throughout my thesis, I state that Karim, Faith, Irie and Millat are creating hybrid identities, which may seem redundant since I have established that all identities are hybrid. However, these characters do not initially acknowledge or embrace their hybridity. Rushdie, as noted earlier, believes that hybridity is how newness enters the world. Sherbert notes that “‘hybridity’ names the place where all individual, cultural, even political, identities are produced” (4). It can be deduced from their theories that personal, cultural and national identity creation contributes to newness being born. Therefore, by “identity creation” I mean that Karim, Faith, Irie and Millat have to acknowledge and embrace that they have in-between identities and then start to dictate what comprises their hybrid identities, particularly, their differences. Until these characters define their hybrid identities, they cannot generate newness since newness requires hybridity and its differences to instigate cultural and societal changes.

The challenge of defining British national identity is also weaved throughout these novels. In *Imagined Communities* (1984), Benedict Anderson reformulates the concepts of the “Nation, nationality, nationalism – [as] all have proved notoriously difficult to define” (3). He defines “nation” as an “imagined political community. . . . It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members . . . . yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (6). For the purpose of my thesis, a “nation” is a socially derived political community of people who feel an affiliation to one another based on commonalities such as their skin
colour, language, religion, history or country of birth. “Nationality” is how people define their sense of belonging and affiliation to a specific nation. Similar to Derrida’s thinking on pure cultures, Anderson implies that nationalities cannot be pure. He states that nationality must be considered in relation to “the large cultural systems that preceded it, out of which – as well as against which – it came into being” (12). Anderson believes that within each nation is a false sense of security. People assume that others share their sense of belonging since they all have the same national heritage. For example, white British citizens and British citizens of colour may both feel a strong affiliation with the British nation. White British citizens may stringently oppose people of colour sharing this sense of nationality since they were raised to imagine the British nation as white. British citizens of colour may feel that they have as much right as white British citizens to belong to this nation since it is both of their country of birth. If neither considers Britain’s long history of immigration, colonization and racism, they struggle to see how they share a common nationality. This disconnect inhibits a hybrid sense of nationality and the newness this sense of nationality could create in postcolonial London.

“Postcolonial” is a loaded term with multiple definitions and interpretations. In *The Location of Culture*, Homi Bhabha draws on what he labels as contemporary postcolonial theoretical and literary texts to examine identity, social agency and belonging. Bhabha believes that “post” terms such as “postcolonial” limit analyses when they are used to “indicate sequentiality – after-[colonialism]; or polarity – anti-modernism” (4). Rather, they are most effectively applied as conceptual frameworks to analyze, understand and respond to cultural artefacts and persisting colonial behaviour and attitudes. Bhabha explores the ways in which non-fictional subordinated people –
including colonized people, minorities and migrants – resist the dominant group’s power and create new cultural forms due to and in spite of colonization. He sees colonialism as something that is always present and affects present-day relationships and interactions. Likewise, through their novels, Kureishi, Levy and Smith indicate that second-generation immigrants of colour like themselves “cannot wholly escape the shadow of the colonial past. They still inherit conflicts that are unique to descendants of immigrants” (Finney). Karim, Faith, Irie and Millat are constructed in colonialism’s lingering shadow. Their identities are mainly in flux due to their lack of knowledge about London’s and their parents’ histories of immigration and (de)colonization and due to white Londoners who perpetuate colonial stereotypes and behaviour.

Bhabha’s theories help to explore and understand the complexity of postcolonial, multicultural communities. During an interview, he states that

the postcolonial perspective forces us to rethink the profound limitations of a consensual and collusive ‘liberal’ sense of community. It insists – through the migrant metaphor – that cultural and political identity is constructed through a process of othering. The time for ‘assimilating’ minorities to holistic and organic notions of cultural value has passed – the very language of cultural community needs to be rethought from a postcolonial perspective. (Rutherford 219)

According to Bhabha, culture, identity and politics need to be reconsidered through the postcolonial lens in an effort to dismantle “us” versus “them” thinking and to reveal the expansive possibilities of heterogeneous societies and ideologies. The “us” that Bhabha
would normally reject as a simplistic, limiting binary becomes the key to “them” understanding and recreating their identities: “In the postcolonial text the problem of identity returns as a persistent questioning of the frame, the space of representation, where the image – missing person, invisible eye, Oriental stereotype – is confronted with its difference, its Other” (Bhabha 46). Within Kureishi, Levy and Smith’s novels, the “us” – white Londoners – and “them” – second-generation immigrants of colour – have been constructed in the same “space of representation,” the same physical and social spaces, with their differences exposed and available for discussion and confrontation. However, it tends to be white Londoners dictating Karim, Faith, Irie and Millat’s differences to them. It is this strong contrast of “us” versus “them” thinking and behaviour in these spaces that triggers Karim, Faith, Irie and Millat to see and evaluate themselves as a “them.”

1.3 Methodology

I begin my study by employing Bhabha’s critical thinking to explain the transition from hybridity to newness. Bhabha argues that the “migrant’s survival depends, as Rushdie put it, on discovering ‘how newness enters the world’” (227). This means that migrants have to establish and embrace their hybridity before newness – the positive potential of hybridity – can occur. Saladin, who initially favours his English identity, ends up wealthy and happy once he accepts his hybridity and finds a successful balance between his Indian and English cultures. Gibreel tries to maintain a fixed identity as solely Indian and commits suicide seemingly because he cannot accept or embrace his hybridity. Bhabha explores Saladin and Gibreel’s identity crises by engaging “with the
‘foreign’ element that reveals the interstitial . . . and becomes the ‘unstable element of linkage,’ the indeterminate temporality of the in-between, that has to be engaged in creating the conditions through which ‘newness comes into the world’” (227). The “foreign element” that displaces historical and current ways of thinking and behaving to allow newness to be born is what Bhabha calls the “Third Space of enunciation” or, simply, the “third space” (37). The third space is not a physical, tangible object or space; it is a theoretical space that is “unrepresentable in itself” (37). Bhabha sees the third space as a necessary and inevitable reality of contemporary society and relationships due to the identity crises created by class barriers, racism and other stigmas that promote “us” versus “them” thinking.

Bhabha describes the third space as a “contingent, borderline experience [that] opens up in-between colonizer and colonized” (206). It is “the precondition for the articulation of cultural difference” (38) and a means for subordinated people to challenge and resist racist and cultural labels and binaries. The third space also helps people challenge the validity of homogeneous historical accounts:

The intervention of the Third Space of enunciation, which makes the structure of meaning and reference an ambivalent process, destroys this mirror of representation in which cultural knowledge is customarily revealed as an integrated, open, expanding code. [It] quite properly challenges [people’s] sense of the historical identity of culture as a homogenizing, unifying, authenticated for the originary Past, kept alive in the national tradition of the People. (37)
Bhabha explains the third space conceptually and theoretically as a state of being. It is a point of disclosure in which the colonial fabric of culture, which attempts to “homogenize” and “unify” (37), is dismantled and shown to be a falsehood. The third space does not allow culture to be seen as fixed or homogeneous. It “constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew” (37). Bhabha believes that culture is in a continuous state of renewal in which its “meanings and symbols” are revisited and re-read. The third space “creat[es] that occult instability which presages powerful cultural changes” (38). Cultural changes, as noted earlier, are indicative of newness. The third space, then, is a conceptual space of discussion, intersection, tension and personal growth that creates the possibility for “us” and “them” to find a more heterogeneous sense of culture, history and nationality.

Since the third space is intangible, it is difficult to demonstrate how it generates newness. To clarify the process, the third space must be considered as a modality associated with Bhabha’s related concepts in *The Location of Culture* – “in-between spaces” (1), the “beyond” (1) and “hybridity” (4). Bhabha believes that it is limiting for narratives to emphasize simplistic binary oppositions such as those between the colonizer and the colonized and black and white. Rather, he sees the value in focusing on the borders of these oppositions, “those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences” (1) – the “in-between spaces.” In-between spaces are where identities, ideologies and racist attitudes are either succumbed to or challenged. The “‘beyond’ signifies spatial distance, marks progress, promises the future. . . . The
imaginary of spatial distance – to live somehow beyond the border of our times – throws into relief the temporal, social differences that interrupt our collusive sense of cultural contemporaneity” (4). “Spatial distance” does not mean physical distance; rather, the beyond creates the mental and social distance necessary for people to question society’s values and rules and gain an alternative perspective of their circumstances and identities. Going beyond gives people the opportunity – although it is not immediately apparent to them at the time – to be psychologically migratory. It helps them to envision the potential for newness, particularly, new communities in which their skin colour, ancestral histories and cultural backgrounds are viewed as positive additions to their identities and these societies.

Newness for both Bhabha and Rushdie requires the positive potential of hybridity – a state of being that “offers the most profound challenge to colonialism” (Bhabha 113). Bhabha presents hybridity as an “empowering condition” (Location 227) since it involves “the act of living on borderlines” (226-27). He believes that hybridity is “where cultural differences ‘contingently’ and conflictually touch . . . . It resists the binary opposition of racial and cultural groups . . . as homogeneous polarized political consciousness” (207). Hybridity signifies that subordinated people are challenging colonial perspectives, how nationality is viewed and how opposing cultural groups interact with one another:

Hybridity is the sign of the productivity of colonial power . . . it is the name for the strategic reversal of the process of domination through disavowal. . . . It displays the necessary deformation and displacement of
all sites of discrimination and domination . . . [and] turn[s] the gaze of the
discriminated back upon the eye of power. (112)

Hybridity also signifies that subordinated people are directly questioning “the eye of power,” forcing people with colonial attitudes to re-evaluate their own beliefs and behaviour and acknowledge their own hybridity.

Historically, though, hybridity was viewed negatively: “In colonial days ‘hybridity’ was a term of abuse, signifying the lowest possible form of human life: mixed breeds who were ‘white but not quite’” (Hoogvelt 159). Karim, Faith, Irie and Millat are born with in-between identities, which they view as limiting. They struggle to embrace their hybridity since many characters in these novels maintain the mindset that hybridity is undesirable. Authors such as Kureishi, Levy and Smith strategically use their characters’ ignorance to present hybridity in a positive light and help change the negative connotations associated with it: “In post-colonial discourse . . . hybridity is celebrated and privileged as a kind of superior cultural intelligence owing to the advantage of ‘in-betweenness,’ the straddling of two cultures and the consequent ability to ‘negotiate the difference’” (Hoogvelt 159). In these novels, Karim, Faith, Irie and Millat’s in-between identities are actually “empowering” and help them to see British nationality more inclusively. Karim, Faith, Irie and Millat do not have to choose to assimilate to the dominant culture or preserve their ancestral cultures; they can exist as a balance of both. These characters have the opportunity to create hybrid identities that will enable them to find the freedom in and advantage of being multi-racial, contemporary, urban British citizens of colour. Bhabha likewise positions “‘liminality . . . [as] that productive space
of the construction of culture as difference” (Hensen and Petry 129). Therefore, by using Bhabha’s third space modality to explore Rushdie’s concept of newness, hybridity can be viewed as something other than a problem that causes identity crises and social strife – it becomes the solution: a “productive space” that creates “difference” and generates newness.

The third space modality creates doubt and uncertainty, which prompts personal and societal awareness. This awareness discredits the racist drive toward purity by challenging its viability. It also helps people find their own hybridity and discover the power of hybridity to dismantle any racist strategies that subordinate differences. Based on this understanding, I begin my study by explicating Bhabha’s third space modality, which provides a framework to understand the transition from hybridity to newness, specifically, how Karim, Faith, Irie and Millat’s pursuits of hybrid identities can create doubt, uncertainty, awareness and, ultimately, newness for readers.

The next section of my thesis elucidates the significance of the city and London as these novels’ settings. Identity crises of second-generation immigrants of colour can be explored in any multicultural, postcolonial and racist metropolis with a high immigration rate. I chose novels that explore their identity crises’ functionality and significance in fictional London due to the actual city’s lengthy history of mass immigration, racial plurality, class and race hierarchies, and its citizens’ historically contradictory views on British nationality. Even though Karim, Faith, Irie and Millat are adolescents in London during different decades – Karim the 1970s, Faith the 1980s, and Irie and Millat the 1990s – they experience comparable challenges and the London in the
novels is depicted similarly. London is a city with different cultures, skin colours, histories, ideologies and lifestyles existing simultaneously and seldom harmoniously. These city settings contribute to and mirror Karim, Faith, Irie and Millat’s disorientation, senses of conflict and potential growth. The characters’ similar social challenges in different temporal settings also alert readers to racism’s endurance in London and its life-changing effects. In the context of London’s history and heterogeneous population, the city settings also present believable and potentially familiar social and physical circumstances, which increase the chances of the stories resonating with readers. Additionally, the years these novels were published increased the likelihood that they could instigate newness through their readership since more people in England were openly speaking out against racism and discrimination by the 1990s.

The novels’ city settings in conjunction with Bhabha’s third space modality highlight the importance of the concept of space to my study. London contains innumerable mental, physical and social spaces that are integral to understanding Karim, Faith, Irie and Millat’s identity crises. Additionally, the interconnectedness of Karim, Faith, Irie and Millat’s mental, physical and social spaces directly relates to their disorientation, identity crises and outcomes in the third space and to how newness is

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6 See section 3.2 London for a brief overview of London’s history and the significant historical and political moments that occurred after World War II and during these novels’ temporal settings that demonstrate why racism continued to persist in London and, correspondingly, how these characters could be created in different decades with similar challenges.

7 Ian Baucom’s *Out of Place: Englishness, Empire, and the Locations of Identity* provides a thorough discussion of the (de/re)creation of the English identity from 1857 to the 1990s, highlighting the most significant historical and cultural moments connected to the struggle of people of colour to be considered “English.” He explores the British Nationality Act of 1981 and the resulting negative mindset shift from asking where someone was born to asking their race when determining British citizenship. These novels were written after 1981 and, therefore, their focus on skin colour reflects a reaction to this Act.
generated for readers. I recognize that defining “space” in any context is complex since what is considered to be “space” has increased and changed considerably. I consider Karim, Faith, Irie and Millat’s physical, mental and social spaces from Henri Lefebvre and Edward Soja’s interconnected perspectives. Lefebvre, in *The Production of Space*, focuses on the evolution of space from being “strictly geometrical” to include “social space” (*Production* 1), particularly in modern urban settings. Lefebvre views social space through his “perceived–conceived–lived triad” (*Production* 40). Perceived space (which includes physical spaces) represents the constructed, natural, geographical and physical aspects of environments such as landscapes, cities, buildings and streets. Conceived space (which includes mental spaces and Lefebvre also calls “true” and “ideal” space) represents the space of the mind such as knowledge, language, discourse, ideology and how people perceive the world and one another. Lived space (which includes social spaces and Lefebvre also calls “real” space) represents social space such as cultural models and people’s relationships and interactions with one another.

Lefebvre believes that “the lived, conceived and perceived realms should be interconnected, so that the ‘subject’, the individual member of a given social group, may move from one to another without confusion. . . . Whether they constitute a coherent whole is another matter” (*Production* 40). These realms are “interconnected” in the sense that they have a symbiotic relationship. For example, conceived space appropriates perceived and lived spaces by dictating how people formulate and react to these spaces.

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8 I reference Lefebvre and Soja, since Lefebvre, Soja and Bhabha are prominent theorists who reject binaries and dualisms, connect space and culture through symbiotic theories and triadic frameworks, highlight the importance of social space, and pursue and highlight the importance of pursuing alternative ways of viewing space and its impact on society.
Perceived and lived spaces also affect a person’s conceived space as they can alter a person’s mindset. When these realms are functioning as “a coherent whole,” a person can navigate, manipulate and understand their various spaces without feeling disoriented or misplaced, even as one space alters the others. However, when discussing subordinated people in multicultural metropolises in which there are an infinite number of conflicting human contacts and contracts, it is fleeting and rare to have a coherent triad. This is also true in *The Buddha of Suburbia*, *Fruit of the Lemon* and *White Teeth*. Karim, Faith, Irie and Millat are not aware at first that they are in different mental and social spaces than white Londoners. They easily see themselves as sharing many commonalities with white Londoners, but white Londoners resist this fact. It is the disconnect between how Karim, Faith, Irie and Millat conceive of their spaces and white Londoners conceive of these same spaces that alter the readers’ conceived and lived spaces.

The shift of spatial studies to include the social space triad is particularly important as Karim, Faith, Irie and Millat’s identity crises are not solely produced by physical spaces. They try to change society without acknowledging that they are also being changed in the process, which results in them trying to resist or control changes to their identities. They also do not have strong senses of self – what makes them the same as and different from others – which makes these changes challenging to accept. In general, these characters initially ignore, deny or tolerate that they have in-between identities, even in spite of the blatant racism they endure, making London a controlling and limiting space for them. London is not being personified in this context; it is a city that these characters initially conceive of as home, as somewhere they belong, and that
offers endless possibilities for their relationships and personal development. However, after white Londoners articulate their differences, Karim, Faith, Irie and Millat conceive of London as a space that inhibits their relationships and development.

Karim, Faith, Irie and Millat’s varying conceptions of themselves and the disconnections between their spaces occur as they attempt to (re)define what constitutes their identities among competing mental, physical and social spaces that they are changing and that are also changing them. Sherbert explains these kinds of continuous, albeit often subtle, identity changes and their impacts through the concept of “cultural poesis . . . [which] refers to the ‘making of culture,’ or to the tension between making and being made by culture at the same time” (2). Cultural poesis supports the idea that all cultures and identities are simultaneously being made by and are making other cultures and identities. The “tension” of cultural poesis, which exists in the mental, physical and social spaces between making and being made by culture, represents the social challenges, identity crises, and potential created by the process of culture creation. For Karim, Faith, Irie and Millat, the “tension” associated with cultural poesis occurs because they do not initially see themselves as culturally different. When they do, they struggle to influence others to create a more common sense of culture or accept them as part of their cultures. White Londoners feel tension since they are resistant to Karim, Faith, Irie and Millat’s desired changes and prefer to work on shaping and maintaining these characters as how they perceive them. As Karim, Faith, Irie, Millat and white Londoners resist each other’s influences, tension surfaces again due to the disconnection between what each person is willing to adopt and what they are stringently opposed to adopting from each
other’s cultures. However, this tension also triggers the need for change in these characters’ spaces.

Sherbert states that people have the ability to control their identities: “Rather than swinging back and forth between making and being made by culture, and resolving nothing, cultural poesis allows both to happen at the same time by dwelling on the space in between the two processes” (7). In relation to Karim, Faith, Irie, Millat, this “space in between the two processes” and the “tension” in which they can form hybrid identities is the third space. It is how these characters react in the third space to this tension that determines the interconnectedness of their spatial triads. According to James Donald in *Imagining the Modern City*, Lefebvre believes that

> the key to understanding the . . . dialectic between social space and mental space is the *transition*. . . . the circuit running through imagination, representation, the body, the social, and the spatial. What makes the circuit work . . . is not the nature of space, but the spatial consequences of what people do. The space we experience is the material embodiment of a history of social relations. (13)

The people and neighbourhoods that once seemed welcoming to Karim, Faith, Irie and Millat become disorienting. London, as a physical space, has not changed. However, in Karim, Faith, Irie and Millat’s perspectives, its lived spaces have changed, which affects them mentally, physically and socially. They must understand white Londoners’ lived and conceived spaces to be able to abandon whom white Londoners have stereotyped
them to be, which is also how they have come to identify themselves. The “spatial consequences” of white Londoners’ behaviour help Karim, Faith, Irie and Millat create mental and social spaces of power and identities that cannot be imposed upon as easily by white Londoners. The spatial consequences of all of these characters’ behaviour help readers gain new awareness of London and its cultural relationships. They also help readers to reformulate their perceived, conceived and lived spaces in regards to a new perspective of British nationality and the treatment of second-generation immigrants of colour in London.

In *Thirdspace* (1996), Soja builds on Lefebvre’s triadic spatial concepts to introduce “Thirdspace” (53) – “a way of thinking that sees the spatiality of our lives, the human geographies in which we live, as having the same scope and critical significance as the historical and social dimensions of our lives” (Borch 113). Thirdspace highlights the necessity to view these forms of space as inseparable and interdependent. Soja introduced Thirdspace shortly after Bhabha’s *The Location of Culture* and synthesized their concepts to make Thirdspace more encompassing and ambiguous. Soja insists “that each mode of thinking about space, each ‘field’ of human spatiality – the physical, the mental, the social – be seen as simultaneously real and imagined, concrete and abstract, material and metaphorical” (*Thirdspace* 64). For example, I examine London as being composed of different kinds of space: I introduce it as the actual geographical and physical city of London to give context to the authors’ choices of settings; I explore it as a fictional city based on the actual city of London and as a cultural space with people from numerous backgrounds living, working and existing together to clarify the cause of
Karim, Faith, Irie and Millat’s identity crises; and, I discuss London as a psychological space that is constructed and reconstructed based on Karim, Faith, Irie, Millat and white Londoners’ states of mind.

Thirdspace is “a space of extraordinary openness, a place of critical exchange” (Soja, *Thirdspace* 5). It is “a strategic location from which to encompass, understand, and potentially transform all spaces simultaneously” (*Thirdspace* 68). The nature of Thirdspace closely resembles Bhabha’s concept of hybridity and they both allude to newness and how it can be generated. Bhabha states that “all forms of culture are continually in a process of hybridity. . . . [that] gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognizable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation” (Rutherford 211). Thirdspace is based on constantly creating “an-Other way of understanding and acting to change the spatiality of human life” (Soja, *Thirdspace* 57). Like Lefebvre, Soja emphasizes that his concept is “radically open to additional otherness, to a continuing expansion of spatial knowledge” (*Thirdspace* 61).

These novels, for example, present “an-Other” way of seeing in-between identities, British nationality and the interconnectedness of space that challenges and redefines power, social boundaries and identity and helps shape human actions.

Soja’s Thirdspace supports the continuously evolving concept and interpretation of space and history for which Bhabha is commonly criticized. Bhabha is also criticized for disregarding any connection between materialism and space or culture. Instead, he focuses on abstract thinking and neologisms to found his ideas in representation and language to ensure that they are never finite and his third space modality cannot be anchored in historical or futuristic thinking. Bhabha employs Derrida’s concept of
**différance** (to defer and to differ) to support his notion that everything can be interpreted in endless ways since language and words have endless meanings due to endless signifiers; hence, *différance* and, particularly, differences are how hybridity is produced (Bhabha 53). And, in the production of differences and hybridity, the third space modality becomes a venue to oppose and dismantle power structures by presenting alternatives to purist and status quo ways of thinking.

Throughout my character analysis in the latter half of my thesis, I explore how Karim, Faith, Irie and Millat’s identity crises are prompted by their disconnected space triads, which include their relationships with their families and immigrant histories and their and white Londoners’ contrary conceptions of space. I also discuss space in connection to cities, social norms and the mental life of London’s citizens to indicate the expansive effect space has on Karim, Faith, Irie, Millat and white Londoners, particularly when they do not consider space in its multitude of forms. I highlight the fluidity of both space and the city and the complexity their mutability creates for Karim, Faith, Irie and Millat’s identities and relationships.

The latter half of my thesis is a comparative study of Karim, Faith, Irie and Millat in the context of Bhabha’s third space modality. Literary critics such as Bart Moore-Gilbert, Bradley Buchanan, Susan Alice Fischer and Philip Tew have analyzed Kureishi, Levy and Smith’s works, noting their contributions to British literature and the concept of British nationality. Moore-Gilbert’s *Hanif Kureishi* provides a comprehensive review of Kureishi’s work up to 2001. He reiterates Kureishi’s views in *The Buddha of Suburbia* about race, ethnicity, Britain and British identity that contradict stereotypical British views. Moore-Gilbert commends Kureishi for his creation of a “new social subject which
challenges traditional conceptions of class identity . . . [and] the elaboration of new models of English/British ethnicity and identity” (112). He highlights that “one of the strongest themes of [Kureishi’s] writing is the inextricable connection between the ‘personal’ and ‘the political’” (212). In other words, Kureishi creates Karim’s individual identity crisis to be a commentary on the larger political, cultural and class issues in London. Likewise, Buchanan’s *Hanif Kureishi* provides an overview and analysis of Kureishi’s major works, focusing on how his characters are representative of the larger issues in Britain. He examines *The Buddha of Suburbia*, noting how Kureishi uses “issues of race and class . . . [to] shape identity in contemporary Britain” (41). He also explores how Kureishi’s coming from a “lower-middle-class family” (111) affects his portrayal of the limitations and advantages of class in Britain.

Most critics have only recently begun to review Levy’s novels in depth. In “Andrea Levy’s London Novels,” Fischer – who writes about British national identity in contemporary literature, including Kureishi, Levy and Smith’s works – discusses the concept of “‘unbelonging’ . . . of being caught between places” (203) in Levy’s fiction. Her concept stems from Levy’s portrayal of immigrants who feel split between their homelands and new countries. The idea also lends itself to second-generation immigrants of colour who exist in the aftermath of their parents’ feelings of unbelonging. It can be argued that they find assimilating as challenging as their parents did since they are further removed from their ancestral histories that are still affecting their interactions. In 2012, Wendy Knepper compiled a collection of essays on Levy’s novels. The essays emphasize Levy’s affiliation with postcolonial women’s writing, gender rights and her “unflinching critique of inequality, especially as evidenced through the intersections of
race, class, and gender” (1). Tew has written Zadie Smith and The Contemporary British Novel and co-edited Contemporary British Fiction, British Fiction Today and the series New British Fiction. He examines other critics’ analyses of British works, focusing on the “‘new wave’ of British writing emerging from the mid-1970s” that “exemplifies [the] cultural codes and creative hybridity characteristic of this period” (Contemporary 1). He sees the “dominant cultural themes [as] . . . British identity, the explicit notion of a culture in transition, late capitalist ‘Thatcherized’ urban spaces, and finally the use of the mythopoeic and hybridity as renewing literary responses to such conditions” (Contemporary 1). Tew notes that Smith believes that critics “ignore her notion of the impossibility of and pointlessness in searching for any coherent identity” (Zadie 115). This is important as Karim, Faith, Irie and Millat’s identity crises should not prompt readers to look for finite identities in the characters, themselves and others. Rather, they should prompt readers to discover how identity crises generate the need for these characters to find their hybrid identities and the purpose of such senses of identity.

The above critics analyze each author’s oeuvre and address key themes such as identity, hybridity and belonging. However, their reviews focus on immigrants more than second-generation immigrants of colour. They seldom cross-reference the other novels for comparison purposes, choosing to either delve into the applicable author’s oeuvre or briefly reference the other author’s overarching themes to support their arguments. These critics’ discussions of the third space either do not go in depth or do not include Bhabha’s third space modality. Buchanan and Tew do allude to the idea of fiction generating newness for readers. However, none of the above critics explore how these novels, via the third space modality or otherwise, can accomplish this.
As I have been iterating, while considering these novels in relation to the third space modality, it is important to remember that fiction is constructed and exists for the readers, not the characters. In *Narratives for a New Belonging*, Roger Bromley examines diaspora and belonging in migrant writings and how texts such as Kureishi’s and Smith’s challenge fixed assumptions about identity, space and community. He notes that migrant writings are “an attempt to produce an act of reinscribing, of revising and hybridising the settled discursive hierarchies, by constructing a third space beyond existing political, social and cultural binaries: it is a space of revaluation” (1). Therefore, as white Londoners and Karim, Faith, Irie and Millat articulate their cultural differences, the third space is actually opening up for readers. The third space helps readers challenge what these characters are intentionally created to challenge: the persisting notions that London’s history, culture and society are or should be homogenous, London would be better off without immigrants and their children, and London does not have racial challenges.

In *Imaginary Ethnographies*, Gabriele Schwab expands her “theory of reading as cultural contact” (2) that she began in *The Mirror and the Killer-Queen*. She argues that literature is a “medium that writes culture” and “relates to, produces, or intervenes in culture” (2). The act of reading creates the potential for the reader’s conception of culture to be altered:

> Literary experience is thus located in a transitional space between reader and text. . . . ‘The place where cultural experience is located is in the *potential space* between the individual and the environment.’ Culture, in
turn, circulates within this potential or transitional space in an open and fluid process in which aggregates from both the text’s and the reader’s different cultural systems interact with one another, creating new amalgams and myriad emergent forms. (14)

Newness can be born in this “potential and transitional space,” the third space, which intervenes as readers compare and contrast their cultural systems with the novels’ presentation of culture. Schwab recognizes and highlights that it is “the dialogical process between text and reader” that allows literature “to write the future” (14). Newness stems from the hybridity created as the reader encounters the text and searches out difference instead of fighting for the purity of the status quo.

Schwab calls novels that challenge and alter readers’ social and mental cultural landscapes “imaginary ethnographies” (1):

Imaginary ethnographies are texts that write culture by inventing a language that redraws the boundaries of imaginable worlds and by providing thick descriptions of the desires, fears, and fantasies that shape the imaginary lives and cultural encounters of invented protagonists. . . . they also rewrite cultural narratives. They use alternative signifying practices and bold reconfigurations to undo cultural iconographies and unsettle the status quo of habitual cultural codes. In this respect literatures . . . can also be seen . . . as discourses and practices of cultural resistance. (2)
In keeping with Schwab’s definition, *White Teeth*, *Fruit of the Lemon* and *The Buddha of Suburbia* can be seen as imaginary ethnographies since they are venues for dismantling political and societal stereotypes and norms. These novels are amongst the first British novels to be recognized and acclaimed for having protagonists who openly depict the challenges experienced by British citizens of colour. Schwab believes that imaginary ethnographies “use language and artistic form to reshape iconic figurations in order to generate emergent forms of subjectivity, culture, and life” (18). Since the time of their publishing, particularly, but still today, Kureishi, Levy and Smith’s novels redefine immigrant subjectivity by responding to persisting colonial attitudes and behaviour – racism, discrimination, cultural alienation, displacement and violence – and giving a voice to actual British citizens of colour facing similar experiences. Kureishi, Levy and Smith embark on a process of negotiation between different cultural spaces and colonial and postcolonial binaries. Their novels depict the mental, physical and social spaces that disorient readers, encouraging them to reconsider their current ideologies and how they and other citizens participate in multicultural societies.

Karim, Faith, Irie and Millat are torn by who they were, are and could be. Their varied journeys and end states help readers become aware of the gaps between how daily life for British citizens of colour has been portrayed by white Britons versus by second-generation immigrants of colour. Karim, Faith and Irie’s initial unresponsiveness to racist encounters are triggers to open up the third space in which readers question these characters’ complacency. Both Karim and Faith enter depressed states due to their disconnections from their heritages and the racial roadblocks on their journeys to creating
hybrid identities. *White Teeth* revolves around Irie’s and Millat’s anger and sense of powerlessness. Karim’s naivety, Faith’s innocence, and Irie’s and Millat’s continuous frustration highlight to readers how unfair their struggles are and the breadth of the physical and psychological effects of racism. Readers see that in-between identities are unavoidable since Karim, Faith, Irie and Millat cannot control their skin colour, country of birth or heritage. They also see that white Londoners’ treatment of second-generation immigrants of colour is a choice.

Karim, Faith, Irie and Millat help readers recognize how unnecessarily challenging life is for second-generation immigrants of colour. For example, *The Buddha of Suburbia* and *Fruit of the Lemon* indicate how much more difficult success is for people of colour in industries such as theatre and television. Karim, who is striving to become an actor, is placed into compromising positions to test what he will do for success and to be part of white Londoners’ society. Faith, who wants to be a television costume designer, does not initially acknowledge her skin colour as a barrier, which leads to her enduring her co-workers’ and friends’ racial comments. Through these scenes and others, readers realize that these characters are not protected from the effects of racism in their homes and friends’ homes, their work environments, their own mindsets or London.

Kureishi, Levy and Smith help readers re-evaluate the struggles that second-generation immigrants of colour endure and the newness they can and will bring to the cities they inhabit. The inevitability of newness is captured in *The Satanic Verses* when black militant leader Dr. Uhuru Simba speaks in court after he is arrested (mistakenly
due to his skin colour and social status) for a series of gruesome murders. He states that immigrants and their children will inflict cultural change:

Make no mistake. . . . we are here to change things. I concede at once that we shall ourselves be changed . . . we are other than what we would have been if we had not crossed the oceans, if our mothers and fathers had not crossed the skies in search of work and dignity and a better life for their children. We have been made again: but I say that we shall also be the ones to remake this society, to shape it from the bottom to the top. . . . It is our turn now. (Rushdie 428-29)

Uhuru is talking about concepts such as cultural poesis, hybridity, cultural change and newness. He acknowledges that he and other immigrants have been changed due to migrating and that they will also change London and its citizens by intentionally and unintentionally exposing them to their cultures. Uhuru is a visionary who sees the inevitability of change and the improvements it can bring. Like his character, Rushdie states that “‘having been borne across the world, we [migrants] are translated men. It is normally supposed that something always gets lost in translation; I cling, obstinately, to the notion that something can also be gained’” (“Imaginary” 17). Rushdie sees this “gain” as hybridity and the potential resulting newness. Immigrants and their children will “remake” London and “shape it from the bottom to the top” so that in-between, hybrid identities and people of colour are valued by themselves and others instead of persecuted.
By applying Bhabha’s third space modality to Karim, Faith, Irie and Millat’s identity crises, I will demonstrate how these novels can generate newness for readers. I explore how Karim’s and Faith’s initial complacency and Irie’s and Millat’s initial anger limit their abilities to mentally progress past the in-between spaces created when white Londoners articulate their cultural differences. I then use Bhabha’s concepts to examine what prompts each character to go beyond and attempt to redefine who they are in the context of their families, friends and London. I conclude by providing evidence that Karim, Faith, Irie and Millat’s abilities to generate fictional newness do not progress past Karim and Faith’s hybrid identities and Irie and Millat’s failed attempts to dwell in the beyond. However, I employ Bhabha’s concepts to highlight that it is Karim, Faith, Irie and Millat’s journeys, rather than their end-states, that prompt newness for readers and readers to generate newness. As Karim, Faith, Irie and Millat actively question and address persisting colonial and racist beliefs and behaviours, they reinforce the ability of readers to do likewise.

Uhuru’s lawyer, at a rally for his acquittal, states, “As Dr Simba has written, newness will enter this society by collective, not individual, actions” (Rushdie, Satanic 429-30). In other words, one person’s actions can be powerful, but a group’s collective actions are transformational. Schwab presents imaginary ethnographies as being capable of creating such social and cultural transformations. The real medium, though, as noted by Schwab, is not literature but rather “language” that can reach a multitude of people and “unsettle the status quo of habitual cultural codes.” Imaginary ethnographies, such as these novels, allow one author’s thoughts to become anybody’s beliefs. Karim, Faith, Irie and Millat’s stories help readers come to the third space recognition and create the
potential for actual newness: positive cultural changes and “hybrid moment[s] of political change” (Bhabha 28) in the readers’ personal lives and communities.
CHAPTER 2: Third space modality

2.1 In-between spaces, the beyond and hybridity

Bhabha, like Rushdie, suggests the ability of texts to dismantle current ideologies and present opportunities for readers to re-evaluate how they participate in multicultural societies with citizens of colour. This potential is revealed through an understanding of Bhabha’s in-between spaces, the beyond and hybridity. In-between spaces are the prerequisite for subordinated people to construct a hybrid identity and more inclusive social space and to prompt powerful social changes and newness: “‘In-between’ spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity, and innovate sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself” (Bhabha 1-2). In-between spaces emerge due to negative interactions between opposing cultural groups, whether or not either side realizes or accepts that they are part of this dichotomy. They are emblematic of the larger cultural tensions in multicultural cities between people who are white and people who are not. Therefore, they cause subordinated people to experience identity crises by heightening their awareness as “other.” When Karim, Faith, Irie and Millat accept that they have in-between identities and start to address the marginalization and daily negative interactions they experience, they are enabled to psychologically experience a new terrain, the beyond.

9 In-between spaces are produced when cultural differences are both positively and negatively articulated. I focus on the negative interactions due to the novels’ focus on them.
Bhabha introduces the beyond as a contemporary phenomenon commonly used to address “the question of culture” (1). He discusses the beyond conceptually as something that is neither futuristic nor ahistoric: “The ‘beyond’ is neither a new horizon, nor a leaving behind of the past.... in the fin de siècle, we find ourselves in the moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion” (1). The beyond is unique in its melding of the past, present and future into the “time of the now” (4). It enables people to identify the present day as separate from the temporal, homogenous version of history. People can confront this version of history to create worldviews that are not burdened by or continuations of the past. Rather, these new worldviews are based on the reality of contemporary societies.

Bhabha differentiates between “being in the beyond” and “dwelling in the beyond” (7) to explicate how the effect of the beyond differs based on how the person experiences it: “Being in the beyond” “is to inhabit an intervening space” (7), the third space. The beyond is the mental venue for Karim, Faith, Irie and Millat to explore and understand their ancestral histories and cultures and white Londoners’ racist behaviour. It helps them recognize their and others’ limiting perspectives of England and how London is and could be. Bhabha says that “there is a sense of disorientation, a disturbance of direction, in the ‘beyond’: an exploratory, restless movement” (1). Karim, Faith, Irie and Millat become unsure as to where they belong in their current cultural spaces (mentally, physically and socially) and they have not found a way to be incorporated into new cultural spaces in a way in which they feel as if they belong (again, mentally, physically...
and socially). They psychologically oscillate between their cultures, their parents’ cultures and white Londoners’ cultures, restlessly traversing the boundaries between “us” and “them” in an attempt to dismantle this binary. Being in the beyond creates greater disorientation for Karim, Faith, Irie and Millat; however, this disorientation is required for the successful pursuit of less disoriented selves, that is, their hybrid identities. Karim, Faith, Irie and Millat must not be consumed by their disoriented states to be able to dwell in the beyond.

“Dwelling in the beyond” is being “part of a revisionary time, a return to the present to redescribe our cultural contemporaneity; to reinscribe our human, historic commonality; to touch the future on its hither side. In that sense, then, the intervening space ‘beyond,’ becomes a space of intervention in the here and now” (Bhabha 7). When people dwell in the beyond, the beyond becomes a space of re-evaluation that helps them pursue clearer identities in which they can effectively confront their oppressors and address the racism that often controls their lives. Bhabha associates the transformational power of the beyond with postmodern and postcolonial thinking. He believes that “post” terms “insistently gesture to the beyond, [and] only embody its restless and revisionary energy if they transform the present into an expanded and ex-centric site of experience and empowerment” (4). Soja states that postmodernism “represents a decision to seek new and different practices based on the belief that even the most resilient and productive of established modern forms of thinking and acting are becoming increasingly ineffective in the contemporary world” (“Urbanization” 127). *The Buddha of Suburbia, Fruit of the Lemon* and *White Teeth* capture the essence of Soja’s postmodernism and Bhabha’s
beyond since they help readers take a temporary journey outside of their current ways of thinking and being – they “reveal” readers’ “proximate self-presence, [their] public image . . . for its discontinuities, its inequalities, its minorities” (Bhabha 4). They help readers find a new way to review literature that changes how they view the world.

Bhabha paraphrases the epigraph in *The Location of Culture*, which is from Martin Heidegger’s “Building, dwelling, thinking,” within his text to emphasize its importance in relation to the third space and his understanding of the postmodern and postcolonial:

> The wider significance of the postmodern condition lies in the awareness that the epistemological ‘limits’ of those ethnocentric ideas are also the enunciative boundaries of a range of other dissonant, even dissident histories and voices . . . the colonized, minority groups . . . . For the demography of the new internationalism is the history of postcolonial migration, the narratives of cultural and political diaspora . . . . It is in this sense that the boundary becomes the place from which *something begins its presencing*. (4-5)

Bhabha notes that the concept of postmodernism helps identify the social boundaries imposed by the dominant culture’s racist behaviour. The confrontational and dehumanizing nature of these boundaries can be inhibiting. However, the “postmodern condition” also identifies these boundaries as spaces of empowerment and productivity. The boundaries encourage subordinated people to start sharing their versions of history.
and culture. They are where ethnocentric articulations lose their footing and are discoverable as outdated, sweeping and false generalizations.

When Karim and Faith dwell in the beyond, the beyond becomes the boundary from which they begin their “presencing.” It helps them embrace the inner dialectics of London’s culture, society and history as necessary pieces to their identities in which they do not feel perpetually displaced or disoriented. Karim and Faith open their minds to others’ perspectives, which helps them reconstruct their mental, physical and social spaces into spaces that are informed by more than their limited personal experiences and knowledge. The beyond is a transitional space that helps them realize that they cannot change the past, but they can affect the future by more knowledgeably contributing to and existing in their communities today. Dwelling in the beyond can generate newness since it results in a sense of “hybridity” (Bhabha 112).

Bhabha believes that

the importance of hybridity is not to be able to trace two original moments from which the third emerges, rather hybridity . . . is the “third space” which enables other positions to emerge. This third space displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives. (Rutherford 211)

Hybridity as a manifestation of the third space helps people relocate their personal and national histories to the past to create the potential for the emergence of newness: “new structures of authority, new political initiatives,” new cultural forms, new senses of nationality and new understandings of history based on multiculturalism. Bhabha
believes that “the borderline work of culture demands an encounter with ‘newness’ that is not part of the continuum of past and present. It creates a sense of the new as an insurgent act of cultural translation” (Bhabha 7). Rushdie, through Uhuru’s and his other characters’ speeches, discusses “translative newness” (Baucom 215). Newness as translation recognizes the past and present only as a means to challenge the status quo and encourage a different understanding of the world. Newness stems from hybridity in which people approach the question of nationality and culture from new perspectives with more informed beliefs and an awareness of but not an attachment to the past, present or future.

Bhabha states that “hybrid hyphenations emphasize the incommensurable elements – the stubborn chunks – as the basis of cultural identifications” (219). For Karim, Faith, Irie and Millat to form hybrid identities, they must identify their “stubborn chunks” – the cultural differences that are integral to their identities and define who they are. Stubborn chunks are the stabilizing factors – their differentiating personal features such as those based on ambitions, culture, skills and abilities – that make their identities hybrid, unique and powerful. Their stubborn chunks become their tools for resisting others’ influence and discounting concepts of purity. However, hybridity is not an “uncomplicated blend of ‘new and old elements’ whereby the merging of two seemingly different forms is resolved ‘in some grand cultural synthesis’” (Acimovic). As these novels demonstrate, creating a hybrid identity takes considerable time, mental energy, research, personal growth and perseverance. And, the nature of hybridity is that it constantly evolves to meet the needs of the present, which means that hybrid identities must do the same.
Bhabha states that the third space is “not a third term that resolves the tension between two cultures” (113) or a quick solution to lingering colonialism that the “the eye of power” (12) openly embraces. Therefore, even as Karim and Faith create hybrid identities, white Londoners still try to oppress them. Karim and Faith can resist assimilation by interacting with more groups, clarifying and determining their stubborn chunks, and establishing their hybridity. By doing so, their hybrid identities become disorienting for white Londoners. Karim and Faith can now articulate their own cultural differences, thereby opening up in-between spaces for white Londoners in which white Londoners have the opportunity to go beyond and pursue newness.

Although I introduced the third space, in-between spaces, the beyond and hybridity separately, it is important to highlight their interconnectedness and their ambiguity. These concepts function as a continuum and have a symbiotic relationship, as each requires the others to exist. Bhabha’s descriptions of these concepts are elusive, often overlapping or appearing to contradict one another, which makes each concept difficult to distinguish from the others at times. For example, hybridity is described as an in-between space and the third space. The third space intervenes to trigger the continuum, but it can also be changed by the continuum since new in-between spaces can open up while people are in the beyond. People may approach these in-between spaces in more informed ways with new knowledge and a better awareness of their societies and themselves if they have been dwelling in the beyond. Just as Lefebvre qualifies that studies of space “are distorted from the outset” (*Production* 95) since it is difficult and detrimental to state anything definitive about such a multivalent concept as space,
Bhabha notes that his “articulation” of the beyond, and arguably his other concepts, are “ambulant, ambivalent” (5). I believe he is deliberately being ambiguous as the process of newness – of cultural transformation – is also ambiguous.
3.1 The city

The city setting in *The Buddha of Suburbia*, *Fruit of the Lemon* and *White Teeth* contributes to the complexity of the characters’ identity crises. Cities involve a culture of permanent transition and incompleteness. Everything and everyone in the city can be viewed in endless ways that are capable of changing at any second. In *Soft City*, Jonathan Raban discusses the risks of the city’s mutability and concludes that people “are on the brink of being strangers to [them]selves in the city” (246). Paul Patton, in “Imaginary Cities: Images of Postmodernity,” supports Raban by adding that “the city is a place where individuals can assume different identities with comparative ease, but where they run the risk of losing themselves in the process, or being harmed by the violence of others” (115). Karim, Faith, Irie and Millat are mentally and socially trapped, yet protected, by their initial identities that include the imaginary boundaries they construct around themselves to maintain their self-images as not different, as not victims of racism and as everyday British citizens who belong. These images are easy to create when Karim, Faith, Irie and Millat do not have a strong historical grounding and the white Londoners they know pretend to be multicultural and accepting. When Faith becomes aware of Britain’s multicultural façade and Karim, Irie and Millat can no longer tolerate it, their imaginary boundaries are shattered and London becomes an oppressive force that contributes to their disorientation and loss of self. Lefebvre states that it is the “city, not the home, which expresses and symbolizes a person’s being and consciousness” (*Writings* 7-8). Likewise, the London in the novels mirrors Karim, Faith, Irie and Millat’s
disorientation through its white Londoners’ resistant and ignorant approaches to people of colour and its ability to make Karim, Faith, Irie and Millat simultaneously feel like they do and do not belong.

Raban explores the reconceptualization of urban space, emphasizing that the dynamics of city life allow differences of cultural, religious and sexual orientation to flourish in ways not possible in smaller centres. He believes that these differences in conjunction with the mass gathering of strangers cause the city to be “an imaginary space” (116). Although the city is a real space containing physical elements such as buildings, streets and people, it is also “‘soft’, in the sense that it is a type of reality for which the boundary between imagination and fact is not absolute” (116). Patton again supports Raban’s view of the city and adds that “imaginary cities” are “complex objects which include both realities and their description: cities confused with the words used to describe them” (112). Donald, in *Imagining the Modern City*, looks at “the city as an imagined environment . . . [that] embraces [the physical city and] the translation of the places they have made into the imaginary reality of our mental life” (8). In *The Body and the City*, Steve Pile states that “people [do] not live in the city as such, but inside the mental picture that they [have] built up of the city” (218). The city is imagined because it is just as much a social and mental construct as it is a physical entity. These theorists view the city as an artificial space that is a projection of each person’s imagination – a combination of facts, supplementation and fluid notions of what people think a particular city is like that fluctuates based on where they are at in their lives mentally, socially, physically and economically.
Patton notes that labelling cities as imaginary “is not to suggest that [they] are not real in their way, or that they do not have effects. Nor is it to suggest that they are all imaginary in the same sense” (112). All citizens’ perspectives of the city are right and yet incorrect since they approach their views of and behaviour in the city from different past and present circumstances and future aspirations. Karim, Irie, Faith and Millat expend time and energy trying to simultaneously fit in with their families, friends, communities and white Londoners when it is impossible. They develop fragmented identities and experience identity crises as they are attempting to negotiate living in three parallel worlds without hybrid identities: their desired views of London based on their current states of mind and personal manifestations of how they want London and themselves to be; the reality of London in which they co-exist with racist, white Londoners who are openly resistant to their influence and existence; and, their parents’ views of London, which do not provide a complete or consistent cultural grounding.

Karim, Irie, Faith and Millat initially disregard the mental and social aspects of London and only see it as a physical space. For example, Karim views London as one giant house where “the kick was to work out how [its rooms] connected” (Kureishi 126). This leads to him trying to capture it and contain it, as if this appropriation of space will make his colour less significant and let him be established and accepted on his terms. As Karim is packing to move from the suburbs to West London, he fantasizes about what he will do “when the city belongs to [him]” (121). Within five pages, Karim believes that London is his: “nothing gave me more pleasure than strolling around my new possession all day” (126). Karim soon learns that moving to a more prestigious area of the city does
not make him more prestigious nor more in control of his life. Karim needs to establish how London’s mental and social spaces – particularly, its politics, citizens and cultures – interconnect to create a hybrid identity that is functional in an imaginary city.

Raban believes that cities are malleable entities and each person in a city contributes to how it is perceived: “Cities, unlike villages and small towns, are plastic by nature. We mould them in our images: they, in their turn, shape us by the resistance they offer when we try to impose a personal form on them” (4). Raban cautions people that when they shape the city into the environment they want it to be, it will push back and resist their moulding. This is because “London is not a place; it cannot be placed. . . . It is a fluid city” (Wolfreys 4). Technically, London, as a geographical location, is relatively constant. It is the idea of London that is fluid and varies based on each person and the people with whom this person is in contact. Karim, Faith, Irie and Millat try to mould the city based on their perspectives and needs, but the city, in the form of its white Londoners, resists and contorts any visions they have that are not of them as immigrants or as people that do not belong.

3.2 London

It is important to have a brief overview of the actual city of London’s modern history to further understand the significance of these novelists’ works, London as their settings and second-generation immigrants of colour as their protagonists. Although Britain was victorious in World War II, its global empire had begun to collapse as a result of the war’s economic impact and since most British colonies earned their independence during this time. London citizens were suffering over the loss of loved
ones and due to the housing shortages caused by the war bombings. Foreigners, mainly from the Commonwealth countries, were invited to become British citizens through the British Nationality Act of 1948 and later by the Macmillan government’s advertising campaign in the late 1950s. London’s cultural landscape began its rapid transformation with the arrival of the SS Empire Windrush in 1948 – the first of many ships bringing immigrants to Britain. Immigrants were not new to London or Britain, but the sudden increase in the number of immigrants of colour was: “Cultural and racial diversity is not new, as the presence of large numbers of Irish and Jewish immigrants in the nineteenth century confirms. . . . blacks [have been] in Britain since the eighteenth century and earlier. What is new is that highly visible presence of non-white people . . . and the wide measure of cultural diversity which they have brought with them” (Royle 15). There were over 100,000 West Indians in London by 1961, which aggravated the housing shortage and escalated social problems. London had its first major post-war, racially charged riot in 1958 – the Notting Hill riot.

Caryl Phillips, a Kittian-British fiction and non-fiction writer, notes that “in the postwar years British insecurity was everywhere in evidence” (270) and this insecurity was deepened by the influx of immigrants. He notes that many “British people had no desire to view themselves as a nation of immigrants. . . . The British needed neither to learn from, nor be subject to, other people’s decidedly inferior cultures. . . . British influence upon others was the norm” (266-7). Regardless, people such as immigrants with histories and lifeways different from the official ones began insisting on those histories and lifeways as part of their citizenship, as the very
mode of their membership in the national collectivity. In their dialogues with dominant institutions, many groups began asserting a rhetoric of belonging that made demands beyond those of representation and basic rights. (Pratt 39)

Immigrants’ legal rights improved throughout the United Kingdom as demonstrated by the 1965 Race Relations Act and 1968 Race Relations Act. However, their social status continued to be in turmoil. Many white British citizens resisted the cultural changes immigrants were effecting and their presence in London, which caused immigrants to struggle to belong. Phillips includes a memoir by Penelope Lively, an immigrant writer from Egypt, in his anthology *Extravagant Strangers*: “I was a displaced person. . . . and displaced persons are displaced not just in space but in time; they have been cut off from their own pasts. . . . If you cannot revisit your own origins . . . you are forever in some crucial sense untethered” (169). Lively shares her struggle to create communities and a comprehensive identity when contact with her home country was limited and practising her culture was often discouraged. Her story aptly captures the alienation and displacement many immigrants encountered in London.

In 1968, John Enoch Powell, a British Conservative politician, delivered his infamous “Rivers of Blood” speech, warning of the risks of mass immigration. By the 1970s, the United Kingdom was experiencing a recession, industry was declining and the unemployment rate was rising. London’s African-Caribbean community experienced notably high unemployment, poor housing conditions and high crime rates. Such conditions fuelled Margaret Thatcher’s anti-immigrant political stance and perpetuated
the idea that immigrants were negative additions to London. When Thatcher was Prime Minister (1979-1990), she was a right-wing nationalist who was adamant that “one could not be both black and British” (Phillips 248). Thatcher’s government passed the Nationality Act of 1981, which Rushdie notes was “expressly designed to deprive black and Asian Britons of their citizenship rights” (“New” 136). He adds how it also “abolished” every person’s “right to citizenship by virtue of birth, the *ius soli*, or right of the soil. For nine centuries any child born on British soil was British. . . . From now on citizenship [was] the gift of the government” (“New” 136). Many of Thatcher’s political promises that derived from her racist vision of Britain did not occur: “Thatcherism failed to deliver the liberal promises of liberty, personal autonomy and security and resulted in increased social division, disorder and an impoverished conception of citizenship” (Faulks 1).

It is evident that people worldwide were rethinking and opposing Britain’s attitude toward colonization and immigrants based on the influx of anti-colonial texts published after World War II. Theorists such as Frantz Fanon, Aimé Césaire, Albert Memmi, Kwame Nkrumah and Edward Said began exposing the negative effects of colonization that occurred during and after the war. They also examine the psychological and social challenges colonized people were encountering in the process of becoming decolonized. In the 1950s and 1960s, George Lamming, Sam Selvon, V. S. Naipaul, Chinua Achebe and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o started writing fiction from the perspectives of oppressed people.
In 1982, Rushdie wrote “The New Empire Within Britain” to expose the continuing racism in London: “I want to suggest that racism is not a side-issue in contemporary Britain; that it’s not a peripheral minority affair. . . . It’s [a major part of the] crisis of the whole culture, of the society’s entire sense of itself” (129). Rushdie adamantly states that racism in Britain has deep “historical roots” and has become a “stain [that] has seeped into every part of the culture, the language and daily life” (“New” 130) since there has been limited efforts to address it. Rushdie also discusses the “sizeable amount of white immigration” in Britain and how unfair and inaccurate it is that the “word ‘immigrant’ [still] means ‘black immigrant’; the myth of ‘swamping’ lingers on; and even British-born blacks and Asians are thought of as people whose real ‘home’ is elsewhere” (“New” 132). Based on the Brixton Riots in 1981 and 1985, it is evident that many British citizens and immigrants of colour felt similarly and were still sensitive to and experiencing racial discrimination.

A gap developed in contemporary literature when second-generation immigrants of colour began to encounter the racism and messages of not belonging that their parents’ generation had encountered. By the late 1980s, few British novels addressed the challenges of growing up in London as second-generation immigrants of colour. Kureishi, Levy and Smith saw an opportunity to use the medium of British fiction to explore how second-generation immigrants of colour address the question of identity, belonging and British nationality in present-day London. They portray London as the epitome of cultural difference, ignorance and change; it is a city in which people of various backgrounds and beliefs can frequently interact and articulate their differences,
which often occurs in a confrontational manner. This city setting contributes to Karim, Faith, Irie and Millat’s disorientation and sense of conflict as in-between spaces occur multiple times every day. This also means that the beyond can intervene every day. Most significantly, then, London, in the context of its actual history and as an imaginary city, presents endless opportunities for the third space to open up for readers so that they can change their mindsets, dismantle long-standing beliefs of a superior homogeneous city and work toward a more inclusive society. London, as the setting, helps create the potential for newness for readers.
4.1 Family history

Stuart Hall, a Jamaican-British cultural theorist, believes that identity “is constantly destabilized by what it leaves out” (5). In Karim, Faith, Irie and Millat’s cases, they are missing accurate or complete knowledge of their parents’ and ancestors’ histories. In “Andrea Levy’s London Novels,” Fischer explains the challenging relationships second-generation immigrants have with their identities due to their families’ histories:

Reclaiming the past and redefining the present takes place in both spatial and temporal terms: uncovering collective history involves exploring one’s relationship to the space one inhabits – in this case London – and at times the other space of [the country of birth] . . . Second generation [Londoners] . . . have different geographical spaces to deal with: not only a different (yet still hostile) London, but also the absent, yet paradoxically always-present country of their parents’ origin. (203)

Karim, Faith, Irie and Millat’s families’ histories detrimentally affect their relationships and identities. In addition, their parents have mainly built communities with white Londoners or with immigrants who have assimilated to British culture. Their homes do not have consistent cultural presences and favour Western décor. Their parents could have shared their original nationalities through their behaviour, words and home environments, but they do not. Instead, Karim, Faith, Irie and Millat are influenced by
white Londoners’ traditions and cultures and London’s multicultural, prejudiced British society. Unsurprisingly, they seldom, if ever, follow their parents’ cultural backgrounds and favour the British culture they know.

Karim articulates his confusion about his identity and nationality in the opening paragraph of *The Buddha of Suburbia*:

> My name is Karim Amir, and I am an Englishman born and bred, almost. I am often considered to be a funny kind of Englishman, a new breed as it were, having emerged from two old histories. But I don’t care – Englishman I am (though not proud of it), from the South London suburbs and going somewhere. (Kureishi 3)

Karim is certain of his name but not his nationality as he announces it three times with slight variations. At first, he appears confident and proud when he announces that he is an Englishman, but then he becomes hesitant adding “almost.” Next, he tries to use other people’s descriptions to justify his belonging. By the third declaration, he regains his confidence but adds that he is “not proud” of being an Englishman. He also expresses confusion about his purpose in life. He knows that he has “emerged from two old histories” and is “going somewhere” but he does not know where or how to get there.

Karim’s journey from the suburbs to the centre of London demonstrates his struggle to become “a new breed” of Englishman. His challenges with his nationality are not surprising as he has a small group of family members with extremely different cultural views on which to base his existence.
Karim knows about his father Haroon’s wealthy family and privileged childhood in India but little of his Indian heritage. Haroon shows minimal interest in his homeland and culture and strives to assimilate to English ways. He starts to embrace and flaunt his Indian culture when he realizes that it can be used to make money and appear exotic. For example, he practises to be a Buddhist because his love interest, Eva, who is white, and her white suburban friends want him to share his “oriental philosophy” (Kureishi 5) and teach them yoga. Since Haroon is Indian, they assume that he can provide a spiritual experience. Karim knows that his father is only pandering to their stereotypes and wonders why his father is suddenly interested in promoting his Indian background: “He’d spent years trying to be more of an Englishman, to be less risibly conspicuous and now he was putting it back in spadeloads” (21). As Haroon fickly embraces his Indian side, he criticizes his best friend and fellow immigrant from India, Anwar, for being too British. Contradictorily, Haroon does not want Karim to date “Indians” (74) and continues to carry a dictionary so he can learn a new word every day in case he needs “to impress an Englishman” (28).

Anwar, whom Karim calls Uncle Anwar due to the closeness of their families, has not adhered to Indian customs while living in London and suddenly decides to go on a hunger strike until his daughter, Jamila, agrees to an arranged marriage: “Our way is firm. She must do what I say or I will die. She will kill me” (Kureishi 60). Karim is once again confused: “It was certainly bizarre, Uncle Anwar behaving like a Muslim. . . . it was an amazing novelty to find him literally staking his life on the principle of absolute patriarchal authority” (64). Karim tries to understand his father’s and Uncle Anwar’s sudden need to be connected to their roots in India, but he cannot:
Maybe there were similarities between what was happening to Dad, with his discovery of Eastern philosophy, and Anwar’s last stand. Perhaps it was the immigrant condition living itself out through them. For years they were both happy to live like Englishmen. . . . Now, as they aged and seemed settled here, Anwar and Dad appeared to be returning internally to India, or at least to be resisting the English here. It was puzzling: neither of them expressed any desire actually to see their origins again. (64)

When Anwar dies, Haroon announces: “I have lived in the West for most of my life, and I will die here, yet I remain to all intents and purposes an Indian man. I will never be anything but an Indian” (263). Karim contemplates his father’s declaration as he finds it confusing: “For most of his life [my father has] never shown any interest in going back to India. . . . he preferred England in every way. . . . He wasn’t proud of his past, but he wasn’t unproud of it either; it just existed” (212-213). Karim’s identity is distorted by his father’s and Uncle Anwar’s behaviour throughout the novel as they waver between dismissing their Indian culture and embracing it as their core identities.

Karim’s brother disguises his ethnicity through his name and purposely strives to become as British as possible: “My brother Amar, four years younger than me, called himself Allie to avoid racial trouble. He always went to bed as early as he could, taking with him . . . anything European he could lay his hands on” (Kureishi 19). Karim’s mother, Margaret, is white and originally from Britain. Margaret brags about Haroon being from a family “higher than the Churchhills. . . . [to ensure] there would be no confusion between [him] and the swarms of Indian peasants who came to Britain in the 1950s and 1960s” (24). Margaret’s sister’s husband, Ted, is a racist. When he and Karim
are riding the train, he points out the window at a poor neighbourhood and blurts: “That’s
where the niggers live. Them blacks” (43). He is seemingly unaware that he is being
racist and could offend his nephew.

Like Karim, Faith has a limited sense of her nationality. *Fruit of the Lemon* opens
with a depiction of Faith’s family tree that only includes her, her parents, Wade and
Mildred, and her brother, Carl, since they are whom Faith can include with confidence.
Faith’s parents never talk about their pasts with her or Carl, and anything her mother
accidentally divulges is sworn to secrecy:

My mum and dad never talked about their lives before my brother Carl
and I were born. They didn’t sit us in front of the fire and tell long tales of
life in Jamaica – of palm trees and yams and playing by rivers. There was
no ‘oral tradition’ in our family. . . . And if Mum ever let something slip –
‘You know your dad lived in a big house,’ – then I was told with a
wagging finger not to go blabbing it about to my friends. (Levy 4)

Faith’s claims, “I was born in England and I knew nothing else” (332). Even though
Faith’s parents can withhold information about their heritage, they cannot hide their skin
colour or change their children’s classmates’ reaction to it. Faith is teased from a young
age about her skin colour and cultural background from the other children at school who
would chant: “Faith is a darkie and her mum and dad came on a banana boat” (3). Faith
is shocked when her mother confirms this: “We came on a banana boat to England, your
dad and me” (3). Faith feels confused and frustrated as she knows less about her
background than her classmates, yet her parents avoid her questions, often responding:
“That was a long time ago,’ or ‘What you want to know about that for?’” (4). Similar to Karim’s brother, Faith’s brother changes his name to his middle name, Trevor, to fit in and seem less black. Then, he changes it back to Carl to differentiate himself and send a “don’t-mess-with-me-I’m-a-black-man message” (18). Faith’s parents construct artificial walls around their previous lives to help her and Carl be British. They worked hard to build their new lives in London and feel that this is the land of opportunity for their children.

In *White Teeth*, Irie’s mother, Clara, is an immigrant who can only trace her origins back to her Jamaican grandmother and white colonial grandfather, Captain Durham. Clara’s mother, Hortense, is a strict Jehovah’s Witness who ostracizes Clara for entering a mixed-race marriage with an older, white British man, Archie: “Hortense was fiercely opposed to the affair, on grounds of colour rather than age” (Smith 46). Hortense believes that Clara should have married a black man to strengthen the black side of their genetics. Hortense “hadn’t put all that effort into marrying black, into dragging her genes back from the brink, just so her daughter could bring yet more high-coloured children into the world” (327). Irie does not know her grandmother until she is older as Clara disconnects from her past life and history by never speaking of either. Clara strives to lose her Jamaican accent and raises Irie to be as English as possible. Archie, on the other hand, is passive and flips a coin to make almost every decision. He does not have a colour prejudice and wonders why “couldn’t people just get on with things, just live together, you know, in peace and harmony or something” (162). Archie shows no interest
in his or Clara’s heritages and therefore shares nothing with Irie about British or Jamaican nationality.

Clara and Archie are passive parents who are focused on living in the present moment with little interest in the past. Ironically, Clara is sad that Irie does not have black friends and feels an “aching sadness” (Smith 328) as Irie engulfs herself in everything white: “From Irie’s bedroom shrine of green-eyed Hollywood idols to the gaggle of white friends who regularly trooped in and out of her bedroom, Clara saw an ocean of pink skins surrounding her daughter and she feared the tide that would take her away” (328). Irie feels disconnected from her community as she believes that she has no choice but to have white friends and idols since no one looks like her or has a similar cultural background.

Millat’s parents, Samad and Alsana, are from Bangladesh and each of them contradictorily portrays their cultural background. Samad is a university-educated immigrant and former British soldier struggling for identity in a city in which he feels he should be more but is restricted from advancement. Samad preaches about India and the purity of the culture and people. He incessantly discusses his ancestor Mangal Pande whom he believes is of some historical significance, even though the history books state that Pande committed mutiny while he was intoxicated. Samad clings to pieces of his historical, cultural and religious past to try and give his life significance in London. Samad is actually a hypocrite. He lives his life against all of the morals and lessons he tries to instil in his wife and his twin sons, Millat and Magid, and lets his religious vigour bend when it is advantageous to him. For example, he masturbates daily while repeating
“To the pure all things are pure” (Smith 137) to make him feel that he is not such a bad Muslim. Since no one is pure and nothing is pure, his mantra sets him up to fail as he is striving for the unattainable by trying to exist in a dichotomy of “pure” and “impure” lifestyles. Samad gives up masturbation so that he can justify drinking alcohol with Irie’s father, Archie, whom he served with in the war and labels as “an unbeliever” (145). Samad then returns to masturbating, but excessively, when he becomes attracted to a white teacher at his sons’ school. However, to justify his sin, he gives up all nourishment from sunrise to sunset and works extra hard at his waiter job so that he has something of which to be proud.

Samad pointlessly struggles to live as a pure, non-British Indian in London – an impossibility in a city in which he encounters non-Indian external influences every day. Therefore, Samad continues to be a hypocrite throughout the novel. He has an affair with his sons’ white teacher, but disciplines Magid for wanting to participate in school activities: “I don’t want you participating in that nonsense. It has nothing to do with us, Magid. Why are you always trying to be somebody you are not?” (Smith 150). Magid is true to his personality, but it is his father’s unrealistic, semi-Indian ideals that he is not meeting. Magid, like Karim’s and Faith’s brothers, temporarily changes his name to “Mark Smith” as he desires “to be in some other family” (151) and be British like he assumes everybody else is. Samad decides to send Magid back to Bangladesh to learn to be a proper Indian. He is thrilled to think that Magid “is learning the old ways” (213), but Magid continues to become “more like the English” (240). Samad fails to pass his self-professed vigilant religious and cultural sides onto his sons since he has also succumbed
Millat’s mother, Alsana, is a Bangladeshi Muslim woman who is “very religious, lacking nothing except the faith” (Smith 53). She embraces their new life in London and the opportunities it presents. She becomes a seamstress of erotic lingerie since she believes that it is better to work in a profession that is not acceptable in her Indian culture than to not be employed. Samad repeatedly chastises Alsana for adapting her clothing and lifestyle to blend with other Londoners and losing her connection to her roots: “You do not even know what you are, where you come from. We never see family anymore – I am ashamed to show you to them” (199). Alsana could say the same thing to Samad as he lounges in sweat pants with his genitals accidentally exposed. Samad has embraced London in similar ways to Alsana, but he finds it easier to criticize others than to work on himself.

Alsana appreciates what London can offer monetarily but she is hypocritical as she does not want her family interacting with people who are not Indian. When she is pregnant (unknowingly with twins), she resents Samad’s friends, Archie and Clara, whom she feels forced and embarrassed to interact with: “You fight in an old, forgotten war with some Englishman . . . married to a black! Whose friends are they? These are the people my child will grow up around? Their children – half blacky-white?” (Smith 61). Years later, Alsana weeps in the kitchen when Millat brings home white friends as she thinks that they are “deliberately leading [Millat] away from his culture and his family and his religion” (286). Millat constantly hears from his father about the old country and
from his mother about how their lives should be, which creates confusion as his parents’
pasts, their current behaviour and their commentary about how Millat should behave are
all conflicting.

Unbeknownst to Karim, Faith, Irie and Millat, their parents find themselves
similarly “displaced” and “untethered” (Lively 169) in their homes and in London. As
mentioned throughout the novels, white Londoners do not perceive them and other
immigrants as welcome additions to London. Samad shares his disappointment about
England: “You are never welcomed, only tolerated. . . . you belong nowhere. . . . And
then you begin to give up the very idea of belonging. . . . it seems like some long, dirty
lie” (Smith 407). Faith’s parents, Wade and Mildred, thought that they were going
“home” when they immigrated to “England, ‘the Mother Country’” (Levy 6). When they
first arrived, they were treated poorly: “Everyone called them ‘Wog’ and ‘Darkie.’
Everyone told them they were from the jungle. Nobody wanted them to live in their
house, or even in their street. They laughed at their food, at their clothes, at the way they
spoke” (331). Karim, Faith, Irie and Millat’s parents see London as a place that has
provided opportunities at a cost – they have poor relationships with their immediate
families and minimal connections to their extended families; they experienced extreme
racism when they first arrived and now watch their children experiencing the same
treatment; and, they and their children have a distorted sense of nationality and
belonging.

Lefebvre discusses his notion of cultural space that embodies sediments of the
past: “‘Our’ space thus remains qualified (and qualifying) beneath the sediments left
behind by history, by accumulation, by quantification” (Production 230). Haroon, Mildred, Wade, Clara, Samad and Alsana have navigated challenging physical, social and mental spaces that have created a different frame of reference about London than their children’s. Karim, Faith, Irie and Millat do not know the sacrifices that their parents have made to build them new lives in London. Haroon, Mildred, Wade, Clara, Samad and Alsana are frustrated by their failed attempts to instil their unclear ideas of culture in their children. They truly believe that their non-hybrid versions of their children’s identities are what are best for them: “The desire of first generation immigrants to protect their children from the uncertainties of a hybrid identity invariably externalizes the internal split which becomes a split between generations” (Finney). Haroon, Mildred, Wade, Clara, Samad and Alsana forget that by their being immigrants of colour, their children are born with in-between identities. Instead of protecting their children from feeling divided, they aggravate the divide by forcing one culture on them and not explaining their other nationalities. Samad, like the other characters’ parents, cannot conceive of a hybrid identity and discusses being torn between letting British life consume him and fighting to reclaim his Indian life. If these parents would have encouraged their children to embrace their hybrid identities, they would have helped them create identities of social power that are adaptable in more situations. Instead, Karim, Faith, Irie and Millat end up distancing themselves from their parents as their meddling is frustrating, embarrassing, interfering with their psychological development and causing them to feel more displaced. Although their in-between identities make them more susceptible to white Londoners’ racism, they also prompt in-between spaces – the “terrain” in which newness can be initiated.
4.2 In-between spaces

Karim, Faith, Irie and Millat are depicted as living in threatening spaces of contested racial relations in which they are forced to re-evaluate and reconstruct their identities and senses of nationality with white Londoners who resist this challenge with ignorance, racism and violence. The majority of their encounters with white Londoners are violent ones in which they encounter conflict in typically non-confrontational circumstances. As white Londoners articulate their cultural differences to Karim, Faith, Irie and Millat, in-between spaces emerge in which they have the choice to either resign to or resist white Londoners’ behaviour. According to Donald in *Imagining the Modern City*, Lefebvre analyzes the relationship “between the space of the city and the mental life of its citizens. But [he] is less concerned . . . with the impact of the metropolis on mental life . . . [as he is with] the way that mental life is projected outwards” (13). Lefebvre would be interested in the psychological effect that the city and its citizens has on second-generation immigrants of colour like these characters. For example, Karim, Faith, Irie and Millat’s senses of self and community are distorted since their families, white Londoners and London simultaneously present a multitude of opportunities and limitations. However, Lefebvre would be more interested in the ways in which second-generation immigrants of colour behave as a result of these effects. Karim, Faith and Irie initially compromise their values for acceptance and remain silent, only defending themselves in their internal dialogue, which tends to be laden with sarcasm and anger. Millat verbally and physically lashes out in anger and uses drugs, alcohol and sex to numb his feelings of not belonging.
Pile, in *The Body and the City*, interconnects and reconceptualises geographical and psychoanalytical theories of the dialectics between the subject (including the mind), society and space. He extrapolates from David Lowenthal’s “Geography, Experience and Imagination: Towards a Geographical Epistemology” to suggest that “people create personal geographies, which are ‘separate personal worlds of experience, learning, and imagination [which] necessarily underlie any universe of discourse’” (Pile 12). Personal geographies are “localised and restricted” (12) and help people to maintain something personal in a world in which everything else is shared. They are people’s mindsets and frames of reference created by past experiences, present circumstances and future ideas that determine how they approach their daily interactions – “‘all information [in personal geographies] is inspired, edited and distorted by feeling’” (11). As paraphrased by Pile, Lowenthal believes that

the individual’s personal geography is indispensible . . . because it lies at the intersection of their image of the environment, their perception of the world, the general world-view and their life history. . . . ‘every image and idea about the world is compounded, then, of personal experience, learning, imagination, and memory. . . . each contribute to our images of nature and man.’ (14)

Essentially, personal geographies are the foundation of a person’s understanding of himself or herself and the world and the foundation from which all other iterations of their identities can develop.
Karim, Faith, Irie and Millat, like all Londoners, create personal geographies to define themselves and their behaviour in the city. Pile’s inclusion of “life history” and “the general world-view” is important as these factors cause the most turmoil in Karim, Faith, Irie and Millat’s lives. Karim, Faith, Irie and Millat attempt to create personal geographies that do not account for their immigrant parents’ histories, their skin colour and white Londoners’ perspectives of them since these “perceptions” create what they first believe are the most ideal situations for their lives. It is an impossible feat to create such personal geographies since their excluded factors inherently affect their decisions, behaviour and relationships. Even their need to establish and re-establish their personal geographies and, ultimately, hybrid identities is a reaction to external factors. Karim, Faith, Irie and Millat struggle to understand why everyone cannot see the world and themselves as they do. They forget that white Londoners’ personal geographies contain a different general world-view based on their experiences and own life histories, which include generations of different cultural thinking and traditions.

Pile questions how “people gain a sense of who they are, the ways in which space helps tell people their place in the world, and the different places that people are meant to be in the world” (6). Karim, Faith, Irie and Millat initially try to place little significance on their cultural identities as they do not understand or place importance on their parents’ histories. They believe that they belong to London’s history and understand it as much as any white Londoner who is learning it via history books. Due to Karim, Faith, Irie and Millat’s skin colour, white Londoners negatively label and treat them as immigrants and aggravate the idea that they belong to an immigrant’s history of another country. Karim,
Faith, Irie and Millat could not choose where they were born, yet white Londoners appear to choose how they fit in London’s social structure. White Londoners are quick to remind them that they are “out of place” (Pile 6) and that their nations are not the same. As Karim, Faith, Irie and Millat experience racism more frequently, London becomes uninviting and personally limiting – a city that once offered endless opportunities now seems adamant about limiting their dreams.

In *Soft City*, Raban notes that “each city-life is an intricate pattern of belonging interspersed with these stretches of locomotion when one is stripped of credentials and credibility” (244). Even when Karim establishes himself as someone who belongs in one white Londoner’s space, such as at Eva’s parties (his father’s white girlfriend), he is generalized by the negative connotations associated with immigrants of colour as soon as he enters a new space. For example, Karim tries to visit Helen, a white girl he ends up dating, when her father, whom he has never met, verbally attacks him in the front yard: “You can’t see my daughter again. . . . She doesn’t go out with . . . wogs. . . . We don’t want you blackies coming to the house. . . . However many niggers there are, we don’t like it” (Kureishi 40). Karim is aware that these inaccurate racial perspectives exist throughout England, noting, “we were supposed to be English, but to the English we were always wogs and nigs and Pakis and the rest of it” (53). Karim’s best friend and casual lover, Jamila, instantly confronts anyone who tries to marginalize her or other people of colour. When a man rides by on his bicycle and yells a derogatory comment at her and Karim, she “sprint[s] through the traffic before throwing the bastard off his bike
and tugging out some of his hair” (53). Karim admits that he “practically thank[s] [his oppressors] for not making [him] chew the moss between the paving stones” (53).

Karim has aspirations to be an actor and is excited to meet Shadwell, a London theatre director. As they are speaking, Shadwell unabashedly degrades him: “Your destiny . . . is to be a half-caste in England. That must be complicated for you to accept – belonging nowhere, wanted nowhere. Racism. Do you find it difficult?” (Kureishi 141). Karim finds it difficult that people are so consumed by his skin colour when he is not. He becomes angry and confused when Shadwell’s ignorance interrupts their conversation about a potential acting role: “Instead of talking about the job, [Shadwell] said some words to me in Punjabi or Urdu. . . . ‘Well? [said Shadwell] . . . You don’t understand?’” (140). When Karim admits he cannot understand what Shadwell just said, Shadwell is disgusted, “Your own language!” (140). English is Karim’s “own language,” but Shadwell assumes that there is a direct correlation between Karim’s skin colour and his mother tongue. Karim does not correct Shadwell as he wants the acting job.

Karim gets the acting role because Shadwell typecasts him to play Mowgli in The Jungle Book “for authenticity and not for experience” (Kureishi 147). Shadwell perpetuates racist stereotypes as his vision of an “authentic” Indian is much darker than Karim’s skin colour so he has him covered in brown shoe polish as part of his costume. Shadwell also forces Karim to speak in an “authentic [Indian] accent” (147). Karim pleads with him to not have to do the accent. He feels exploited and as if he is betraying and mocking actual Indians such as his father and his Uncle Anwar’s family: “I wanted to run out of the room, back to South London, where I belonged, out of which I had
wrongly and arrogantly stepped. I hated Shadwell and everyone in the cast” (148).

Shadwell does not care and tells Karim that he should feel fortunate since Indians do not get opportunities like this every day.

    Faith is passive like Karim when people make racist comments to her since she does not know how to respond in these circumstances. Faith’s art tutor interprets her work to contain something unique because Faith is black: “Your work has an ethnicity which shines through. . . . A sort of African or South American feel which is obviously part of you. Don’t you find that exciting, Faith?” (Levy 31). Faith does not contest her tutor’s opinion since she wants to do well in the class: “As I was born and bred in Haringey I could only suppose that I had some sort of collective unconscious that was coming through from my slave ancestry” (31). On Faith’s first day of work at a television studio, her co-worker, Lorraine, catches her off-guard: “My boyfriend’s coloured. His name’s Derek. I live with him and his family. They’re ever so nice. Although some people are prejudice, aren’t they?” (38). Lorraine’s comment is ignorantly laden with racism and renders Faith speechless.

    According to the omniscient narrator, Millat, too, is frequently treated unfairly by white Londoners: “Millat was a Paki no matter where he came from. . . . he smelt of curry; had no sexual identity; took other people’s jobs. . . . [he was told] that he should go back to his own country” (Smith 234). When Millat, Irie and Magid deliver a food donation to an elderly man, Mr. Hamilton, as part of a school initiative, Mr. Hamilton unintentionally inflicts them with racist stories from the war. Millat emphasizes that he is British and his father fought in the war, but Mr. Hamilton retorts that he must be wrong:
“There were certainly no wogs as I remember. . . . what would we have fed them?” (172).

Millat kicks over Mr. Hamilton’s tea-tray, curses him and runs out of his apartment without explaining why he is so upset.

Irie, seemingly like a typical teenage girl, is obsessed with changing her appearance since she is overweight and does not like her hair. However, her focus and anxiety have developed from her need to be what she considers less Jamaican and more English. She is “unwilling to settle for genetic fate; waiting instead for her transformation from Jamaican hourglass heavy with the sands that gather round Dunn River Falls, to English Rose – oh, you know her – she’s a slender, delicate thing not made for the hot suns, a surfboard rippled by the wave” (Smith 266-67). Her mother tries to convince her that she is fine but Irie cannot see this: “There was England, a gigantic mirror, and there was Irie, without reflection. A stranger in a strange land” (266). Irie is different from Karim, Faith and Millat as she constantly reminds herself that she does not belong: “This belief in her ugliness, in her wrongness, had subdued her. . . . she was all wrong” (268). Irie cannot see herself reflected in the people around her. The only Jamaicans she knows are her mother, who does not have her build, and estranged grandmother. She also does not see her skin colour or voluptuous body type reflected in magazines, on the television or in her classmates. Irie feels a glimmer of hope in school one day when they are examining Shakespeare’s “Sonnet 127.” She inquires if the lady in the poem is black, which her teacher quickly dismisses as impossible:

There weren’t any . . . well, Afro-Carri-bee-yans in England at that time, dear. That’s more a modern phenomenon, as I’m sure you know. But this
was the 1600s. I mean I can’t be sure, but it does seem terribly unlikely, unless she was a slave of some kind, and he’s unlikely to have written a series of sonnets to a lord and then a slave, is he? (271-72)

The class reaffirms her belief that she is out of place. They laugh at her question and pass her a malicious note mocking her hope that the lady was black.

Millat, who likes to be seen as cool and rebellious, and Irie, who does anything for Millat because she is in love with him, are caught smoking marijuana on school property. They are sentenced to a two-hour, twice weekly study group at Josh Chalfen’s house – their white classmate who was also caught. The principal believes that Millat and Irie will learn better in a “stable environment, [especially] one with the added advantage of keeping [them] both off the streets” (Smith 303). By “stable,” he means white and his definition of successful. Interestingly, Josh’s parents, Joyce and Marcus, are white, liberal racists who frequently inflict Irie and Millat with their ignorance and slander the children’s parents and cultures.

Joyce tells Irie and Millat that they “look very exotic” and asks, “Where are you from?” When they simultaneously answer, “Willesden,” Joyce rephrases her question: “Yes, yes, of course, but where originally?” (Smith 319). Joyce proclaims the benefits of monogamy and sympathetically talks to Irie: “I don’t know if you’ve ever experienced it – you read a lot about how Afro-Caribbeans seem to find it hard to establish long-term relationships. That’s terribly sad, isn’t it?” (322). As Joyce’s children endearingly laugh at her tirade, Irie is silent. She is already self-conscious about her appearance and now
she is aware of another stereotype that is detrimental to her self-image. Joyce continues her racist conversation with Irie and assumes that Millat has an arranged marriage awaiting him, noting “he should be thankful he’s not a girl. . . . Unbelievable what they do to the girls” (320). Joyce frequently asks Irie and Millat to stay for supper since her youngest son, Oscar, loves “brown strangers” (326). Oscar quickly corrects his mother: “I hate brown strangers” (326). Questions and comments such as these amplify the characters’ identity crises as their skin colour means that they are not English enough and yet the fact they have never been to their parents’ homelands makes them not Jamaican or Indian enough.

Karim, Faith, Irie and Millat struggle to redefine themselves in a city in which most white Londoners have not accepted the deconstruction of cultural barriers nor advanced their understanding of British nationality. Lefebvre recognizes that citizens unconsciously maintain the dominant cultural status quo:

> The members of archaic societies obey social norms without knowing it – that is to say, without recognizing those norms as such. Rather, they live them spatially: they are not ignorant of them, they do not misapprehend them, but they experience them immediately. . . . Pre-existing space underpins not only durable spatial arrangements but also *representational spaces* and their attendant imagery and mythic narratives – i.e. what are often called ‘cultural models.’ *(Production* 230)

“Representational spaces” include lived (social) and conceived (mental) spaces. They are the spaces of ideas, culture, history, relationships and politics. In the novels, they are the
spaces in which racial beliefs are created and perpetuated. For example, Helen’s family lives in poorer conditions than Karim’s family, but her father’s behaviour suggests that, as long as they are white, they are “better” and justified in mistreating people of colour. Karim, Faith, Irie and Millat’s racially charged environments commingle with a lack of cultural grounding and conflicting messages about who they should be from their families, friends, co-workers and white Londoners, which further distorts their senses of self and community. Karim, Faith, Irie and Millat have to start changing and appropriating their representational spaces, which includes (re)creating their personal geographies, to go beyond. 10

4.3 Going beyond

Lefebvre believes that an unavoidable part of being human is existing in space – space people cannot leave, but also space they do not want to leave: “Human beings . . . are in space; they cannot absent themselves from it, nor do they allow themselves to be excluded from it” (Production 132). This concept adds an element of entrapment and choice for Karim, Faith, Irie and Millat. They want to belong, so they struggle with difficult relationships and often remain in physical and social spaces in which they feel restricted or disoriented. Lefebvre believes that a person’s decision to remain in a specific space, even when it is harmful to him or her, is a conscious decision. People “know that they have a space and that they are in this space. They do not merely enjoy a vision, a contemplation, a spectacle – for they act and situate themselves in space as

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10 As noted earlier, the third space modality is not sequential or limited to one exploration at a time. People can be in the beyond articulating their cultural differences and a new in-between space will open up in response to this. They can also create a new hybrid identity at the same time as they go beyond in response to a different in-between space.
active participants” (*Production* 294). In relation to cultural poesis – unavoidable cultural transactions in which people are simultaneously “making and being made by culture” – Karim, Faith, Irie and Millat appear to be intentionally inhibiting their cultural development by choosing to exist in such negative spaces. However, the challenge for these characters is recognizing which spaces in their lives are destructive and unhealthy. Once they do this and start actively pursuing the courage and knowledge to change or leave these spaces, they go beyond. They begin to build stronger senses of self by discovering mental, physical and social spaces of belonging. However, this process is complicated by the fact that Karim, Faith, Irie and Millat live in London – an “imaginary” city that is defined by and that defines its citizens.

Karim, Faith, Irie and Millat initially fail to see the extent to which the city pushes back when it is being defined by second-generation immigrants of colour and how much this resistance limits their power to define their spaces and identities. Raban believes that identity is a fleeting notion in the city since people can constantly change who they are perceived as: “In the city, we are barraged with images of the people we might become. Identity is presented as plastic, a matter of possessions and appearances” (64). As these characters try to define themselves in the context of London, a fluid city, they are constructing themselves in relation to the white Londoners they want to be like and who also discriminate against them. Karim, Faith, Irie and Millat do not realize that their identities can never be stable or that white Londoners also have fluctuating identities that are continually adapting to their environments and encounters. Karim, Faith, Irie and Millat neglect to acknowledge how impressionable they are. White
Londoners are shaping London and Karim, Faith, Irie and Millat more quickly than Karim, Faith, Irie and Millat are shaping white Londoners, London and themselves. Pile believes that a city and its citizens have a symbiotic relationship since “place is a social construction and there’s a fundamental link between place and identity. . . . it matters that people in the city are constantly interacting with people they do not know. People produce selves which are capable of acting in a world of abstract, or even alienated, social interactions” (55). London is simultaneously functional for and destructive to Karim, Faith, Irie and Millat: it helps them become more adaptable in everyday circumstances by presenting a plethora of confrontations in which they can defend and define themselves; London also contributes to their radical compulsions to belong because it provides exposure to citizens who are more successful and accepted in society. This awareness of and struggle to create other ways they could exist in London further disables and disorients Karim, Faith, Irie and Millat.

Karim becomes more disheartened with every racist encounter and starts to lose his ambition to accomplish anything in life: “I felt I was ready to retire. There was nothing I particularly wanted to do. . . . [I] could just drift and hang out and see what happened” (Kureishi 63). Some white Londoners abuse Karim based on the assumption that he is a lazy immigrant who lives off of their tax dollars. Ironically, it is largely their treatment of him that causes him to not want to make something of himself. Karim believes that he will be subjected to racism despite his achievements: “All my Dad thought about was me becoming a doctor. What world was he living in? Every day I considered myself lucky to get home from school without serious injury” (63). Karim
begins to use passive-aggressive means to get revenge on any white Londoners who oppress him. He gets his girlfriend, Helen, to drive him and his family to the airport: “The Rover belonged to Helen’s dad, Hairy Back. Had he known that four Pakis were resting their dark arses on his deep leather seats, ready to be driven by his daughter, who had only recently been fucked by one of them, he wouldn’t have been a contented man” (78). Karim starts to feel an intense urge to react to racial prejudice and have justice. He sees Helen’s father one day and, although he does not confront him, his instinct changes from passive-aggressive behaviour to feelings of rage: “How could he stand there so innocently when he’d abused me? I suddenly felt nauseous with anger and humiliation – none of the things I had felt at the time” (101). Karim knows that he has been mistreated and realizes that he should not put up with it. However, he still does not see how he can affect white Londoners’ behaviour, even though his avoidance actually encourages their inappropriate treatment of him.

Karim is aware of how divided his identity is due to his unclear nationality. He partly attributes his impetuous behaviour to this: “Perhaps it is the odd mixture of continents and blood, of here and there, of belonging and not, that makes me restless and easily bored” (Kureishi 3). Karim is even anxious when he is at home: “I couldn’t wait to get out of the house now. I always wanted to be somewhere else, I don’t know why” (4-5). He tries to ground himself through interactions that provide an immediate sense of belonging and acceptance such as getting a book from Eva, engaging in random sexual acts with Jamila and immersing himself in the theatre world. Karim goes to college in South London and lives variously in five different houses of family and friends. He
frequently changes where he lives to avoid becoming attached to anywhere or anyone as he does not understand where he belongs:

I now wandered among different houses and flats carrying my life-equipment in a big canvas bag and never washing my hair. I was not too unhappy, criss-crossing South London and the suburbs by bus, no one knowing where I was. Whenever someone – Mum, Dad, Ted – tried to locate me, I was always somewhere else. (94)

Karim becomes “lonely for the first time in [his] life” (94), yet he avoids his family and friends. He cannot envision their significance in his life and knows that they will question the detrimental things he is doing and his lack of direction.

Karim’s identity is also complicated by the fact that he is bi-sexual and in love with Eva’s son, Charlie. Karim is obsessed with becoming Charlie and everything that Charlie’s richer white British lifestyle represents: “My love for [Charlie] was unusual as love goes: it was not generous. I admired him more than anyone but I didn’t wish him well. It was that I preferred him to me and wanted to be him. I coveted his talents, face, style. I wanted to wake up with them all transferred to me” (Kureishi 15). Charlie suggests changes to Karim’s wardrobe and Karim vows to himself that he “would never go out in anything else for the rest of [his] life” (17). Charlie uses Karim for a sense of belonging and as encouragement for his music career but “ignores” (68) him otherwise. This treatment is hard on Karim as he is being directly denied by the person he wants to become. Karim’s life is also negatively affected by his family and friends. His parents get divorced since his father falls in love with Eva; his mother enters a depressive state due
to the divorce; his father and Uncle Anwar use pieces of their Indian culture that they previously ignored for personal gain and control; Jamila agrees to an arranged marriage to prevent her father from starving himself to death; and, his love interests, Helen and Charlie, reject him for white partners. Karim avoids his family and friends because he views their lives as complicated and he can hardly handle his own problems.

Karim moves in with his father and Eva in West London to get some anonymity: “There [are] thousands of black people everywhere, so I wouldn’t feel exposed” (Kureishi 121). Karim believes that the city represents the freedom and anonymity required to minimize his exposure to racism. He is essentially longing for a physical environment in which his colour is less detrimental and he can be accepted on his terms. After he moves, though, he is overwhelmed: “The city blew the windows out of my brain wide open. . . . [It] made you vertiginous with possibility: it didn’t necessarily help you grasp those possibilities. I still had no idea what I was going to do. I felt directionless and lost in the crowd” (126). West London displaces Karim even more than the suburbs did. He realizes that changing his physical location does not mean that he has changed his mental space or identity or that he will instantly be accepted in the elite social spaces of white Londoners.

When Karim gets the role of Mowgli, he immerses himself in the theatre world. He feels as if he has a purpose again and uses his role to forget the problems in his life and the lives of his family and friends. Karim loves theatre rehearsals and “belonging to the group” (Kureishi 145). Like his father and Charlie, he becomes attached to the idea of
power and attention, even though he has to compromise his values and beliefs to get them:

I recognized that what I liked in Dad and Charlie was their insistence on standing apart. I liked the power they had and the attention they received. I liked the way people admired and indulged them. So despite the yellow scarf strangling my balls, the brown make-up, and even the accent, I relished being the pivot of the production. (149-150)

Karim forgets about his original shame and anger about the shoe polish costume and forcing an accent. He even takes advantage of his role in the production and makes random requests to make himself feel more important and gain “confidence” (150). Karim’s white family members – his mother, Uncle Ted and Aunt Jean, Ted’s wife – are proud of his performance. Jamila, however, is disgusted that Karim is “pandering to prejudices” by playing Mowgli: “How could you do it? I expect you’re ashamed, aren’t you?” (157). Jamila is no longer amused by Karim’s antics to achieve fame and become part of white Londoners’ lives. However, he dismisses her criticism in pursuit of more fame.

Karim gets a role in a play by a famous theatre director, Matthew Pyke. When Pyke first talks to Karim and asks him about himself, Karim loses all confidence: “I began to talk rapidly and at random. He said nothing. I went on” (Kureishi 163). Karim divulges things that he has “never told anyone” (163). Karim is so in awe of Pyke that he has no verbal inhibitions. He fills the power void between them with ammunition that gives Pyke stronger mental and social control over him. Karim even tells Jamila that he
is impressed by Pyke’s ability to get the group to bond during theatre practices. Jamila scoffs at his ignorance: “Pah. You’re not close to each other. It’s fake, just a technique” (169). When Karim starts dating a white cast-mate, Eleanor, he once again, such as during his relationship with Charlie, becomes angry at and jealous about Eleanor and her friends’ mental and social competence: “What infuriated me – what made me loathe both them and myself – was their confidence and knowledge. . . . it was invaluable and irreplaceable capital” (177). Karim idealizes people like Eleanor, even though she unintentionally makes him feel marginalized: “It was her stories that had primacy, her stories that connected to an entire established world. It was as if I felt my past wasn’t important enough, wasn’t as substantial as hers, so I’d thrown it away” (178). Jamila is worried that Pyke and the cast are psychologically hurting Karim: “I’m worried that they’re taking you over, these people. You’re moving away from the real world” (195). Karim easily forgets the closeness of family and people who care about him. He continues constructing boundaries around himself and dictating who can and cannot be in his life as he tries to establish his identity and a sense of home.

Pyke asks the cast to create their own characters for the play. Karim wants his character to be based on Charlie, but Pyke insists that Karim plays someone from his “own background. . . . Someone black” (Kureishi 170). Karim models a character after his Uncle Anwar during his hunger strike. He captures the character perfectly, but his cast-mates reject it. Tracey, who has black skin, accuses Karim of hating his own people: “Your picture is what white people already think of us. That we’re funny, with strange habits and weird customs. To the white man we’re already people without humanity. . . . Why do you hate yourself and all black people so much, Karim?” (180). Tracey believes
that black people need to “protect” their culture and Karim counters that “Truth has a higher value” (181). Tracey responds, “What truth? It’s white truth you’re defending here. It’s white truth we’re discussing” (181). Karim does not know how he should address his culture since he gets criticized regardless of how he depicts it. Karim ends up making his character based on Jamila’s Indian husband, Changez. His cast-mates find it acceptable since the character is humorous and naive, not depressing.

Karim’s desire to advance in society blinds him to the mental damage he is doing to himself. He has intuition but he does not vocalize or act on his thoughts. For example, Pyke gives Karim a ride home from rehearsal one night and offers to let Karim have intercourse with his wife as a “token of appreciation” (Kureishi 192) for his work on the play. Although Karim is not “flattered” (192), he tells Pyke, “I’ve never been so flattered in my life” (192). Karim reflects on his lie: “I didn’t want to seem ungrateful . . . it wouldn’t look too good if I turned down Pyke’s gift. . . . I knew this was privilege” (192). “Privilege” to Karim is accepting anything a white Londoner offers him, even if he does not want it, to ensure that he does not offend the person.

Karim shapes West London to be a friendly space indicative of his advancement in society, especially when Pyke invites him and Eleanor over for a dinner party. Karim soon realizes that they are the only people invited and that they are there to fulfil Pyke’s sexual fantasies:

England’s most interesting and radical theatre director was inserting his cock between my speaking lips. I could appreciate the privilege, but I didn’t like it much: it seemed an imposition. . . . So I gave his dick a
Karim lets Pyke have anal sex with him, sacrificing his dignity and free will to avoid losing his part in the play. Karim struggles with self-pity and a victim mentality for circumstances he chooses or can control. For example, he discusses the sexual acts he engages in that evening as “privilege,” again eventually accepting whatever is offered to him by white Londoners, as if these acts are his fee for being allowed to be temporarily elitist. Karim’s “advancement” in society is on Pyke’s terms, based on what Pyke wants from Karim – it is not based on what Karim has to offer the theatre industry. Pyke treats Karim as an Indian that he can easily exploit to test what he is willing to do to be in the theatre industry.

Karim is so driven by his desire to be in elitist physical and social spaces that he automatically and detrimentally forfeits his dignity and power in these spaces. Soja, in Postmodern Geographies, recognizes the interconnectedness of space and power: “We must be insistently aware of how space can be made to hide consequences from us, how relations of power and discipline are inscribed into the apparently innocent spatiality of social life, how human geographies become filled with politics and ideology” (6). Karim chooses to be submissive to and maintain contact with his cast-mates and Pyke, even though they are psychologically detrimental to him and affect his relationships with his family and friends. When his Uncle Anwar’s store is repeatedly targeted for racial attacks, Karim once again ignores and avoids his family and friends as he deludes himself into believing that his acting career is more important: “Everything was going
wrong, but I didn’t want to think about it. The play was too important” (Kureishi 171). When Changez is victim to a physical racial attack, Karim has an opportunity to display integrity and take a stand:

I asked Jamila if I could do anything. Yes; these attacks were happening all the time. I should come with Jamila and her friends on a march the following Saturday. The National Front were parading through a nearby Asian district. . . . Local people were scared. We couldn’t stop it: we could only march and make our voices heard. I said I’d be there. (225)

Karim misses the march since he spends the day stalking Eleanor to find out if she is having intercourse with Pyke.

After Jamila watches Karim’s performance in Pyke’s play, she confronts him for missing the march and for his depiction of Indian men: “Where are you going as a person, Karim?” (Kureishi 232). Instead of responding, he tries to leave the conversation. His mother intercepts him and further disturbs him by stating his identity as she sees it: “You’re not an Indian. You’ve never been to India. . . . You’re an Englishman” (232). Karim acts as if he knows the difference and is only playing an Indian since it is his job. His mother recognizes his lie and says, “Be what you are” (232). Her comment is disabling for two reasons. First, Karim does not know what he is losing or gaining if he sheds his Indian background since he has never taken the time to learn about India on his own – he only knows it through his directors’ stereotypes and father’s and Uncle Anwar’s inconsistent behaviour. Second, he cannot be what he is because he does not know who he is – culturally, personally, professionally, socially or mentally. London
becomes his stage and he is a chameleon who shifts personalities based on each person’s expectations of him and disappears when someone disagrees with or questions his behaviour.

Karim discovers that the white upper class are not how he has constructed them to be. Raban says that “in the city . . . appearances are easy to come by, and very hard to test for authenticity” (75). Karim sees Pyke as someone whom he wants to become due to his lavish lifestyle and power over people, but then he realizes that Pyke’s identity is plastic and cracked: “I . . . began to suspect I’d been seriously let down. That prick, which had fucked me up the arse while [his wife] cheered us on as if we were all-in wrestlers – and while Eleanor fixed herself a drink – had virtually ruptured me. Now, I began to be certain, the fucker was fucking me in other ways” (Kureishi 219). The other actors and actresses in Pyke’s play also betray Karim by laughing at how predictable his emotions and life choices are. Karim realizes that he does not belong in the sense that he needs to belong – as in a home or community – and gets fed up with the fake theatre world: “I was sick of theatre people and the whole play; I was turning numb. What happened to me didn’t seem to matter. Sometimes I felt angry, but most of the time I felt nothing; I’d never felt so much nothing before” (227-228). Karim feels forced to play theatre roles that he does not want to play, which is a metaphor for his life in which he assumes multiple roles as dictated by others that are physically, mentally and socially destructive to him. For example, white Londoners get what they want from Karim: Pyke gets a hit play with an “authentic” Indian actor; Pyke’s wife gets a night of exotic, sexual fantasy; and, Eleanor gets her opportunity to become one of Pyke’s sexual objects. Karim
gets frustrated with himself and how he continually sets himself up for failure. He becomes overwhelmed and further disoriented in the beyond.

Multiple times throughout the novel Karim feels empowered to take hold of his existence. For example, after Karim watches Charlie’s rock concert, he sees that he is also capable of more in life:

> Until this moment I’d felt incapable of operating effectively in the world; I didn’t know how to do it; events tossed me about. Now I was beginning to see that it didn’t necessarily have to be that way. My happiness and progress and education could depend on my own activity – as long as it was the right activity at the right time. (Kureishi 155)

Karim struggles to make something of his new-found clarity as he waits on other people to decide his fate and roles for him. The “tension” of cultural poesis occurs for Karim because he is being “tossed” about, that is, his cultural identity is being haphazardly made by others more than he is making theirs or creating his own. Although he is aware that his identity does not have to be unbalanced, he allows others’ control of it to persist.

Pyke’s play is hired to perform multiple shows in New York City. Charlie is living there at this time so Karim moves in with him. Charlie, who once inspired Karim, ends up contributing to Karim hitting rock bottom. Karim loses his minimal focus on himself by becoming immersed in Charlie’s world: “My depression and self-hatred, my desire to mutilate myself with broken bottles, and numbness and crying fits, my inability to get out of bed for days and days, the feeling of the world moving in to crush me, went
on and on” (249). Karim gets oppressed, depressed, has a revelation, feels empowered and then gets oppressed again, thereby continuing his destructive cycle.

Karim’s power is fleeting because he avoids his pre-existing communities composed of his friends and family who want to help him. Instead of embracing every potential community to discover how each is valuable to his identity, he disregards any that he does not believe can assist with him advancing in white, elitist spaces. To stop his destructive cycle, Karim needs a sense of home and to understand his Indian culture on his terms, rather than letting others dictate how he should connect with his skin colour and Indian culture. As Karim disconnects from his previous life and realizes the extent to which racial discrimination has and is negatively affecting his relationships, he becomes frustrated and decides that he can no longer tolerate it. He finally empowers himself to seek change. He recognizes that he will not “go mad” as he has “a strong survival instinct” and just needs to “heal” (Kureishi 250) from all that he has caused and experienced. Karim changes his perspective of the British to resemble his father’s:

Dad had always felt superior to the British. . . . And he’d made me feel that we couldn’t allow ourselves the shame of failure in front of these people. You couldn’t let the ex-colonialists see you on your knees, for that was where they expected you to be. They were exhausted now; their Empire was gone; their day was done and it was our turn. (250).

Karim’s reflection resembles Uhuru’s from *The Satanic Verses*. Karim finally sees that he is capable of changing his mental state and controlling his life. And, by doing so, he and other Indians can help “shape” London.
Like Karim, Faith initially does not acknowledge the negative impact that her friends and co-workers have on her. She is excited to move out on her own with her friends, who happen to be white. Faith’s father comes to visit her and asks, “Faith – your friends, any of them your own kind?” (Levy 28). Her father means “coloured” (29), although at first she is not “sure what he meant” (28) because she does not classify people by colour. When her brother, Carl, stops by unannounced, Faith does not recognize him at first. She starts to realize that he and other people of colour were “out of context” (53) in most of her life: “For a brief moment as [Carl] stood looking around the room at my friends I saw my brother as a stranger. . . . A big man – with a brown complexion that was pock-marked round the temples from adolescent acne. A black man with a round head of afro hair that was too long” (53). Faith questions why he is there to which he responds, “What are you doing here?” (54). Faith becomes aware of an alternative dynamic occurring around her that is based on skin colour. For example, when Faith and Carl are looking at a used car for her, a woman in the apartment building questions their presence by the car. The woman selling the car does not welcome them into her house when she goes to get the keys but, rather, closes her door. Carl tells Faith, “She thinks we’ve come to mug her” (59). Due to such experiences, Faith begins to pay attention to how people respond to her skin colour.

Faith and her best friend and roommate, Marion, stop by Marion’s parents’ house before going to watch their friend’s band. Marion’s sister, Trina, who had been reprimanded at school that day for a racial incident, is spewing racial slurs and talking to Faith in the same breath. Marion’s father uses similar racial slurs as he shares his shock that a “black” person tried to give him parenting advice: “I thought that’s bloody rich
comin’ from a coon” (Levy 85). Marion’s grandmother supports her son and says, “You
don’t need no bloody help from no nig-nog” (85). They do not notice that their language
could be inappropriate and offensive to Faith. Marion admits that her father is a racist
and tells Faith that she told him to be more sensitive. She justifies his racial slurs by
saying “it’s a cultural thing” (93):

Not that being a cultural thing makes it all right. . . . But that’s why I
asked him to come tonight. Broaden him and my sister out a bit. My
family are very close. Working-class families in this country have
traditionally been close. He says he wants to see the sort of life I lead
now. So they want to change. They like you Faith. It’s a matter of
educating them. . . . they’ve just grown up with this. (93)

Faith becomes hyperaware of her colour at the show that night and the colour of
everyone around her. When the last performer takes the stage, Faith realizes that they are
the only two black people in the room. She finds herself praying that he is good: “The
poet became my dad, my brother, he was the unknown black faces in our photo album,
he was the old man on the bus who called me sister. . . . He was every black man – ever”
(92). Marion’s father basically boos the black performer off the stage. Faith sees that he
is not concerned with changing since it is a personal choice for him to continue to speak
and behave as he does. Faith likes Marion’s family, but she now wonders “who they
saw” (93) when they looked at her.

Simon, another one of Faith’s roommates and the man on whom she has a crush,
invites Faith to his parents’ house in the country. On their walk to the local pub, a man
stares at Faith and, in the pub, a woman moves away from Faith when she sits down. Andrew, an old friend of Simon’s father, asks Faith where she is from. When she says “London” (Levy 130), he, like Joyce in *White Teeth*, clarifies his question: “I meant more what country are you from?” (130). Faith knows that he wants an answer that corresponds with her skin colour: “I didn’t bother to say I was born in England, that I was English, because I knew that was not what he wanted to hear. ‘My parents are from Jamaica’” (130). He claims that he was sure she was from Jamaica and Faith tries to correct him that she is not, just her parents are. However, he continues talking about his recent trip there and tries talking with Faith about what it is like, which she does not know. Faith starts to feel foolish for having parents from Jamaica and knowing nothing about Jamaica or her family who lives there.

Faith also feels restricted by her co-workers’ perspectives. She works at a television station and sees a job posting for a dresser. When she asks her co-worker, Lorraine, what it takes to be a dresser, Lorraine once again unintentionally insults Faith: “They don’t have black dressers. . . . I don’t mean to be horrible but it’s just what happens here. Haven’t you noticed there aren’t any coloured people dressing? . . . I overheard [the managers] saying that they didn’t think the actors would like a coloured person putting their clothes on them” (Levy 70-71). Faith is visibly upset and Lorraine tries to defer Faith’s anger to the managers who supposedly said this, rather than to herself, who was the one who repeated it: “You shouldn’t let them upset you. . . . Don’t let them upset you. They’re not worth getting upset about” (71). During Faith’s interview for the dresser position, she is asked if she feels “overqualified for the job” (106). The interviewers then reference her employment report to discuss her areas of improvement,
which include her walking too slowly on the job. Faith feels as if they are finding ways to avoid hiring her and asks if they prefer not to have black dressers. The one interviewer is adamant that the department does not discriminate and suggests that Faith is “getting a little sensitive because of all the things that have been said” (109). The other interviewer is obsessed with discovering who said this to her versus working on changing this perception in the workplace and ensuring that Faith has not been offended. When Faith learns that she got the dresser job, Lorraine says she knew that the one interviewer “wasn’t prejudiced. He loves animals” (135). Lorraine’s perception of the interviewer is based on his treatment of animals, as though people of colour can be equated with animals, that is, uncivilized, non-human creatures. Faith is frustrated by how closed-minded her white co-workers are and how they justify each other’s behaviour.

Faith meets Carl’s black girlfriend, Ruth, who gets upset when Faith tells her about the rumours surrounding black dressers. Ruth asks Faith, “Did you report them?” (Levy 140). When Faith says she did not, Ruth states that Faith only got the job to ensure that she did not press charges: “It’s just to shut you up. It’s tokenism. It’s what they do. How many other black people are working there? None, I bet. So they just employ you and then they can say, yes, we have a black person. And they carry on discriminating just the same. You really do have to do something” (140). Faith is happy that she got the job and feels that her promotion is enough, but Ruth continues her overzealous tirade: “We can’t let this keep happening to us. Black people must stand together. . . . Don’t you understand? . . . We’re talking about European oppression here. Hundreds of years of oppression by white people that shows no sign of stopping” (141). Ruth makes Faith feel complacent for not defending black people, guilty for not pursuing the rumour and guilty
for getting the job because she might not have been the most qualified – just the most
black. Carl does not help the situation as he says that Faith “lives in a house full of white
people. She doesn’t really like black people” (142-143). Faith is not a racist and has not
considered herself as “for” or “against” black or white people, but she realizes how she
could be portrayed that way.

Faith gets frustrated by the limitations her skin colour causes and starts to respond
when people ignorantly continue their racist and discriminatory discussions. When
Marion belabours her point about her father’s racist behaviour, Faith tells her to change
the topic. Marion continues her patronizing lecture – “I mean as a woman in this society I
think I know how you must feel” – and Faith tells her to “shut up” (Levy 94) and then
walks away. In the pub, Andrew tells a story of meeting a Jamaican with the same last
name as him. Faith tells him, “Well, the thing is, that would have been his slave name. . .
. Your family probably owned his family once” (131). Andrew is shocked and claims it
must have been a “wayward vicar” (131). Simon’s mother calls Faith “brave” for putting
Andrew in his place and tells her that she was “absolutely right’ (134) about where the
Jamaican got his name. Faith thinks her other white roommates, and especially Simon,
do not judge people based on their skin colour. Simon witnesses a National Front attack
by three white men on a black woman at her workplace. The men escape but not before
they vandalize the store and attack the woman. When Simon tells their roommates about
the attack, they end up making racial jokes to lighten the mood. Faith storms off to her
parents’ house to get comforted. She unexpectedly meets Ruth’s white parents and half-
siblings. Ruth’s birth mother and step-father are white and her birth father, whom she
Faith gets overwhelmed after experiencing and witnessing racial discrimination from her friends, family and white Londoners. In *Narratives for a New Belonging*, Bromley states that Faith has a “contradictory and conflicted identity” (135) as this new knowledge about the power of her skin colour immobilizes her. She cannot look at her black skin anymore since she is beginning to view herself as nothing more than a “black girl” (Levy 160). She quits working, eating and interacting with everyone as she enters a depressed state and tries to establish who she is and why her reflection, her blackness, affects people like it does. Faith and Irie have similar challenges with mirrors. Whereas Irie cannot see herself in England’s reflection due to her appearance, Faith struggles to stop seeing herself, her blackness, glaring out from every reflection, sticking out amongst her white roommates, white job and white ambitions. Irie tries to will herself into Englishness by searching deep within the mirror for her British reflection; Faith covers up her blackness, blends herself into the darkness and omits all of the reflections she can control so that nothing visual is left, just her personality:

I closed the wooden shutters and the curtains until it was so dark I could not see where I was stepping. I got into bed. But as my eyes adjusted to the dark I could see my reflection in the wardrobe mirror. A black girl lying in a bed. I covered the mirror with a bath towel. I didn’t want to be black any more. I just wanted to live. The other mirror in the room I covered with a tee-shirt. **Voilà!** I was no longer black. (160)
Bromley notes that “by covering her mirrors, Faith is becoming-white, as her body can no longer be ‘seen’ by its counterparts or others” (135-136). He applies Lefebvre’s spatial theories and adds: “‘The whole of (social) space proceeds from the body’ . . . in this act of veiling, Faith is symbolically removing the black, the ‘multi’, from the body of England” (136). By eliminating her reflection, Faith is attempting to eliminate other people’s perceptions of her and live without her colour negatively affecting her. However, the only way she can see to do this is by becoming a recluse who exists in darkness.

Irie wants to change her image and, unlike Faith, she is focused on things she can control. She is obsessed with looking like the white people she admires and goes to a hair shop to get “Straight straight long black sleek flickable tossable shakeable touchable finger-through-able wind-blowable hair. With a fringe” (Smith 273). The hairdresser praises Irie’s hair since it is “half-caste hair” with a “loose curl” (277). Irie instantly voices her hatred of it as she cannot believe that her “non-English” features are worth admiring. She is so anxious to begin her transformation that she can hardly speak and appears “lost” (273) when her appointment is delayed by a few minutes. The hairdresser tells Irie that her hair needs to be unwashed for two weeks or the ammonia treatment will burn her hair and scalp, but Irie gets it done anyway. The ammonia ends up making her scalp bleed and hair fall out, and the hairdresser has to fix her hair with hair extensions.

When Irie goes to show Millat her new hair, his cousin, Neena, is there with her girlfriend, Maxine. They are shocked since Irie “had beautiful hair” (Smith 283) and wrecked it: “The Afro was cool man. It was wicked. It was yours” (285). Irie had never
viewed her hair as something special, as something that made her unique in a good way. She realizes that she intentionally destroyed something special about herself for the sake of her English transformation, only to end up looking silly: “Irie couldn’t say anything for a moment. She had not considered the possibility that she looked anything less than terrific” (283). Irie once again gets the overwhelming feeling of not belonging: “Irie stood, facing her own reflection, busy tearing out somebody else’s hair with her bare hands” (289). Irie fails to see the irony as she is “tearing out” her hair extensions that are made from an Indian woman’s hair and were used to assist with her English transformation. Instead, Irie continues to view her world as one of inequality since she is so physically different from everyone in her life and does not have the context to be able to identify or appreciate her differences.

Irie realizes that an English physical transformation is less likely than a social and mental transformation. The Chalfen house, where Irie and Millat have to attend their bi-weekly study group, becomes an escape for them in which they can temporarily forget the reality of their home and social lives. Irie decides not to mention the Chalfens to her mother right away since she idolizes them, their family dynamics and their “Englishness” and is obsessed with becoming more like them: “It wasn’t that she intended to mate with the Chalfens . . . but the instinct was the same. . . . She wanted their Englishness. Their Chalfishness. The purity of it. It didn’t occur to her that the Chalfens were, after a fashion, immigrants too. . . . To Irie, the Chalfens were more English than the English” (Smith 328). From this passage, it is evident that part of Irie’s challenge is her incorrect idealization of the notion of a pure English identity. She is unknowingly being racist to
her mother by discounting Clara’s Englishness based on her skin colour. She also never considers that her father could be more English than the Chalfens based on his heritage and behaviour, which she considers not English enough.

Irie is impressed by Josh’s father, Marcus, a futuristic scientist, for not living in the past like her father and Millat’s father: “So there existed fathers who dealt in the present, who didn’t drag ancient history like a chain and ball. So there were men who were not neck-high and sinking in the quagmire of the past” (326). Ironically, Irie is in awe of Marcus’s well-researched family tree that dates back to the 1600s: “You guys go so far back. . . . It’s incredible. I can’t imagine what that must feel like” (338). Irie’s family goes back just as far but Marcus’s meticulous record makes Irie feel as if her roots are even more disjointed since her history is mainly “rumour, folk-tale and myth” (338). Irie decides to work for Marcus to increase her exposure to his family and fast track her transformation: “She wanted to merge with the Chalfens, to be of one flesh; separated from the chaotic, random flesh of her own family and transgenically fused with another. A unique animal. A new breed” (342). Being in the Chalfen house, spending time with them and their children and working for Marcus make Irie feel as if she is getting closer to her goal of being more English: “When Irie stepped over the threshold of the Chalfen house, she felt an illicit thrill. . . . She was crossing borders, sneaking into England; it felt like some terribly mutinous act, wearing somebody else’s uniform or somebody else’s skin” (328). Irie has convinced herself that she does not belong in England and must “sneak” in in a disguise to be accepted. She fills her space with as much Chalfen as she
can when, in reality, her obsession is again distracting her from seeing what is unique about her identity.

Irie feels deceived by her parents for not having a concrete history and again when she realizes that her mother has false teeth. She feels like this is just one more thing that her parents kept from her: “To her, this was yet another item in a long list of parental hypocrisies and untruths, this was another example of the Jones/Bowden gift for secret histories, stories you never got told, history you never entirely uncovered, rumour you never unravelled, which would be fine if every day was not littered with clues” (Smith 379). Irie feels as if her parents spent sixteen years withholding information from her and, now, “she didn’t want it any more, she was tired of it. She was sick of never getting the whole truth. She was returning to sender” (379). Irie has had enough of feeling as if she is all wrong and being confused about who she is and where she is from and decides to take matters into her own hands by moving in with her grandmother, Hortense.

Millat, like Irie, feels like he does not belong, although his behaviour and popularity disguises this. Millat tries to disregard being marginalized and embrace the freedom and anonymity London presents. In *Soft City*, Raban notes that the city is appealing to some as it offers unrivalled freedom and open-ended possibilities and the opportunities for personal change and renewal are endless. He sees the city as a theatrical space with a multiplicity of roles for each person. Millat appears to embrace these opportunities and contorts his personality so that he is accepted in every group at school:

> He had to please all of the people all of the time. To the cockney wide-boys in the white jeans and the coloured shirts, he was the joker, the risk-
taker, respected lady-killer. To the black kids he was fellow weed-smoker and valued customer. To the Asian kids, hero and spokesman. Social chameleon. And underneath it all, there remained an ever present anger and hurt, the feeling of belonging nowhere that comes to people who belong everywhere. (Smith 269)

Millat uses his fluctuating personalities, which are based on other people’s expectations of him, as coping mechanisms to stifle his core feeling of not belonging. He does not require Magid’s life in Bangladesh to feel just as lost as him: “[Millat] stood schizophrenic, one foot in Bengal and one in Willesden. In his mind he was as much there as he was here” (219). Interestingly, the distance does not prevent the twins from suffering similar hardships, such as breaking their noses, and ending up more English than Bangladeshi. However, Magid openly embraces being British and Millat tries to hide his preference like his father does. Millat’s multiple identities further disconnect him from discovering a hybrid identity in which his anger and hurt is minimized or does not exist and in which he feels empowered instead of trapped and disoriented.

Millat, like Karim, is an attention-fiend who thrives on other people’s acceptance and rejection of him. He does whatever it takes to get a sense of belonging from his frequent, casual sexual encounters and using vulgar language to joining KEVIN – Keepers of the Eternal and Victorious Islamic Nation – which is a militant branch of Islamic fundamentalism. Millat claims he joins KEVIN because his people “need to make [their] mark in this bloody country” (Smith 295). It is actually because the unabbreviated group name has a “wicked kung-fu kick-arse sound to it” (295). Millat lies
to his KEVIN brothers that he reads their pamphlets because these pamphlets matter to
them and he feels “pleased” when his brothers seem “pleased” (370-71). Millat should
read the pamphlets as KEVIN is against drugs, alcohol, promiscuity, Western movies,
including Millat’s favourites Goodfellas and Scarface, and most other things he enjoys
and would be the stubborn chunks of his personality – his defining differences.

Once Millat turns sixteen, he feels he can do “whatever, whenever . . . [and]
disappear[s] from home for weeks at a time, returning with money that was not his and
an accent that modulated wildly between the rounded tones of the Chalfens and the street
talk of the KEVIN clan” (Smith 351). Millat becomes a wanderer like Karim. He moves
between houses and groups based on what he needs at that moment but he never stays
long enough to become attached. Joyce develops an intense interest in Millat. She wants
him to feel the same connection to her and tries to create this through conversation,
which includes insulting his parents, and by giving him money to do odd jobs such as
babysitting. The more Millat rebels and disrespects her family by “turning up uninvited
on a Sunday night, off his face, bringing round girls, smoking weed all over the house,
drinking their 1964 Dom Perignon on the sly, pissing on the rose garden, holding a
KEVIN meeting in the front room, running up a three hundred pound phone bill calling
Bangladesh” (334-35), the more Joyce loves him. She even designates him a bedroom in
their house.

Alsana is furious that Millat spends so much time at the Chalfen’s: “I am saying
these people are taking my son away from me. . . . They’re Englishfying him completely!
They’re deliberately leading him away from his culture and his family and his religion”
Millat is already English and his parents have led him away from his culture, family and religion more than the Chalfens through their inconsistent practices. Regardless, Alsana sends Neena to meet the Chalfens. Marcus proceeds with his generalizations and stereotypes when he learns that Neena is a lesbian:

Dykes always are [terrible temptations for a man]. . . . a Chalfen man and an Iqbal woman would be a hell of a mix. Like Fred and Ginger. You’d give us sex and we’d give you sensibility. . . . Funny thing about your family: first generation are all loony tunes, but the second generation have got heads just about straight on their shoulders. (349)

Neena reports back that the Chalfens are “crazy, nutso, raisins short of a fruitcake” (351), but she also tries to explain to Alsana why Millat likes them: “He’s running away from himself and he’s looking for something as far away from the Iqbal as possible. . . . Conceptually far away from you. Being an Iqbal is occasionally a little suffocating, you know? He’s using this other family as a refuge” (346). Neena explains that she and Millat are “second generation . . . you need to let [us] go [our] own way” (346). Interestingly, Alsana uses the same logic to Samad earlier in the novel when she defends Magid: “Let the boy go. He is second generation – he was born here – naturally he will do things differently. . . . what is so awful – so he’s not training to be an alim, but he’s educated, he’s clean” (289). She clearly forgets her prior understanding when she feels she is losing control of Millat to a white family. Millat continues to “go his own way” and remains a wanderer who is angry that he cannot figure out how to control his life or what he wants to control, which is ultimately his identity.
As Karim, Faith, Irie and Millat’s identities blur, they struggle with the concept of “home.” For example, Faith develops a skewed concept of home as a direct result of her parents’ misuse of the word “home.” When her parents purchase their first house in London, they consider it a sign of their progress and hard work and declare, “We finally arrive home” (Levy 11). Years later, her father says, “Your mum and me are thinking of going back home” (44). Faith interprets “home” to mean their “old council flat where Carl and [she] had grown up” (44), as this is the place that she considers home. She is shocked when her father corrects her and says, “No, Faith. . . . We’re thinking of going home to Jamaica” (44). Her parents never speak of Jamaica, let alone call it home. Faith’s parents’ concept of “home” ends up contributing to her identity crisis since it is difficult for Faith to accept her and her parents’ concepts of home as different places.

Karim, Faith, Irie and Millat demonstrate a huge disconnect between where they call home – initially their parents’ houses – and where they feel at home. In “Andrea Levy’s London Novels,” Fischer states that

in the midst of oppression and domination, ‘home’ [becomes] a site of struggle for communal space . . . an admission of uncertainty and ambiguity . . . a space of contestation, racist aggression and family disintegration . . . a sense of loss . . . a place of rage and exclusion . . . which is eventually shattered and where its appeal remains confined to the imaginary. (202)

As Karim, Faith, Irie and Millat struggle with racism, they largely blame their social circumstances on their parents, who they feel have not properly taught them their
cultures. They become disoriented as their homes become unwelcoming and unfamiliar. Bromley quotes Lawrence Ferlinghetti, a poet and second-generation immigrant from the United States: “‘Home is the place one starts from’ – it is a point of departure” (133). “Home” signifies a physical house and, more importantly, the relationships and dynamics of the people within the house. Pile, in The Body and the City, believes that “the home is not simply an expression of an individual’s identity, it is also constitutive of that identity” (55). Karim, Faith, Irie and Millat’s parents provide a foundation for their intellectual, spiritual and emotional development. As these characters get older, they, like other adolescents, question their parents’ beliefs and behaviour, start to establish their own senses of self and want more independence. Their homes become a “point of departure” – as places they psychologically and physically leave to be able to recreate their personal geographies, their “personal worlds of experience and learning,” and develop their identities with less direct influence from their parents, relatives, friends and communities.

Bhabha connects the dislocation of the home to the beyond. He discusses Isabel Archer’s personal growth in The Portrait of a Lady, which becomes a useful analogy of the psychological effect when the beyond intervenes: “The world shrinks for Isabel and then expands enormously. . . . In that displacement, the borders between home and world become confused; and, uncannily, the private and the public become part of each other, forcing upon us a vision that is as divided as it is disorienting” (9). Before the beyond intervenes, Karim, Faith, Irie and Millat’s worlds appear to be contained and limited as they feel inhibited and repressed by white Londoners and their own families and friends.
Bhabha says that it is “the intervention of the ‘beyond’ that establishes a boundary: a bridge, where ‘presencing’ begins because it captures something of the estranging sense of the relocation of the home and the world – the unhomeliness – that is the condition of extra-territorial and cross-cultural initiations” (9). Karim, Faith, Irie and Millat go beyond each time they articulate or question their cultural differences and want white Londoners’ perspectives of them to change. The beyond helps them see the world – the places, people, cultures and politics – inside and outside of their homes more inclusively. The beyond makes their worlds “expand” so that they can explore them in a way that helps them develop a hybrid sense of belonging, home and self.

Going beyond is not a quick solution to racial challenges or a guarantee of a hybrid identity or newness. White Londoners construct their own boundaries to prevent Karim, Faith, Irie and Millat from entering and influencing their mental, physical and social spaces. Bhabha states that

> it is a commonplace of plural, democratic societies to say that they can encourage and accommodate cultural diversity. . . . although there is always an entertainment and encouragement of cultural diversity, there is

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11 Karim, Faith, Irie and Millat go beyond when they become aware of their personal and societal barriers and boundaries. It is not clear in Bhabha’s theory if people need to get the point of depression and obsession of Faith and Irie, respectively, to go beyond. Bhabha also does not indicate if people go beyond every time they are frustrated by their circumstances, inspired to enact change or responding to any in-between space no matter how insignificant the interaction might have been. Based on these novels, Karim, Faith, Irie and Millat tolerate white Londoners’ behaviour for a significant amount of time before pursuing change. This is not to say that they did not experience the beyond after each time an in-between space emerged but rather that they did not dwell there, which is required for them to get more informed worldviews and create hybrid identities.
always a corresponding containment of it. A transparent norm is constituted, a norm given by the host society or dominant culture, which says that ‘these cultures are fine, but we must be able to locate them within our own grid.’ . . . The second problem . . . [is] that in societies where multiculturalism is encouraged racism is still rampant in various forms. (Rutherford 208)

White Londoners appear to keep their contact with Karim, Faith, Irie and Millat to a minimum, on their terms or impersonal, unless it is personally offensive. Rushdie has observed British society, noting that most white citizens demonstrate “the will not to know – a chosen ignorance” as they are not “willing to believe the descriptions of contemporary reality offered by blacks” (“New” 134). He alludes to purist thinking and notes that white citizens have been resistant to seeing society from other perspectives, choosing their own stagnant dichotomies as fact. Kureishi notes that such behaviour is because “racists find mixing terrifying. But of course it’s inevitable” (MacCabe 50). The “tension” of cultural poesis is amplified as these interactions with people who are physically different are “terrifying” to some. They cannot see past a person’s skin colour due to their stereotypical mentality or due to their concerns that they may find themselves relating to people who are less accepted in their societies. They worry that these encounters could mentally change them for the worse. Raban recognizes the ease with which people transform themselves and are transformed by the city. He warns that all people “need to hold on tight to avoid going completely soft in a soft city” (250) and succumbing to the city’s identity of them, which could include anyone’s perspectives.
I believe that Millat “goes soft,” does not dwell in the beyond and, therefore, does not construct a hybrid identity. He is unstable and insecure and constantly changes who he is and what he values to meet others’ expectations of him. He tries to escape his genetics by physically leaving his parents’ house but he still ends up like his father. Similar to Samad’s mantras of “To the pure all things are pure” and “Can’t say fairer than that” (137), Millat has “four main criteria” to live as a “Hifan” (Smith 444):

1. To be ascetic in one’s habits (cut down on the booze, the spliff, the women).
2. To remember always the glory of Muhammad (peace be upon Him!) and the might of the Creator.
3. To grasp a full intellectual understanding of KEVIN and the Qur’an.
4. To purge oneself of the taint of the West. (444)

Like Samad who uses his mantras to justify his deviations from his culture and religion, Millat gives himself leeway:

[Millat] smoked the odd fag and put away a Guinness on occasion (can’t say fairer than that), but he was very successful with both the evil weed and the temptations of the flesh. . . . He paid occasional visits to one Tanya Chapman, a very small redhead who understood the delicate nature of his dilemma and would give him a thorough blow job without requiring Millat to touch her at all [as] Millat needed ejaculation with no actual active participation on his side. (444)
Millat justifies his actions to himself as being close enough: “He had the fundamentals, didn’t he?” (447). Ironically, he wants to be in KEVIN because he loves American gangster movies and wants his life to resemble them as much as possible. He also knows that because of his love for Western things, the fourth criterion is impossible for him. And, as noted earlier, Derrida states that “there is no culture without a relation to the other” (170). Millat can never “purge” himself of the “taint of the West” as he requires knowledge of the West to keep it outside of his cultural system. Like his father, he attempts to live a “pure” life and fails since it is impossible. However, he remains in KEVIN, lying to his brothers about his commitment.

At the end of the novel, Millat has an opportunity to prove himself to KEVIN. He plans to shoot Dr. Marc-Pierre Perret because of his involvement with Marcus Chalfen’s scientific work that alters genetics – scientific work that is against KEVIN’s beliefs. As the narrator notes, Millat’s involvement actually “secreted [from his] genes” (Smith 525) since he is behaving like his ancestor; he is “a Pandy deep down. And there’s mutiny in his blood” (526). Millat, like his father, makes it seem like he has no power over how he is and puts accountability on anything and anyone other than himself. Due to television and movies, violence is “familiar” to Millat. This familiarity makes his role seem like “fate . . . [which, to Millat, is] a quantity very much like TV: an unstoppable narrative, written, produced and directed by somebody else” (526). As the reality of killing a man dawns on him, he realizes that he is “stoned and scared” (526), which is similar to Pande who was drunk. Millat is once again removing his accountability by having drugs in his system. However, he does realize that it is harder to be a gangster than the movies depict.
Millat compares his situation to Al Pacino in *The Godfather*. He even compares Pacino being “huddled in the restaurant toilet” to Pande who was “huddled in the barracks rooms” (Smith 526) before they were about to kill. Millat considers the “doubt” that crosses Pacino’s face before he kills someone and notes that Pacino “never does anything else but what he was always going to do” (527). Millat puts his accountability to fire the gun on a fictional character, an ancestor he never knew and a group he regularly defies. When the moment arrives, “Millat [reaches] like Pande” (533) and fires the gun at Dr. Perret. However, Archie intercepts the bullet with his thigh. Millat should go to jail for attempted murder, which might give him a chance to end his identity crisis by having time to reflect on his past, present and future. Instead, Smith ends the novel by stating nothing definitive except that the mouse that is part of Chalfen’s experiment escapes.

Millat remains a liminal figure in terms of his mental and social identity: “Millat was neither one thing nor the other, this or that, Muslim or Christian, Englishman or Bengali; he lived for the in between, he lived up to his middle name, *Zulfikar*, the clashing of two swords” (Smith 351). He wants to instigate change, but he lives in a city that is too vast and offers too many possible selves and situations for someone as angry, unfocused, unaccountable and immature as Millat. Lefebvre visualizes space as something that is not concrete and cannot be filled by whatever people put in it: “space is neither a mere ‘frame’, after the fashion of the frame of a painting, nor a form or a container of a virtually neutral kind, designed simply to receive whatever is poured into it” (*Production* 93-94). Millat fills his spaces with what others want him to fill them
with, for example, KEVIN, the Chalfens, sex and violence. In secret, Millat also fills these spaces with what he wants: a modified version of KEVIN, the Chalfens for money, shelter and approval, sex, violence, vandalism, drugs and gangster movies. Millat behaves how people who are not close to him want him to behave, because he knows that he really does not belong to these groups and does not have to be accountable to them. He lashes out in anger to those who love him because they want him to change for the better and he does not know how to change or who he should become.

Irie shares Millat’s anger, also does not dwell in the beyond and does not construct a hybrid identity. However, she is too “hard” rather than too “soft,” rigidly seeking the purity of one identity rather than the power of a hybrid identity. Irie moves in with her Jamaican grandmother, Hortense, which allows her to escape from everything in her life that is familiar, deceptive and unwelcoming. After visiting her parents or the Chalfens, she hurries back there and feels “relieved . . . for it was like hibernating or being cocooned, and she was as curious as everyone else to see what kind of Irie would emerge” (Smith 399). Irie is now unsure of whom she wants to become. However, she treats her grandmother’s as her place of rebirth since it contains evidence of her Jamaican family’s history: “In cupboards and neglected drawers and in grimy frames were the secrets that had been hoarded for so long” (399). Irie voraciously finds, reads and looks at everything to piece together her history:

She laid claim to the past – her version of the past – aggressively, as if retrieving misdirected mail. So this was where she came from. This all belonged to her, her birthright. . . . X marks the spot, and Irie put an X on
everything she found, collecting bits and bobs (birth certificates, maps, army reports, news articles) and storing them under the sofa, so that as if by osmosis the richness of them would pass through the fabric while she was sleeping and seep right into her. (400)

Irie begins to feel as if she belongs due to discovering tangible pieces of her history.

As Irie immerses herself in her family’s history, she sees the Chalfens less: “She still did Marcus’s filing twice a week, but avoided the rest of the family” (Smith 399). She had idolized the Chalfens but begins to see that their lives and their version of Englishness are not right for her. Irie hears Joyce on a radio program one day and turns it off: “It was quite therapeutic switching Joyce off. . . . It just seemed tiring and unnecessary all of a sudden, that struggle to force something out of the recalcitrant English soil. Why bother when there was now this other place?” (402). However, Irie’s version of her homeland is unrealistic as she idealizes it as symbolizing a land and time in which “a young white captain could meet a young black girl with no complications, both of them fresh and untainted and without past or dictated future – a place where things simply were. No fictions, no myths, no lies, no tangled webs” (402). Irie feels as if she can start anew from her family’s historical knickknacks. To her, Jamaica “sounded like a beginning. The beginningest of beginnings. . . . a blank page” (402). Really, Irie is further disorienting herself by imagining a utopian historical past and using it to found her utopian sense of the future.

Ironically, Irie, who is obsessed with living life without complicated roots, creates her own entangled roots at the end of the novel. After “ten years of love
unreturned” (Smith 461), Irie and Millat spontaneously have intercourse on his prayer mat. Irie feels “embarrassed and ashamed because she could see how much he regretted it” (461); Millat, who had been striving to be a better Muslim, realizes that he is still like his father and cannot commit to his religion. Irie wants to blame someone for Millat’s response and sets out “to find whoever had made him unable to love her” (462). She cannot fathom that she is more like family than a love interest to him. Instead, Irie determines that Magid is the cause because he was born first, making Millat “the lesser son” (462). Irie finds Magid and makes “love to him angrily and furiously, without conversation or affection” (463) and then weeps “like a baby” (463). Her behaviour demonstrates how destructive her idealization of her past and future is to her identity. Additionally, by having intercourse with twin brothers within 25 minutes of each other and ending up pregnant, Irie’s, her child’s, Millat’s and Magid’s roots become forever entangled. They will never know who impregnated her due to Millat and Magid’s identical genes.

Despite this, Irie reprimands her and Millat’s parents for talking so much about their pasts, presents and futures, highlighting that “normal” families are quiet and not stuck in the past:

They’re not always hearing the same old shit. . . . The biggest traumas of their lives are things like recarpeting. Bill-paying. Gate-fixing. They don’t mind what their kids do in life as long as they’re reasonably, you know, healthy. Happy. And every single fucking day is not this huge battle between who they are and who they should be, what they were and what
they will be. . . . Because it doesn’t fucking matter. As far as they’re concerned, it’s the past. (Smith 514-15)

Irie is eight weeks pregnant during this outburst. She has decided that she will, like Samad did years ago when he chose one of his twin sons to grow up in his homeland, also choose between Millat and Magid. This time the decision will determine who will be her child’s father and, hence, part of its heritage. Like her mother, Irie plans to raise her child severed from its past. Irie does not see that she is planning to raise her child as she was raised and could thereby create similar challenges for it. She is unaware that she is actually creating a more complicated life for her child with roots that reach just as deep in many different cultures based on her heritage, her child’s father’s culture and the fact that the child will never know who its father is.

Millat and Irie go beyond multiple times, but they are unable to dwell there because they are missing an all-encompassing view of the various spaces, relationships, identities and histories that compose their pasts, presents and futures. Lefebvre believes that the “theoretical error [of the perception of space] is to be content to see a space without conceiving of it, without concentrating discrete perceptions by means of a mental act, without assembling details into a whole ‘reality’, without apprehending contents in terms of their interrelationships within the containing forms” (94). Millat and Irie’s mental, physical and social spaces are disconnected, which prevents them from constructing inclusive senses of self and identifying their stubborn chunks – their defining, foundational differences. Millat’s spaces are inconsistent, discordant and built on deceitfulness, which ends up being destructive to him and others. He remains in an
identity crisis as neither British nor Bengali nor a productive combination of each. Irie’s physical spaces change significantly when she moves in with her grandmother, and her mental and social spaces become more informed as she learns her family’s history. However, Irie is still disoriented by the novel’s conclusion. She has an unrealistic perspective of her family’s history and remains adamant about cutting her ties to everyone else’s histories and lives when these are necessary pieces to her and her unborn child’s identities. The other two second-generation immigrants of colour, Karim and Faith, realize the importance of their families’ histories, are empowered to struggle through their disorientation and end up dwelling in the beyond, in which they create hybrid identities.

4.4 Dwelling in the beyond

As Karim and Faith dwell in the beyond, their worlds “expand.” They realize that they can and need to construct personal geographies and hybrid identities that are less impressionable to racism and not as easily imposed upon by their oppressors, including white Londoners, their families and their friends. This knowledge of their mental and social capabilities is overwhelming and disorienting. Karim and Faith become hyperaware of how racist and resistant many white Londoners are; they see how difficult it is going to be to formulate strategies to respond productively to the racism and limitations around them; and, they must have the difficult conversations and exchanges that help white Londoners realize that second-generation immigrants of colour are born British citizens and belong in London. Karim and Faith also quit trying to superimpose themselves into groups in which people view skin colour as an irreconcilable difference.
In *Imagined Communities*, Anderson states: “Nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it *invents* nations where they do not exist” (6). Karim and Faith search for nations with people who share similar goals, values and beliefs and in which they can determine who they are and how they fit in society.

Soja, in *Postmodern Geographies*, quotes sociologist C. Wright Mills to highlight history’s integral role in individuals establishing who they are and in understanding how they and their societies have evolved:

> ‘The individual can understand his own experience and gauge his own fate only by locating himself within his period, that he can know his own chances in life only by becoming aware of those of all individuals in his circumstances. . . . By the fact of his living he contributes, however minutely, to the shaping of this society and to the course of history, even as he is made by society and by its historical push and shove.’ (13)

When Karim and Faith try to understand their identities from their parents’ perspectives, they are trying to understand themselves based on events that happened in a period before they were born and in circumstances that they will never fully understand since they never directly experienced them. If they try to exist with their current mentalities and without considering their parents’ upbringings, they also fail since they need to understand what they have gone through to interact and socialize effectively with them and other people of their generation. If they try to emulate white Londoners’ mentalities, they remain disoriented since their histories and cultures tend to be polar opposites. Karim and Faith must create their identities based on all of these factors and with an
awareness of the circumstances of other second-generation immigrants of colour. By doing so, they can define their stubborn chunks, which are their personal and cultural differences.

Bhabha emphasizes the role of social differences in triggering people to go beyond and driving cultural change:

Social differences are not simply given to experience through an already authenticated cultural tradition; they are the signs of the emergence of community envisaged as a project – at once a vision and a construction – that takes you ‘beyond’ yourself in order to return, in a spirit of revision and reconstruction, to the political conditions of the present. (3)

Karim and Faith, upon returning from the beyond, are still in the third space. However, they are ready to articulate their differences versus having their differences articulated to them. The beyond helps them identify and question social differences to disrupt any homogeneous senses of culture. For example, Karim and Faith can help their parents recognize the challenges they encounter as second-generation immigrants of colour and their different, but equally effective, relationships with culture; they can help their friends see the negative effects of discriminating against people based on their skin colour. The beyond allows Karim and Faith to revise, reconstruct and intervene in the current political conditions to create cultural change.

There are frequent political struggles as hybridity becomes a reality. For Karim’s and Faith’s explorations of the third space to produce hybrid identities and newness, they must learn to address these political struggles from new perspectives. Bhabha states:
[Hybridity] is about the fact that in any particular political struggle, new sites are always being opened up, and if you keep referring those new sites to old principles, then you are not actually able to participate in them fully and productively and creatively. . . . [People need to] negotiate. . . . Hybridity is precisely about the fact that when a new situation, a new alliance formulates itself, it may demand that you should translate your principles, rethink them, extend them. (Rutherford 216)

Karim and Faith must stop applying their current cultural thinking, historical knowledge and future vision when evaluating London, their relationships and their identities to work toward hybrid identities that are more adaptable to external forces and the fluid city. Lefebvre states:

The more carefully one examines space, considering it not only with the eyes, not only with the intellect, but also with all the senses, with the total body, the more clearly one becomes aware of the conflicts at work within it, conflicts which foster the explosion of abstract space and the production of a space that is other. (Production 391)

By psychologically navigating between their and their oppressors’ beliefs, behaviours and cultures, Karim and Faith can understand and challenge them. Their examinations and deconstruction of the mental, social and physical spaces of their oppressors help Karim and Faith determine how much influence each should have on their personal geographies and identities. They find the balance of cultural poesis rather than wildly modulating between cultural extremes with white Londoners controlling the tension.
Through Karim’s acting career, he learns “that the self is something we perform, that it can be changed at will, and that there is no transcendental ‘I’, only a series of positions which we choose to occupy” (Finney). Karim tries to emulate white Londoners by filling his life socially and sexually with them. He also conforms to racial stereotypes when it is advantageous to him such as for his theatre roles. He realizes that he can easily wear and discard these roles like his father does during his Buddhist performances. Karim’s divided journey is psychologically detrimental since he does not have his father’s Indian background and experiences to ground himself. After Uncle Anwar dies, Karim recognizes that personal knowledge of his Indian heritage is what is missing in his life:

I did feel, looking at these strange creatures now – the Indians – that in some way these were my people, and that I’d spent my life denying or avoiding that fact. I felt ashamed and incomplete at the same time, as if half of me were missing, and as if I’d been colluding with my enemies, those whites who wanted Indians to be like them. (Kureishi 212)

Karim sees that he cannot recreate his identity by faking his Indian heritage; he must understand his Indian heritage and then find a balance of being both British and Indian.

As Karim dwells in the beyond, he comes to the understanding that second-generation immigrants of colour such as him “became part of England and yet proudly stood outside it. But to be truly free we had to free ourselves of all bitterness and resentment” (Kureishi 227). He originally does not know how he can do this “when bitterness and resentment were generated afresh every day” (227). His behaviour and
internal dialogue toward the end of the novel indicate that he is finding a way by placing less importance on becoming part of white, elitist society. Karim continues living with Charlie in New York after his play closes. His obsession with Charlie transforms into Charlie’s obsession with him. Charlie needs a “witness” (250) to how far he has come in his life. Karim witnesses that Charlie’s happy life is an act and that Charlie is “dark, miserable, angry” (251). Karim knows that he will mentally remain like Charlie as long as he remains in New York under his influence, so he returns to London. After he returns, he has a dentist appointment. The dentist sees Karim’s skin colour and asks the nurse if he can speak English. Instead of swallowing his pride or getting angry, Karim is unaffected by this educated man’s ignorance and humorously replies, “A few words” (258). Karim embraces whom he is stereotyped to be and starts building a hybrid identity of whom he actually is.

Karim gets a life-changing role in a television soap opera. As he celebrates with his family and friends, his identity strengthens as they clarify their senses of self. His Uncle Ted tells him not to “live an untrue life” (Kureishi 265) like he did when he spent years in an unhappy marriage and in a job he hated. Karim’s father, now a full-time Buddhist, shares his realization that the English are “superior” in many regards but Indians are superior in their “culture,” “wisdom” and “spirit” (264). Karim’s brother, Allie, tells him:

At least the blacks have a history of slavery. The Indians were kicked out of Uganda. There was reason for bitterness. But no one put people like you and me in camps, and no one will. We can’t be lumped in with them.
. . Let me say that we come from privilege. We can’t pretend we’re some kind of shitted-on oppressed people. Let’s just make the best of ourselves.

(267-8)

Allie’s logic reminds Karim that he is accountable for how and who he is. Allie also uses the word “privilege” as a reminder of the power of being born British and having in-between identities. Karim’s new mental, social and physical spaces take shape as he quits running from suburbia and embraces what actually matters in his life – family, friends and defining one’s self: “I sat in the centre of this old city that I loved. . . . I was surrounded by people I loved, and I felt happy and miserable at the same time. I thought of what a mess everything had been, but that it wouldn’t always be that way” (284). By transcending his self-made boundaries, he creates an empowering personal geography – a mental foundation to anchor his restlessness in which he can define and embrace his cultural differences and choose who he has in his life. He constructs a hybrid identity based on his past, present and future in the context of whom he is and was, and whom he wants to become.

When Faith recognizes that her skin colour is a factor in her relationships, she questions what people see when they look at her. She becomes depressed that she does not have the context, her parents’ history and knowledge of Jamaica, to respond intelligently to Marion, Ruth, her family, her co-workers and others when they oppress her. To help Faith recuperate, her parents pay for her to go to Jamaica for two weeks to meet her Aunt Coral, cousin Vincent and other relatives. Faith is resistant and suggests somewhere closer like “Spain,” but her parents insist: “It might help you. . . . everyone
should know where they come from” (Levy 162). Faith “‘returns’ to a place from which she has not come” (Bromley 134) to investigate why her parents want to return to a home they barely mention.

When Faith lands in Kingston, she is amazed by the number of “black faces” (Levy 168) and feels “out of place” (169). She gets overwhelmed when a Jamaican man bombards her with offers to find her suitcase. When he does not return, Faith realizes that he has swindled her for five dollars. She starts to cry since this is her first experience of her parents’ homeland. A woman comforts Faith and expresses her annoyance at “higglers,” who are robbers such as the man who took Faith’s money. Faith is embarrassed: “I didn’t know what a higgler was. But I thought I should. I was after all the daughter of two Jamaicans” (173). Faith has many discriminating assumptions about Jamaica. For example, she thinks that her Aunt Coral’s “Third World” dog must have “rabies” (179) and that her house will be “a mud hut with a pointy stick roof and dirt floors” (180). Coral’s house actually resembles her parents’ house, which makes “everything more strange” (181). Faith had not expected to find anything familiar with people she knows nothing about. She is further disoriented as she finds a photo album full of pictures of her and her brother that she does not remember being taken. She realizes that she has existed here in their lives more than they have existed in hers.

Coral and Vincent fill Faith’s visit with lengthy, complex stories of her immediate and extended family. Faith hears about her mother’s obsession with English women after some Jamaican soldiers brought home English wives after World War II: “Mildred loved the way they dressed and curled their hair and she loved to listen to the women speak. . . . Mildred spent hours in front of the mirror [practising speaking and] . .
. walking like them” (Levy 249). Faith also learns that her father’s mother, due to her lighter skin, lied to everyone that she not “West Indian” or “African” (282). Wade’s parents even had “garden parties” for “light skin and white people” (284) and ensured that their children learned to be as English as possible. Wade liked Mildred when he met her because of “her determination to leave Jamaica and go to England” (288). A few months after they married, they “sailed to England on a banana boat” (288). Faith cries as she hears this confirmation of one of the few things her parents have told her.

Faith learns that there was a lot of colour discrimination within her family based on the shade of black of each person’s skin. For example, her mother and Coral’s father, William, who had a white Scottish father and black Jamaican mother, “did not like [his daughters] to mix with anyone who was darker than they were. . . . [He] would turn friends of his daughters away from the house, telling them that children of his did not mix with people like them” (Levy 248). Coral explains, “That’s how it was. Even though Mummy was dark she wasn’t as dark as some people” (248). Coral’s mother-in-law was not in favour of Coral marrying her son, Oscar, because she “was too dark” (193). Wade’s parents did not like Mildred because “she was too dark” (288). Faith is surprised that black Jamaicans desired lighter skin as they saw it as a sign of wealth and importance within their own country.

Faith is more like her Jamaican relatives than she thought. Coral tells Faith, “We did not learn about Jamaica in lessons. Oh no. I knew everything about England and nothing about Jamaica – the place I lived” (Levy 326). Faith also learns that some of her family felt deceived by England. Faith’s cousin, Constance – who was raised to eat lemons “with sugar and a tiny spoon . . . how the English eat lemons” (312-313) –
embraced England until she “met a Rastafarian man” (317). Constance changed her name to Afria and “called England Babylon – a place of sin where the evil white man lived. . . . [She] sat in the sun, wiped her skin with cocoa butter. And told everyone she was letting her black inside out” (317). Wade’s brother, Donald, lived in England and frequently tried to get Wade to join him. Once he returned, it was evident that he had lied about how amazing it was there: “Donald was tired of England – of the cold, of living in one room, of emptying dustbins and sweeping floors for a living. And of people shouting ‘Sambo!’ and ‘Jungle Bunny!’ at him in the street” (289).

Faith is awe-struck when Coral shows her the land where her mother grew up. Coral thinks Faith has “gone mad” (Levy 255) as Faith touches everything as if she is trying to absorb her history in one quick stop. Faith’s desperation to learn her family’s history and create a sense of belonging is similar to Irie’s. As the chapters progress in the latter half of the novel, Faith’s stark family tree grows branches. Faith’s relatives give her something she has never known – her family history: “They laid a past out in front of me. They wrapped me in a family history and swaddled me tight in its stories. And I was taking back that family to England. But it would not fit in a suitcase – I was smuggling it home” (326). Faith’s family have “wrapped” and “swaddled” her, helping her be reborn as a proud descendent of Jamaica. Faith will not declare her history at British customs since she views Britain as somewhere that does not yet appreciate it.

The last story Faith hears before she leaves Jamaica is her own. Vince tells her that her parents had pre-arranged her trip to Jamaica since she was making a mess of her life in London. Faith had lost two good jobs and tried to hide it from her parents. She moved into a dilapidated house with people her parents saw as ambitionless vagrants.
Her parents were not worried that they were white; they worried that their poor morals would influence Faith. Faith was proceeding like a self-centred adolescent and finally realizes it: “I had no job, no proper home and everywhere I looked I saw people trying to hold me back. . . . trying to keep me down because I am black. I was just running around like there is something missing” (Levy 332). Faith thought that her parents and brother, their “blackness,” looked confusing in her environment when it was actually her that was misplaced. She was being oppressed but she was also oppressing herself through a lack of discipline and by surrounding herself with people that did not care about her future.

Faith once blamed her parents for her lack of knowledge about her history. She realizes that she did not know anything because she never asked questions or showed any interest when they tried to share their stories about their lives in Jamaica or their journey to and struggles in England. Through her relatives’ stories, Faith learns that her parents were oppressed worse than she is. They were called names, on the brink of homelessness and faced daily violence and rejection by white Londoners. However, unlike her, her parents did not pay attention to the abuse because they had a solid sense of their identities: “They knew they were Jamaican. They knew where they came from and they knew where they wanted to go. They just got on with it. They learnt to get along with people. They learnt to smile and laugh and all the while just quietly make the life they wanted” (Levy 331). Faith also learns that her parents did not want to return to Jamaica until Faith “was settled, until [she] was happy” (331). Faith is humbled by how much her parents have gone through to get established in London and is embarrassed by how ungrateful she has been.
Coral tells Faith, “You can’t leave England and come all that way without losing some bit of you” (Levy 185). Faith loses her former disoriented sense of self and prepares to return to England with a hybrid identity:

Let those bully boys walk behind me in the playground. Let them tell me, ‘You’re a darkie. Faith’s a darkie.’ I am the granddaughter of Grace and William Campbell. I am the great-grandchild of Cecelia Hilton. I am descended from Katherine whose mother was a slave. I am the cousin of Afria. I am the niece of Coral Thompson and the daughter of Wade and Mildred Jackson. Let them say what they like. Because I am the bastard child of Empire and I will have my day. (327)

Faith’s reflection also resembles Uhuru’s from *The Satanic Verses* and Karim’s, further highlighting the importance of this revelation. Faith comes to “terms with her identity, not as migrant like her parents but as ‘diasporic’ and living a multiple life in a hybrid, syncretic culture” (Bromley 133). Faith returns to England on Guy Fawkes’ night – the same holiday that was being celebrated when her parents first arrived in England. She is certain of her nationality and her mission: “I was coming home to tell everyone. . . . My mum and dad came to England on a banana boat” (Levy 339). London is her home, but Jamaica is her heritage and she is no longer hiding or ignoring this.

Bhabha highlights the importance of returning from the beyond to understand the significance of dwelling in the beyond and to recognize the progress and future it creates: “Our intimations of exceeding the barrier or boundary – the very act of going beyond – are unknowable, unrepresentable, without a return to the ‘present’ which, in the process
of repetition, becomes disjunct and displaced” (4). Bhabha believes that it is not evident that a person has dwelled in the beyond until they mentally return to their former realities and realize that they are no longer familiar. Their former realities have become disorienting, uncomfortable and unfamiliar because they are no longer the same person and are likewise disorienting, uncomfortable and unfamiliar to themselves and others.

Bhabha states that the “unhomely world” is where the results of the beyond and hybrid identities are revealed: “The unhomely world [is] where . . . the banalities are enacted. . . . But it is precisely in these banalities that the unhomely stirs, as the violence of a racialized society falls most enduringly on the details of life: where you can sit, or not; how you can live, or not; what you can learn, or not; who you can love, or not” (15). The beyond helps Karim and Faith realize and accept that they will always have darker skin and identities that are in flux and London will always have racist citizens. Dwelling in the beyond helps Karim and Faith connect the past and present, home and world, “us” and “them” in a fluid way in which they, not white Londoners, can dictate how they participate in the “banalities” of everyday life.
CHAPTER 5: Conclusion

5.1 Newness

Bhabha states that recognizing that the world is not homogenous and accepting that people believe vastly different things that are all right in their own ways may help people envisage, enact and articulate a worldwide culture based on hybridity:

For a willingness to descend into that alien territory [of the in-between space] . . . may reveal that the theoretical recognition of the split-space of enunciation may open the way to conceptualizing an international culture, based not on the exoticism of multiculturalism or the diversity of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture’s hybridity. To that end we should remember that it is the ‘inter’ – the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the in-between space – that carries the burden of the meaning of culture. It makes it possible to begin envisaging national, anti-nationalist histories of the ‘people’. And by exploring this Third Space, we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the other of our selves. (38-39)

By nature of being second-generation immigrants of colour, Karim, Faith, Irie and Millat are in positions of power to go beyond and create hybrid identities. They can generate newness that many others cannot envision because they are born into and able to join seemingly incompatible cultures. However, as these novels have demonstrated, creating hybrid identities and generating newness is more complicated than recognizing injustices
and desiring change. Karim and Faith embrace their hybrid identities, but the novels conclude before they can attempt to change white Londoners’ perceptions about people of colour or their families’ perceptions of white Londoners. Irie begins to recreate her personal geography and identity and inflicts some of her new thinking on her family and friends, but she does not extend this insight to white Londoners. Millat succumbs to racism because he is not mentally strong enough to resist others’ influences, recreate his personal geography and openly establish his stubborn chunks. However, I believe the characters’ mixed outcomes all have the potential to generate newness for readers.

Readers’ lives can be affected by the third space modality even if they do not realize that these concepts exist. Through the act of reading, readers are mentally and emotionally interacting with multiple perspectives on culture, nationality and belonging. They see past London’s veneer of civilization that conceals its unpleasant, unwelcoming side. Readers instinctively compare their own beliefs and behaviour to those presented in the novels. When their beliefs and behaviour contrast, it creates uncertainty and the third space opens up for readers. Bhabha states that

it is the effect of uncertainty that afflicts the discourse of power, an uncertainty that estranges the familiar symbol of English ‘national’ authority and emerges from its colonial appropriation as the sign of its difference. Hybridity is the name of this displacement of value from symbol to sign that causes the dominant discourse to split along the axis of its power to be representative, authoritative. (113)
It is each reader’s unconscious, comparative response that creates and propels the continuum of the third space modality in their everyday lives and environments. Readers do not need to be subordinated to generate newness – they need to recognize how Karim, Faith, Irie and Millat’s experiences translate in the non-fictional world. Therefore, as demonstrated by Karim, Faith, Irie and Millat, it matters how readers explore and experience the third space. Their mindsets determine if they recognize and create their own hybrid identities, generate the balanced tension of cultural poesis, and begin to address oppression, dominant ideologies and persistent colonial behaviour.

*The Buddha of Suburbia, Fruit of the Lemon* and *White Teeth* can create different outcomes for readers based on the reader’s readiness for and openness to societal and cultural changes. Readers may be minimally affected by the novels and not feel compelled to generate newness. They may continue to passive-aggressively or complacently tolerate racism in their own lives and others due to a fear of instigating change. They could go beyond but never dwell there, hence defaulting to their former behaviour and mindsets. They could end up living disoriented and untethered lives since they cannot determine what change they want to initiate or how to initiate it. Or, they could dwell in the beyond and start generating newness in their own lives and others. At a minimum, readers will reconsider dichotomies.

Bhabha uses stairwells as a metaphor for the desired hybrid connection between any “us” and “them” dichotomies since stairwells imply the potential for continuous movement and change:
The stairwell as liminal space, in-between the designations of identity, becomes the process of symbolic interaction, the connective tissue that constructs the difference between upper and lower, black and white. The hither and thither of the stairwell, the temporal movement and passage that it allows, prevents identities at either end of it from settling into primordial polarities. This interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy. (4)

The third space modality combines the past and present, providing a passage between them, in which the colonizer and colonized and their descendents co-exist and have the opportunity to discuss their past, present and future relationships within London. The stairwell eliminates the idea of a top (better) and bottom (worse) position by encouraging identities that are in-between – hybrid identities. Bhabha quotes Renée Green, an African-American artist: “My work has a lot to do with a kind of fluidity, a movement back and forth, not making a claim to any specific or essential way of being” (3). The beyond allows for a higher state of mind – newness – in which people accept that there is no “essential way of being.” Kureishi, Levy and Smith project a similar fluidity in their novels, fluctuating between white Londoners, immigrants and second-generation immigrants of colour, portraying the ignorance in all of their lives, yet not portraying any group as living life more effectively than the others. They help readers see the same things in their communities, which helps readers focus on opportunities for newness rather than on being caught in a cycle of complacency or blame for societal
circumstances. Their novels inspire readers to find better ways to co-exist, identify with each other, and create and function within a multicultural city.

Newness: How does it come into the world? For fictional second-generation immigrants of colour, the answer is slowly and difficultly via racism, identity crises, and the identification and articulation of cultural differences. Newness waits as they bring differences to the surface, dismantle purist ideals and dichotomies, and turn “us” and “them” into hybrid identities. Newness is embedded in late-twentieth century British literature, waiting for the right people to read it and then insist on instigating positive cultural changes.
WORKS CITED


