AT HOME IN THE METROPOLE

GENDER AND DOMESTICITY IN CONTEMPORARY MIGRATION FICTION

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ABSTRACT

This thesis looks at a selection of novels by diasporic writers which engage significantly with the domestic sphere and its associated practices in their narratives of migration to Britain from postcolonial spaces. Employing a feminist postcolonial approach to works by Buchi Emecheta, Monica Ali, Andrea Levy, Abdulrazak Gurnah and Leila Aboulela, this thesis challenges dominant readings of migration fiction that have been shaped by postmodern and diasporic frameworks of displacement and rupture, emphasising instead placement, dwelling and (re)rooting as important features of the migratory process. It also aims to re-centre the domestic, private and 'everyday' in conceptions of home in current debates about migration, while also generating a productive theorisation of 'home' which synthesises its feminist and postcolonial critiques. My approach is about reading more than the allegorical into literary representations of home-spaces, as I trace the interdependence of public and private, domestic and political, across both form and content in the novels covered. Through my analysis of individual texts, I show how writers draw on the colonial and postcolonial politics of home and domesticity as discursive *resources* in their narratives of cross-cultural encounter, challenging the devaluation of the private sphere as a static, unproductive and uncreative space. I unpack how these texts engage with the domestic as a material space of inspiration, but also as a political space constructed by histories of colonialism and immigration, as well as by policy and academic scholarship, showing how they respond to and subvert these discourses. Through their engagement with familiar tropes of house and home, many of these works challenge representations of migrant women as passive recipients and reproducers of an externally defined 'culture'. Instead, I argue, they offer alternative interior geographies which re-map both the British domestic space *and* that of the home-culture, reframing the home as an important carrier of meaning but one that is constantly in flux, remaking itself according to the needs and desires of those who dwell within its walls.

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1. INTRODUCTION

For those who migrate and, to a certain extent, for those who descend from migrated peoples, 'making' a home is a political act. Choosing one place over another, one passport over another, a set of rules, rituals, holidays, and linguistic codes over another set is a complex and often painful endeavour. It is potentially even more challenging for those who attempt to bring one form of home into another, translating codes and practices across space and time to mix and blend with others. But where exactly do we locate this highly charged selection? In which spaces do its mechanisms unfold? What exactly are the boundaries of home?

The first space encountered by the migrating body is that of the new nation-state, often desired from afar, or counted on for refuge, to which entry may be granted but is more often denied. Once admitted, it can become an ideological space of English Defence League demonstrations, unemployment figures and fights over the meaning of the prefix 'multi'. Then, moving down the scale, there is the space of the city, a common place of arrival for the migrant and very often the place of settlement. It is a space that has become an emblem of migration's outcome, with its barrios and Chinatowns, 'ethnic' foods and no-go 'ghettos'. Despite the less visible nature of its processes and characteristics, it is important that we also consider the domestic space itself – the family house, the shared flat, the bed-sit – where the migrated body carries out the activities of everyday life. For displaced peoples, however, each of these spaces is haunted by the one left behind, whether in their own lifetime or long ago, its memory transformed with each passing generation.

In discussions of 'home' in much of the scholarship on migration, there is a frequent slippage between these three spaces. They become unbounded and bleed into one another, even when one explicitly tries to separate them out. When speaking of home in terms of (a sense of) 'belonging', the question becomes even murkier, resisting the spatial altogether and slipping into an amorphous sense of connections to culture,

language and people. In reactionary discourses against immigration, one space is often substituted for another, and the house comes to stand as a metaphor for the nation, with all its accompanying dialectics of resident/guest (or resident/intruder), family/stranger, and its tropes of open doors and bolted locks. However, it is also important to be attentive to the ways that material homes are brought into play in such discourses, through territorial contestations over the 'character' of residential neighbourhoods, the allocation of government housing, access to social care, etc.

There are three primary aims to this thesis. Firstly, I aim to challenge dominant readings of migrant and diasporic fiction that have primarily been shaped by postmodern and diasporic theories that emphasise displacement and rupture, focusing instead on placement, dwelling and (re)rooting as important features of the migratory process. Secondly, I want to re-centre the domestic, private and 'everyday' in conceptualisations of 'home' within current debates about migration in literary and cultural studies, resisting readings which place these as subservient to the 'grand' concerns of nationalism and other 'public' discourses. Thirdly, I aim to contribute a productive theorisation of the value of home which synthesises its feminist and postcolonial critiques. In order to properly address these three aims, it is necessary to place the literary texts covered in this thesis within their wider socio-cultural discursive contexts, which often requires an engagement with theoretical concerns and methodological approaches from other disciplines. However, in addition to an attention to the ways in which the novels analysed thematise these debates, my analysis also takes into account the different formal choices within these works, as these have bearing on their ability to represent the complexity of the domestic in the context of migration. One common way of drawing a line between the different spaces of 'home' described above is to place them into categories of public and private, such that the nation and the city are associated with discourses of the public, while the house is firmly situated in the 'apolitical' private sphere. In addition to problematising the mobilisation of this

boundary (and its implicit hierarchy of value) through an attention to alternative and resistant conceptualisations of space, my analysis will foreground the productive interconnections between these so-called 'separate spheres', both formally and conceptually.

I want to start off my interrogation of the domestic by thinking about that now official, if somewhat American, term 'home-maker' – the box I tick on forms when asked about my mother's 'occupation'. Although put forward as a neutral replacement for the gendered term 'housewife', it is still largely associated with women. Nevertheless, it makes an attempt to transform the spatial stasis of that older label into one of productive action. But what does it mean to 'make' a home, especially when that home is in a foreign country and culture, with different codes and kinds of spaces within which to carry out this work? Also, how seriously are we to take the productive connotation of this compound noun, given that its association with women and the domestic inscribes it within discourses of reproduction rather than those of production? In what contexts can processes of 'making home' become subversive and when are they hegemonic? Finally, how are the processes of homemaking that take place in the domestic space entangled with the processes and discourses of integration, assimilation, segregation, and multiculturalism that are more readily associated with the 'public' spaces of the city and the nation? As James Clifford asks, 'What are the political stakes in claiming (or sometimes being relegated to) a "home"?' (1997, 36). This thesis attempts to shed light on some of these questions through an analysis of literary narratives of migration which engage with the domestic as more than simply backgrounds of the plot, but as an integral part of their narrative machinery and thematic engagement. Borrowing Marilyn R. Chandler's words from her study of houses in American fiction, within the works I analyse, domestic spaces 'figure not simply as historically accurate settings or stage props but as powerful, value-laden, animated agents' (1991, 4).

This thesis is about reading more than the allegorical into deployments of the private and domestic in literature, in the Jamesonian sense where the private merely stands for the public (1986). Given the mobilisation of 'home' in the service of xenophobic and often outright racist public discourses, locating meaning in the private *only* when it is in the service of the 'public' in migration narratives is potentially problematic. It is also precisely the gendered conception of material homes as 'merely' private concerns and therefore unimportant as carriers of meaning in themselves that needs to be challenged, which is what this thesis intends to do. I am nevertheless also concerned with showing how these seemingly 'small' processes are entangled with questions of belonging within the larger spaces of city and nation. Attending to the tension between the public and private, the personal and the collective without resorting to any straightforward transference of meaning from one to the other requires a particular kind of reading practice, which Susan Andrade refers to as 'reading across the threshold' (2011). I will elaborate in more depth on the details of this approach in Chapter 4, but it is important to highlight it here as a methodological framework for the thesis overall, particularly as a way of getting at the relationship between thematic engagement and the operations of narrative form in each of the works analysed.

Although essentially a literary enquiry employing the tools of close reading and formal analysis, this thesis is also underpinned by a cultural studies ethos which seeks to engage with approaches and knowledges from other disciplines, as indicated above. In addition to the need for an interrogation of the different kinds of discourses circulating around the texts in question, this is also down to a demand for theoretical versatility in assembling the analytical tools I will employ in reading my chosen texts. This is largely due to the fact that I am attempting to access aspects of the works I engage with which are less readily observed by literary theory and practice, namely the domestic, the personal and the 'everyday'. In his book on the concept and practice of interdisciplinarity, Joe Moran (2002) makes an explicit link between the crystallisation

of disciplinary boundaries within the academy and the lack of attention paid to these aspects of life in the scholarship it produces. In his discussion of the rise of the (un)discipline of cultural studies as an offshoot of university English departments, he points out that its concern with contemporary life stems precisely from the fact that the present is an 'unmapped, provisional field, […] its disparate elements are only just becoming part of the public discussion and record; it has yet to be "disciplined"' (Moran 2002, 64). For the same reasons, he argues, cultural studies has succeeded in opening up space for looking at those aspects of life which do not fall into easy disciplinary categories, through what Moran refers to as a 'theoretical ground-clearing' (*ibid*, 65). As Moran recounts, Henri Lefebvre, in his *Critique of Everyday Life* (2008)*,* expresses frustration at traditional disciplines' readiness to dismiss everyday culture as banal and unworthy of enquiry, describing it as the 'residue' left over once specialist, structured activities have been singled out by academic analysts (Moran: 2002, 67). Michel de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1988) has been a key work in theorising the importance of such 'residual' activities, arguing that it is these practices which need to be the object of interdisciplinary work because they have been so systematically excluded from the traditional disciplines (Moran: 2002, 66). I will return to Certeau's conceptualisation of such practices in the next chapter, but what is important to highlight here is that it is precisely this interdisciplinary genealogy for scholarship on the domestic and its accompanying 'everyday' practices that makes it necessary to draw on work from outside the literary realm in order to adequately frame its place within the literary works at the centre of this thesis.

My interrogation of home, the domestic and its accompanying practices has been generated largely by questions arising from the field of feminist scholarship, which, perhaps also by virtue of its place outside/alongside the traditional disciplines, has found innovative ways of making sense of the house/home. However, given its focus on contemporary fiction that deals with migration from erstwhile colonial spaces,

this thesis will also necessarily engage with concepts and theories generated from postcolonial critiques, many of which interrogate and undercut mainstream feminist conceptualisations of these same issues. Therefore, it has been necessary to draw on scholars whose work straddles the two spheres – termed variously 'postcolonial feminism', 'transnational feminism', 'global feminism' (among other localised formulations) – while remaining mindful of the positions which such scholars are attempting to displace through their work. Due to its specific engagement with and theorisation of domestic practices and how these come to bear on questions of nationalism and belonging within diasporic spaces, it has also proved useful to draw on feminist work which has been more readily taken up by social scientists and legal scholars than by literary critics. It is hoped that by broadening the reach of my theoretical frame, I will be able to produce fresh approaches to this now established body of literary production.

Many scholars ruminating on the 'condition' of postmodernity have generated influential explorations of home/place as part of the so-called 'spatial turn' (Soja 1989; Deleuze and Guattari 1983; Deleuze and Guattari 2008; Harvey 1990; Tally 2013) and such work has been used widely by literary critics interested in analysing representations of space in fiction, including many using postcolonial approaches (see, for example, Bromley 2000; Pready 2012; Upstone 2009). However, commonly employed postmodern theories of space, particularly Deleuze and Guattari's notion of 'deterritorialisation', have proved largely inadequate for my purposes as it is precisely through drawing on such works that the emphasis on displacement in migration fiction has frequently been articulated. Furthermore, as I discuss in the following chapter and in Chapter 7, their reliance on masculinist and in many cases Eurocentric conceptualisations of space/home make them problematic theoretical frameworks for the aims of this thesis. Although remaining mindful of the critical importance of such work, I have found approaches within the field of feminist geography to be the most

useful for providing ways of conceptualising space and home/place that take account of gender as well as various kinds of 'otherness' in their theoretical explorations, and it is this scholarship which forms the basis of my conceptualisation of space throughout this thesis. It is also within this broad field that some of the more exciting and extensive explorations of the domestic are currently taking place in the UK, as evidenced by the recent creation of the Centre for Studies of Home, established as a collaboration between the Geffrye Museum and Queen Mary University's Department of Geography.

The next chapter of this thesis is broken into five sections, each aimed at exploring different aspects of 'home' which come to bear on my readings of the works to follow, focusing primarily on scholarship arising from outside the literary space. It is aimed at justifying my interest in home as a critical concept in spite of its problematic genealogy, while introducing some alternative conceptualisations which, I argue, go some way to accommodating its various critiques. The first two sections present critical dialogues on home from different ideological and disciplinary perspectives – the first on the mobilisation of home as an abstract theoretical resource and the second on home as a material domestic space. In my exploration of home's theoretical positionings, I discuss some influential theoretical deployments of home as an abstract concept and critiques of such deployments from feminist and postcolonial perspectives. In the second section, I explore the contested position of the material, domestic home within feminism itself and posit a more inclusive conceptualisation of the value of the homespace which takes account of both its feminist and postcolonial critiques. I then move to a discussion of home's place within the colonial encounter – both within the colonial space itself and in the metropolitan 'centre'. These sections focus on architectural space and city planning as expressions of colonial/postcolonial power relations and the role of xenophobic discourses in (re)producing negative images of 'other' homes. The final section sets out my theoretical framing of migration through an

exploration of diaspora theory, focusing on how home has been conceived across this body of scholarship.

Chapter 3 is concerned with tracing different conceptualisations of house/home within English literary studies. Using the critical dialogue generated in Chapter 2 as a backdrop for my discussion, I begin by looking at influential conceptualisations of the home within the English literary canon and then present key feminist and postcolonial critiques which challenge such readings. I then move to set out the terms and rationale for my thesis, particularly my conception of the category 'migration fiction', and situate its contribution within current literary scholarship before elaborating on my critical approach and outlining the chapters to follow.

The remaining chapters of this thesis analyse a selection of contemporary novels which engage significantly with homemaking, the domestic sphere and its associated practices in their narratives of migration. Each of these works draws on the colonial and postcolonial politics of home and domesticity as discursive *resources* in their narratives of cross-cultural encounter, challenging the devaluation of the private sphere as a static, unproductive and uncreative space. Throughout my analyses, I unpack how these authors engage with the domestic as a material space of inspiration, but also as a discursive space, which has been constructed by specific histories of colonialism and immigration, and also by policy and academic scholarship. I ask how writers draw on and respond to, as well as subvert, these discourses in different ways. Through their engagement with tropes of house and home which circulate in gendered, (post)colonial and xenophobic discourses, many of these works subvert representations of migrant homes and migrant women as passive recipients and reproducers of an externally defined 'culture'. Instead, they offer alternative interior geographies which re-map both the British domestic space *and* that of the home-culture, reframing the home as an important carrier of meaning but one that is constantly in flux, remaking itself according to the needs and desires of those who dwell within its walls. Ultimately, they disrupt the

normative reading of the im/migrant domestic home as a purely regressive, 'traditional' space that must be rejected/escaped from in order for migrant and diasporic peoples to properly integrate into the metropolitan nation, figuring any attachment to this home-space as embracing insularity, segregation and gender inequality. Instead, they show that the domestic should be read as undergoing the same processes of cultural hybridisation and productive conflict as the so-called 'public' spaces of city and nation.

I begin with Buchi Emecheta's *Second-Class Citizen* (1973), which I present as a point of departure for reading across the narrative threshold between public and private in order to generate meaning out of the entanglements of gender and race/ethnicity in migration fiction. In addition to its conventional structure and the fact that it is the oldest work covered, Emecheta's novel serves as an appropriate place to start due to its particular limitations. Although it is a work that explicitly sets out to critique both gender and racial hierarchies, it is unable to fully hold them in tension. This 'failure' is productive and opens the door for an exploration of how the novels covered in the rest of the thesis are variously able to deploy the domestic in ways which are more successful in this regard.

Next, I move to an analysis of Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* (2003) which, though coming with its own set of problems stemming from its narrative structure, resists the kind of essentialising mechanisms found in Emecheta's novel. By reading across the different narrative spaces constructed by the novel, specifically the domestic home and the 'ethnic' neighbourhood, I show how they are both performances of their attendant roles within wider discourses circulating inside and outside the Bangladeshi community in London. Reading in this way, however, goes against the prevailing interpretations (both positive and negative) of this novel as a simple narrative of development from female oppression by 'tradition' to emancipation achieved through contact with Western modernity. It is the primarily linear nature of the novel and the somewhat overly heroic ending that encourages such a reading, such that the subtlety of the

novel's discursive interventions are easily glossed over in favour of an over-arching narrative of assimilation. By contrast, Andrea Levy's novel *Small Island* (2004), which I analyse in Chapter 6, pre-empts such a reading by employing particular formal choices to undercut the understanding of migration as a one-way movement from one culture to another. In juxtaposing migrant and 'native' narrators as well as colonial and metropolitan settings, Levy presents post-colonial migration as dialogic and multi-directional, staging domestic spaces and values as the primary ground on which the tension between gender and race/culture are played out.

I then move to two novels, Abdulrazak Gurnah's *By the Sea* (2002) in Chapter 7 and Leila Aboulela's *The Translator* (1999) in Chapter 8, which, I argue, employ more sophisticated deployments of the domestic to produce anti-colonial critiques that are also attentive to the power-dynamics of gender. In both of these novels, their ability to hold these two concerns in tension is more an effect of their rhetorical mechanisms than their thematic content. As a refugee narrative, *By the Sea* resists a reading of migration as an unproblematic shirking off of 'home' and stages the process of narrating migration as one of storytelling, as opposed to mobilising a masculinised trope of authorship. Through its interweaving of stories with household objects, Gurnah's novel presents the process of narrating migration as bound up with processes of homemaking in the domestic sphere. To a different end, Aboulela's novel employs a subtle set of rhetorical turns that challenge commonsense binaries of East and West, presenting a modern Muslim woman as the 'translator' between the two. In *The Translator*, Aboulela holds in tension several of the strands that are of interest in this thesis overall and it is down to the novel's formal structure, namely that of the domestic novel, that makes it successful in this regard. It is precisely by 'reading across the threshold' between public and private in Aboulela's novel that enables an appreciation of the subtlety of its critique, which lies at the intersection of Islamic and feminist concerns. As I will aim to show throughout this thesis, this interpretive approach is one that should be considered for

any work of cross-cultural fiction that is already inscribed within binary terms of reception such as East/West, ethnic/mainstream, 'authentic'/ 'inauthentic'. Focusing on the interconnections between public and private, the political and the everyday, creates more nuanced ways of 'placing' the work and the writer in question without having to rely on the limited terms provided by politicised models of cross-cultural contact which depend on essentialist investments in nationality, race and culture.

2. HOME: THEORIES AND CONTEXTS

HOME AND ITS DISCONTENTS: ABSTRACTIONS AND THEORISATIONS

In Gaston Bachelard's influential work *The Poetics of Space* (1992), the house becomes fertile ground for a metaphorical exploration of the human psyche. This house is explored from top to bottom, its secret spaces are dusted off and laid bare and its contents explored, all in the interest of understanding the interconnections between the self and the space it inhabits most intimately. However, at no point in this work does Bachelard ask 'What kind of selves have access to this space?' or 'Are there selves that might inhabit this space differently and think differently about its significance?' If, as Carl Jung asserts (and Bachelard's analysis appears to agree), the house/home should be seen as 'the universal archetypal symbol of the self' (qtd. in George, 19), then does this imply that the self must also be universal and archetypal?

The feminist geographer Gillian Rose (1993) takes (primarily male) philosophers and geographers to task over this tendency to universalise home as a space for supporting the human subject. Citing a recurrent deployment of home (often articulated through an emphasis on 'community') in its theorisations of place, Rose argues that humanistic geography feminises place, leaving 'no place for woman'. While commending the work of such geographers for going against the grain of mainstream geography's lack of attention to the space of the home and overreliance on activities which take place in the 'public sphere' as constitutive of place, Rose argues that the emphasis on the sense of pleasure that stems from feelings of familiarity and belonging to home in the work of geographers like Edward Relph and Yi-Fu Tuan (and Bachelard) stems from problematic assumptions about the universality of people's relationship to home. In humanistic geography, she says:

> Each object, every person and event, only becomes meaningful through
> its interpretation by a thinking, feeling human. This humanity was
> assumed to be universal, and so was the desire for a sense of place.
> Although mediated in its expression by cultural differences, the desire to
> belong was supposed to be an essential aspect of human existence. (*ibid*,
> 51).

While it is difficult to argue with such a supposition, Rose's critique is formulated out of the few brief moments when women are mentioned in the work of the two geographers mentioned above. Rather than comparing men and women, women are deployed as 'exceptions' to the apparently universal claims put forward in their analyses, thereby establishing men as the implicit norm from which they deviate. As she articulates:

> The appearance of women in their accounts in this way indicates that the use of Man in humanistic geography makes men the baseline against which difference is spoken. Their Man is actually a man. The authority of humanistic geography is masculinist because it falsely assumes that the experience of men can represent all experiences. (*ibid*, 53)

Rose also points out that certain aspects of place get associated with the feminine in the work of humanistic geographers, through invocations of the everyday, the emotional, the bodily and the domestic, such that 'images of the domestic recur in their work as universal, even biological experiences' (*ibid*). However, such experiences are celebrated in such accounts without mention of the work that is done in order to bring about the sense of belonging they apparently induce. Within such framings of home, women's work to produce a sense of place is simply taken for granted, rather than valued as making meaning in its own right, so that women come to stand for the place upon which and from which the masculine subject acts. From this analysis, Rose concludes that 'the (hum)anistic desire for place/belonging/home [i]s masculinist' (*ibid*), due to its reliance on a conception of home/place as one of unchanging stability and sameness rather than productivity or creativity. Whether this space is in fact as stable and unchanging as this conceptualisation assumes forms part of the object of this study, but if we return to Bachelard's idealistic vision of the house, it is telling there is no mention of the woman (whether mother or wife) who maintains this space which supports his universalised self so completely.

In addition to this feminist critique of such unproblematised readings of home, critiques have also been lodged from antiracist and postcolonial perspectives which

draw attention to the ways in which such conceptualisations gloss over the exclusionary practices involved in maintaining the feelings of security and familiarity associated with home. In Audre Lorde's famous essay 'The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House' (2003), Lorde invokes a metaphorical house in order to call attention to the problematic positioning of feminist scholarship which seeks the views of black or 'third world' scholars only as an afterthought or adjunct rather than as a central preoccupation of their work. Referring to the masculinist impulse at the heart of universalist conceptualisations of home, which Rose draws attention to in her critique, Lorde asserts:

> For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change. And this fact is only threatening to those women who still define the master's house as their only source of support. (*ibid*, 27)

In an essay that appears to answer Lorde's call, Biddy Martin and Chandra Mohanty produce a critical analysis of feminist politics that also extends Rose's critique of the exclusions and assumptions inherent in any idealistic reading of home and belonging. In 'Feminist Politics: What's Home Got to Do with It?', Martin and Mohanty point to (white, middle-class) feminism's tendency to add on difference 'without leaving the comfort of home' (1986, 193). Like Lorde's critique, their essay reminds us that even within academic scholarship that takes a progressive stance (such as feminism), one must always recognise the impulse to 'stay home' within the confortable confines of Bachelard's universalist house-as-self. They call attention to an on-going problem, both within academic scholarship and daily life which they describe as '[the] irreconcilable tension between the search for a secure place from which to speak, within which to act, and the awareness of the price at which secure places are bought, the awareness of the exclusions, the denials, the blindness on which they are predicated' (1986, 206). Rose's, Lorde's and Martin and Mohanty's critical stance towards home/house reminds us that despite its associations with positive feelings of

protection and inclusion, without critiquing the very foundations on which these associations are based, idealisations of home can become complicit in systems of oppression and exclusion. Many of the concerns of this thesis have rested on this tension, as I have attempted to bear in mind the genealogy of 'home' as a theoretical concept, in both its positive and negative connotations, while searching for alternative theoretical tools which enable an engagement with home that takes account of its potential traps and assumptions.

One way that home can be brought back into light is by looking at the critiques lodged at theorisations of its apparent opposites – travel, displacement, nomadism, etc. While it is important to bear in mind the problems with over-valuing home as a theoretical concept, we must also be wary of throwing it out altogether in exchange for an equally universalising call to embrace 'homelessness'. Drawn largely from an interaction between postmodern theory and contemporary processes such as economic globalisation, large-scale migration and huge advancements in information technology, there appears to be a growing scholarly preoccupation with un-homing the world. While concepts such as James Clifford's 'dwelling-in-travel' have usefully reframed culture as unfixed to a particular location (1997, 2), destabilising any easy dichotomy between home and travel, there is also a danger in reading movement as constitutive of the (post)modern world.

Doreen Massey, for example, makes the important point that movement in and of itself is not necessarily progressive or liberatory for all those who engage in it, drawing attention to the 'power-geometry' of the time-space compression, which some have cited as central to defining postmodernity (1993, 61). She argues that we must be attentive to the ways in which 'different social groups and different individuals are placed in very distinct ways in relation to these flows and interconnections', and that while some are in positions of control relative to processes of movement (international 'jet-setters', business people, 'the ones distributing films, controlling the news,

organising the investments and the international currency transactions', 'Western academics'), there are others (refugees, undocumented migrant workers, 'those […] who come halfway round the world only to get held up in an interrogation room at Heathrow') who, 'although doing a lot of physical moving, are not "in charge" of the process in the same way' (*ibid*, 61, 62). Massey also asserts that we must move beyond a view that sees capital as the only variable in these processes, reminding us that ethnicity and gender must also be considered as important determinants.

In her book *Questions of Travel* (1996), Caren Kaplan pushes the critique of postmodern theories of movement further, analysing some of the ways it unwittingly recycles many of the imperialist assumptions which underpinned European modernism. Referring in particular to the work of poststructuralist critics Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, she criticises what she refers to as their 'metaphorical mapping of space', which valorises displacement and privileges 'nomadic modes'. Such theories, she argues, rely upon 'an opposition between a central site of subjectivity and zones of marginality' while failing to account for the 'transnational power relations that construct postmodern subjectivities' (*ibid*, 86). Kaplan draws out the Eurocentric assumptions which remain at the centre of such theories, despite their aims to 'deterritorialise' the fixed identities of capitalist modernity and their expression through the 'the nation-state apparatus' (*ibid*, 87). While such a celebration of displacement and deterritorialisation may harmonise well with Rose's and Martin and Mohanty's critique of an uncritical investment in home/place, Kaplan makes the important point that over-valorising marginal positions, 'becoming minor' in Deleuze and Guattari's phraseology, 'is a strategy that only makes sense to the central, major, or powerful, yet is presented as an imperative for "us all"' (*ibid*, 88). Kaplan argues that through such an investment in the figure of the nomad and other marginal figures such as immigrants and gypsies, '[t]he Third World functions simply as a metaphorical margin for European oppositional strategies, an imaginary space, rather than a location of theoretical production itself',

perpetuating a kind of 'colonial discourse in the name of progressive politics' (*ibid*).

bell hooks, in her essay 'Postmodern Blackness', also takes postmodern critics to task

on this issue, highlighting the fact that while their theories are so invested in a so-called

'politics of difference', there is a marked absence of black and other marginal and

displaced groups within their inner circle, declaring that:

> It is sadly ironic that the contemporary discourse which talks the most
> about heterogeneity, the decentred subject, declaring breakthroughs that
> allow recognition of Otherness, still directs its critical voice primarily to
> a specialised audience rooted in the very master narratives it claims to
> challenge. (1991a, 25)

The result of such hypocrisy, Kaplan concludes, is that the 'theoretical tourism' of

postmodern discourses of displacement produces 'imagined' spaces of alterity that serve

to liberate the (centred, 'at home') Euro-American subject at the expense of *historicized*

experiences of homelessness and displacement (1996: 88). What is key here, is that

Kaplan draws attention to the fact that denying the importance of place/home, even in

the service of transformative theory, can be equally as problematically universalist as

over-valuing it.

In a related critique of postmodern theorists Frederick Jameson and David

Harvey, who both cite movement and displacement as the central 'condition' of

postmodernity, Doreen Massey asks us to consider who exactly feels

dislocated/placeless/invaded in assessments which see these as 'new' developments.

Also drawing attention to the ethnocentric and colonialist echoes of such a view, she

says:

> The sense of dislocation which so many writers on the subject apparently
> feel at the sight of a once well-known local street now lined with a
> succession of cultural imports […] must have been felt for centuries
> though from a very different point of view, by colonised peoples all over
> the world […]. (1993, 59)

However, in contrast to those who read any (re)attachment to home/place as a

reactionary, exclusionary solution to the sense of insecurity caused by (post)modernity,

Massey argues that we should 'face up to' rather than deny people's need for spatial

attachments (*ibid*, 63). In order to do this, Massey attempts to map out what she calls 'a

progressive sense of place', which takes account of all its local/global (including imperialist) connections and resists the exclusionary operations of boundary-drawing (*ibid*). The problem she attempts to solve is 'how to hold on to that notion of spatial difference, of uniqueness, even of rootedness […], without it being reactionary' (*ibid*, 64). In this re-imagined idea of place, Massey argues that 'settlement' should not be synonymous with 'enclosure' and reframes place as a process rather than something static and fixed by its internal history (*ibid*, 67, 66). She goes on to argue that places 'do not have single, unique "identities"' but are instead 'full of internal differences and conflicts' (*ibid*, 67). To this end, Massey's 'progressive sense of place' makes central its interconnections with various elsewheres, focusing on social relations as the key determinant of the specific local/global entanglements of a particular place. As she articulates:

> The specificity of place […] derives from the fact that each place is the
> focus of a distinct *mixture* of wider and more local social relations and,
> further again, that the juxtaposition of these relations may produce
> effects that would not have happened otherwise (*ibid*, 68).

Here, Massey makes the important case for the *unevenness* of linkages between spaces and peoples, emphasising that 'globalisation does not entail simply homogenisation' (*ibid*).

MATERIAL CONSIDERATIONS: HOME AS DOMESTIC SPACE

As is evidenced by the kinds of references cited in the above section, feminist scholarship has remained at the centre of debates about home. However, as with its deployment as a theoretical tool, feminist assessments of the material space of the home and its associated practices have not always been positive. Much of feminism's engagement with home has been aimed at critiquing the seemingly common sense, though explicitly gendered, division of space into 'public' and 'private' spheres. While the 'public' has come to be associated with politics and the market, the 'private' has become the container for all that 'residual' material that has nowhere else to go. It is the space of everyday life, all those 'banal' and 'trivial' practices which Certeau and

Lefebvre argue have been under-researched in academic studies. As mentioned above, 'home' is a slippery term in English, and it is often deployed in reference to much 'larger' concerns than the interior spaces reserved for everyday life. As Rosemary Marangoly George articulates:

> While the issue of "homelands" or "home-countries" is raised primarily in the discourse on nationalism and other so-called masculine, public, arenas, the issue of "home" and the private sphere is usually embedded in discourses on women. […] The association of home and the female has served to present them as mutual handicaps, mutually disempowering. (1999, 19)

Within the broad reach of feminism, however, there have been different 'solutions' posed to this mutual disempowerment. Probably the most well-known of these stems from what generally gets referred to as 'second-wave feminism', a movement beginning in the early 1960s in the United States, spreading to Europe and beyond in varying degrees. I do not intend to rehearse here the list of issues raised and policy changes made during this period, but rather, I want to focus on the (d)evaluation of the so-called private sphere through an engagement with the work of Simone de Beauvoir, a key figure whose work greatly influenced the development of second-wave feminism's analyses of home and the domestic.

In de Beauvoir's iconic work *The Second Sex* (1997), the home emerges as a treacherous space for women, from which the only solution is to escape into the public sphere. It is seen as a prime space for the operations of 'patriarchy', where embodied masculine privilege exerts power over women through the institutions of companionate marriage and the nuclear family. As many others have noted (see, for example, Rose 1993; Bondi 1998; McDowell 1999), its association with wage labour has discursively rendered the 'public' as a productive space, while the 'private' space of the domestic home in its association with women and motherhood/mothering, has been cast as 'merely' reproductive (with its accompanying tropes of emotional/biological rather than intellectual/rational attachments). De Beauvoir goes some way to challenge this discursive relationship in launching her criticism of any 'natural' association between

womanhood and motherhood. However, this is primarily accomplished by a disavowal of the reproductive altogether, as she focuses only on its negative aspects – abortion, the trials of pregnancy, the loss of freedom and the vexed relationship between mother and child – fashioning motherhood as an almost pathological condition/occupation. She concludes:

> We have seen that woman's inferiority originated in her being at first limited to repeating life, whereas man invented reasons for living more essential, in his eyes, than the not-willed routine of mere existence; to restrict woman to maternity would be to perpetuate this situation. (1997, 540)

De Beauvoir then extends her critique to the domestic space itself, in a way which serves to reinforce its discursive association with the reproductive. In de Beauvoir's analysis, we can trace a parallel between the repetition she associates with motherhood, expressed above, and the cyclical nature she attributes to women's unpaid labour in the home. 'Few tasks are more like the torture of Sisyphus than housework,' she says, 'with its endless repetition: the clean becomes soiled, the soiled is made clean, over and over, day after day' (1997, 470). It is this 'immanent' nature of housework that makes it so offensive to de Beauvoir, as it is viewed as the antithesis of progression and creativity. These properties, according to this logic, are only found in work that is done outside the home, in the so-called masculine realm of the public. According to de Beauvoir's analysis (which Rose extends in her critique of humanistic geography), woman's responsibility to 'make home' stems from the masculine subject's need for a stable and familiar place to leave from and return to at the end of the day. In fact, it is the very presence of that home and the woman waiting inside of it that allows him to go out into the inconstant world and make his mark. As a result, the woman inside will never be able to 'transcend' above the repetitive work of making home to become a full subject-in-the world herself.

While the point made by de Beauvoir and the second-wave feminists who drew inspiration from her writings (and to a certain extent by feminist scholars and activists

today) is in many ways a valid one, it makes a number of universalising assumptions about the woman who is waiting in the house for her male subject to return home. Firstly, it assumes that this woman does not have to work outside the home for survival, so the male counterpart must be earning enough money to support the household (read middle-class). This leads to another basic assumption, which is that there is indeed a male counterpart to take on the role of breadwinner, leaving out the experiences of single women. Perhaps even more unsettling is that de Beauvoir's argument implies that any woman who claims to stay home out of choice is caught up in some form of false consciousness, that her actions are not due to any decision of her own but rather that she is a victim of a system she is not even aware of. Does this not have the same affect of denying this woman agency and full subject status? Furthermore, if we only conceive of housework as an unproductive strategy for 'marking time' (Beauvoir 1997, 470), then how do we account for the great numbers of women who leave their own homes every day to do the same 'imminent' jobs at hotels, offices and in other people's houses in order to make a wage? Finally, in the problematic mutual disempowerment of woman and the private/domestic, is rejecting the home and its associated practices altogether and making a break for the outside world, as de Beauvoir suggests, the only solution available to women? These are all questions that must be asked of de Beauvoir's analysis of home, and have been tackled by feminists from different class positions, races and localities.

Despite isolated references to 'Mohammedan women', 'Negros' and 'Jews', de Beauvoir's analysis of home and the woman inside it derives primarily from a Eurocentric lineage of the gendered division of labour beginning in the early days of nomadism and solidified through agriculture and later by industry. It is only as a result of this particular history that one can speak of an easy division of the social landscape between public and private, masculine and feminine, housework and productive work. Furthermore, in speaking of 'Woman' as a universal category in the way de Beauvoir

does, she denies the possibility of multiple histories and, by extension, multiple lineages for 'home'. In her essay 'Homeplace: A Site of Resistance', bell hooks offers us a critique of de Beauvoir's interpretation by providing an alternative genealogy for the domestic space. Calling up the history of slavery in America and the consequences it had on the family life of its victims, she argues that, for African-American peoples:

> [H]omeplace, however fragile and tenuous (the slave hut, the wooden shack), had a *radical political dimension*. Despite the brutal reality of racial apartheid, of domination, one's homeplace was one site where one could freely confront the issue of humanization, where one could resist. Black women resisted by making homes where all black people could strive to be subjects, not objects… (1991b, 42)

Though she acknowledges the feminist concerns voiced by de Beauvoir and others, hooks focuses on a different struggle. The structure of homeplace, she explains, 'was defined less by whether or not black women and men were conforming to sexist behaviour norms and more by our struggle to uplift ourselves as a people, our struggle to resist racial domination and oppression (*ibid*, 47).

By assigning to the home a 'radical political dimension,' hooks contradicts de Beauvoir's assertion that home-making can not include transcendent qualities. Furthermore, by saying this, hooks also critiques the apolitical weighting placed on all things private and domestic, asserting the centrality of the home in fighting segregation and discrimination in the post-abolition years. She describes how it served as a *subversive* space, both in its inherent resistance to economic and social structures that prevented black people from establishing a stable home life and in its physical dimension as a place to organize and foster political solidarity.

Though he does not make a concerted attempt to account for gender in his analysis, Michel de Certeau's research into everyday activities in *The Practices of Everyday Life* also gestures at this subversive function of home. Drawing a parallel between the disciplinary constraints placed upon scholarly output and the material constraints found within contemporary life, Michel de Certeau (1988) argues that everyday activities such as walking, reading, shopping and cooking which tend to 'slip

through the extensive power and surveillance networks in contemporary culture, precisely because of their perceived triviality and banality' should be reconceived as 'tactics' for getting around (though never fully overthrowing) the rules of an otherwise constraining space (Moran: 2002, 66). According to Certeau, his enquiry is centred on:

> the uses of space, on the ways of frequenting or dwelling in a place […] and on the many ways of establishing a kind of reliability within the situations imposed on an individual, that is, of making it possible to live in them by reintroducing into them the plural mobility of goals and desires – an art of manipulating and enjoying. (1988, xxii)

In an apt example of such a 'manipulation' of interior space by those who dwell within it, Certeau describes a situation in which

> a North African living in Paris or Roubaix (France) insinuates into the system imposed on him by the construction of a low-income housing development or the French language the ways of 'dwelling' (in a house or a language) peculiar to his native Kabylia. He super-imposes them and, by that combination, creates for himself a space in which he can find ways of using the constraining order of the place or of the language. Without leaving the place where he has no choice but to live and which lays down its law for him, he establishes within it a degree of plurality and creativity. (*ibid*, 30)

By describing such daily activities as an 'art' in the above quotations, Certeau implies a kind of creative agency on the part of the marginalised North African immigrant he describes, such that, through the alterations of interior space, he enacts a form of resistance against the very constraints which fix him in a space of marginality. This reframes the operations of the domestic as productive rather than 'merely' reproductive activities. Instead of the 'immanence' that Simone de Beauvoir associates with housework, home-making is here imbued with creative possibilities that enable its meaning to transcend the repetitive nature of the tasks themselves.

Iris Marion Young (1997) pushes the implications of Certeau's research further by synthesising a case for the revaluation of home with feminist critiques stemming from de Beauvoir's legacy and postcolonial critiques such as Martin and Mohanty's (1986). Young begins by reminding us, contra de Beauvoir's assessment, that 'not all home-making is housework' (149). Building on hooks's essay, Young draws on a phenomenological approach which points to the emotional and creative potential of the

domestic space. While Doreen Massey identifies Heidegger's argument in the influential essay 'Building, Dwelling, Thinking' (1975) that space/place is 'Being' (in contrast to time, which is conceived as 'Becoming') as the source of exclusionary interpretations of home (Massey 1993, 63), Young focuses on Heidegger's conceptualisation of 'dwelling' as containing both 'building' and 'preservation' (Heidegger 1975). In Young's re-reading of Heidegger's paradigm, 'building' stands for the exclusionary aspects of home. She argues that 'those who build dwell in the world in a different way from those who occupy the structures already built and from those who preserve what is constructed. […] If building establishes a world then it is still very much a man's world' (Young 1997, 137). For Young, the process of 'preservation', left largely untheorised in Heidegger's analysis, is key to a conceptualisation of home that is neither idealistic nor exclusionary. Drawing on Edward Casey's concept of 'sedimentation', in which 'material things and spaces themselves become layered with meaning and personal value as material markers of events and relationships that make a narrative of a person or a group' (*ibid*, 150), Young emphasizes that preservation is not about 'fixing identity' (i.e. drawing borders, excluding others) but is a creative process that 'anchors it in a physical being that makes a continuity between past and present' (*ibid,* 151). While still taking a critical stance towards a universalist reading of home as a stable support for the (implied masculine) self, she argues that homemaking has 'a crucial human value' and that this should be democratised rather than rejected completely, as others have done (*ibid,* 135). What Young does not fully develop in her analysis, however, is how home-making as preservation might operate for peoples who are marked by migration, whether personally or historically. It seems that her conceptualisation of home as a process of making and re-making personal narratives through establishing homely spaces would be particularly applicable in this case, and I will come back to this point in my discussion of refugee migration in Chapter 7.[1]

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[1] Irene Gedalof (2009) makes a similar argument and applies Young's conceptualisation

As I have shown in this section, the domestic is a highly contentious space, especially within feminist scholarship itself. While de Beauvoir and many associated with second-wave feminism conclude that the only solution to women's disempowerment in the home is to abandon it altogether for the public, 'productive' world outside, others, like hooks and Young, expose the shortcomings and problematic assumptions at the heart of de Beauvoir's assessment and argue for a rehabilitation of the domestic and the 'private'. Still others reject the division of space into public/private, productive/reproductive altogether. Liz Bondi (1998), for example, argues that such a conceptualisation stems from an urban, privileged middle-class worldview and ignores the experiences of rural and working-class women who do not experience space in this dichotomised way. As Myriam Perregaux articulates, the public/private binary does not represent reality but is instead an 'ideology of power relations, the strength of which resides in the ideal it presumes to represent' (2005, 182). In the following section, I will look at the role of European colonialism in imposing such conceptualisations of space upon foreign populations and how this spatial 'ideology of power relations' became central to maintaining imperial power.

HOMES IN THE COLONIES

While colonialism is most often associated with the conquering of public space, literally through the acquisition of territory and discursively through practices such as map-making, travel-writing and natural science (see Ashcroft 2001; Pratt 1992), there is a growing body of scholarship which addresses the role of the domestic home in shoring up colonial ideology, both in the colonial encounter and back 'home' in the European metropole (see, for example, McClintock 1995; Blunt 2005; Mills 2005).

In her work on gender in colonial spaces, Sara Mills (2003) maps the ideology of colonial power relations onto the design of the colonial city itself. Mills discusses how their layout, with distinct areas for Europeans separate from those for natives,

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of 'preservation' to her study of the domestic practices of West African migrant mothers in the UK.

correlated to prescribed ideals of race relations within the colony at large. She explains that, 'although architectural space does not determine social relations, it may attempt to set out parameters within which certain types of relations may be negotiated' (705). In colonial cities, these parameters were set to limit the 'contact zone' between coloniser and colonised, however unrealised this separation may have been (706). As Mills points out, this contact zone most commonly occurred within the European colonial home itself in the interaction between colonial expatriates and their 'native' servants, thereby limiting colonizer-colonized social relations to those of master and servant. As Anne McClintock (1995) argues, this domestic space of contact became central to maintaining cultural superiority over 'native' populations (discussed in more detail in Chapter 6).

Through her analysis of Anglo-Indian domestic conduct books, Rosemary Marangoly George (1999) shows how the so-called 'private' work of 'keeping home' in India served the very public mission of imperialism. She argues that the figure of the memsahib and the home she ruled over were cultivated as strategic marks of British middle-class values set against the perceived degeneracy of natives. In an interesting twist on de Beauvoir's argument, George asserts that 'the colonial occupation of the Indian sub-continent established one of the primary arenas in which English women first achieved the kind of authoritative self associated with the modern female subject' (*ibid*, 36). Though housework in the metropole was not seen as productive because it was unpaid:

> The English woman in the Indian empire […] was not merely decorating house and self but managing "base camp." In this context, the work done by English women even when it was what had hitherto been defined as 'house-keeping,' is recognized as valuable labour. (41)

Thus, paradoxically, in the guise of the British memsahib, it was precisely through the so-called 'imminent' practices of home-making that women became subjects in their own right. What George's analysis here brings to light is that movements and cultural relocations have the potential of transforming home-making from an endeavour that is wholly embedded in discourses of the 'private' to one that has value in the politically

charged sphere of the 'public'. Furthermore, that this transformation causes a re-alignment of gender power structures when put in the context of other hierarchies of race, culture, and/or religion. I will elaborate upon both of these points throughout the main chapters of this thesis.

This alignment of the authoritative female subject with the colonial mission produces a hegemonic form of domesticity that is further clarified through an example from Salman Rushdie's novel *Midnight's Children* (1995). The 'curious bargain' that the Sinai family enters into with the 'departing Englishman' William Methwold on the eve of independence is key to understanding Rushdie's conceptualisation of colonial power in the novel (124). In order to get Methwold's 'conquerors' houses' at a fraction of their worth, the family must contend with the condition that none of the contents be removed until the transfer of power (125). Though they struggle at first with having to live 'like the Britishers' and, to use Young's language, without the ability to fill the home with their own family narratives ('…And pictures of an old Englishwomen everywhere, baba! No place to hang my own father's photo on the wall!...') (127), they eventually adapt to this received form of domesticity:

> …But now there are twenty days to go, things are settling down, the
> sharp edges of things are getting blurred, so they have all failed to notice
> what is happening: the Estate, Methwold's estate, is changing them.
> Every evening at six they are out in their gardens, celebrating the
> cocktail hour, and when William Methwold comes to call they slip into
> their Oxford drawls; and they are learning, about ceiling fans and gas
> cookers and the correct diets for budgerigars, and Methwold, supervising
> their transformation, is mumbling under his breath. Listen carefully:
> what's he saying? Yes that's it. 'Sabkuch ticktock hai,' mumbles
> William Methwold. All is well. (131)

In this example, the prohibition on 'making home' causes the Sinai family to become unknowing victims of colonial power. As Sarah Upstone (2007) argues, the Sinai home can be read as a microcosm for the colony. While the images of memsahibs watch over the household, their power as the bearers of British domestic values extends long after independence. So, not only does the private extend into the public through the upkeep

of the home of the European expatriate, the public here uncannily transforms the native home into a site of colonial power.

In addition to these deployments of domesticity as a tool for maintaining colonial power, many scholars draw attention to the ways in which the importation of the European separate spheres model had dire consequences for gender relations in the colonies and in the nations formed in their wake. For example, Partha Chatterjee's now famous essay 'The Nationalist Resolution of the Women Question' (1989), discusses how Victorian values of public/private separation were recycled in Indian nationalist rhetoric to produce an idealised image of the Indian housewife as maintainer of cultural tradition in the home. In Chapter 8, I unpack the relationship between the adoption of such values and Orientalist imagery of the Eastern harem as a frame for my analysis of Leila Aboulela's novel *The Translator*. In the British Caribbean, such values came to bear on the post-emancipation principles of 'respectability', the ramifications of which I take up in relation to Andrea Levy's *Small Island* in Chapter 6. Others emphasize the disruptive effects of the public/private division in sub-Saharan Africa, where traditional patriarchal structures, which would normally have been ameliorated by women's participation in political and economic activities, intensified when the imposition of Victorian missionary values consigned them to the space of the home (Katrak 1987; Andrade 2011). This process and its implications for African feminism form the backdrop of my discussion of Buchi Emecheta's fiction in Chapter 4.

In drawing attention to these colonial processes which made very real interventions into the private spaces of those living in the parts of the world touched by European imperialism within a thesis about migration fiction, I am making explicit the link between the discursive tactics of colonialism and contemporary debates which circulate in European spaces around the issue of immigration and its associated terms 'integration', 'assimilation' and 'multiculturalism'. As Paul Gilroy argues in *After Empire* (2004):

> The postcolonial rereading of literary texts, works of art, and other objects of docile cultural history has, for the most part, not been able to find its way back to the disreputable, angry places where the political interest of racialised minorities might be identified and worked upon without being encumbered by an affected liberal innocence, on the one hand, or by the conservative spell of ethnic absolutism, on the other (2004, 18–19)

Here, Gilroy cites a general inability to bridge the gap between the discursive, 'cultural' work of postcolonial studies and the highly charged 'political' issues that stem from intercultural contact in contemporary European spaces. By tracing a line between the material and discursive interventions into 'home' within the colonial encounter and the representations of cross-cultural home-making by and about those who migrate from territories shaped by this history, this thesis aims to go some way to answer Gilroy's challenge. By reading fictional deployments of the home and its gendered practices against both the historical context of European colonialism and contemporary debates around im/migration, we can shed new light on fiction's role in mediating between the 'private' and the 'political'.

In the next section, I will set out the way that media discourses and political policies have framed the charged relationship between home and migration. This will then lead into a discussion of the body of migration theory that I will be drawing on in my analysis of the migration narratives in the rest of this thesis.

HOMES IN THE METROPOLE

> Jamaica people colonizin
> Englan in reverse.
> By de hundred, by de tousan
> From country and from town,
> By de ship-load, by de plane-load
> Jamaica is Englan boun.
> > – Louise Bennett-Coverley, 'Colonisation in Reverse' (1966)

During the European colonial period, as I have begun to show, the importation and maintenance of norms of domesticity became part of a discursive system that functioned to make the occupation of land appear natural and to mask the violence of obtaining and retaining power over colonial space. While the power dynamics behind immigration to

the erstwhile metropole mean it could never actually amount to a 'colonisation in reverse', it is often constructed as such in xenophobic discourses. Rather than the occupation of territory, however, it is the encroachment upon welfare resources such as healthcare and housing – both associated with the private and the personal – that are of particular concern (Gedalof 2007).

Sarah Gibson (2003) analyses how the asylum system in Britain (now one of the few 'legitimate' ways to immigrate to Europe from outside) is framed by a discourse of hospitality which uses the language of 'guest' and 'host' respectively to denote the relationship between asylum seeker and the country that 'accommodates' him or her. However, she explains that, in comparison to tourists who are seen as less likely to take from their hosts, the asylum seeker is associated with parasitism and therefore does not warrant being offered unconditional hospitality within the home-as-nation. She goes on to say:

> Accommodation offered to strangers can […] commonly mean the literal accommodation (in sense of housing, board, and lodging), but this is haunted by the less benign meaning of accommodation in relation to immigration and asylum in Britain, that of 'adaptation' (assimilation) and 'containment' of these others. (*ibid*, 373)

Gibson's analysis here makes an important link between the physical housing of immigrants and asylum seekers within European spaces and the expectation that, in exchange, they will make every effort to 'accommodate' themselves to the culture and values of the nation where they now live. While many of the recent policies surrounding immigration and asylum-seeking have on the surface been directed at solving the problem of 'accommodation' in the first definition above, on deeper scrutiny, it is clear

that they are largely about the second ('adaptation') and third ('containment').[2] What this analysis shows is that debates about the housing of immigrants and asylum seekers are actually masking politically charged debates about home – i.e. who is at home and who is not at home within the space of the European nation.

If we return to Sara Mills's analysis (2003) of colonial town planning, we can also see similar principles at work in the way metropolitan cities like London and Paris 'accommodate' immigrants and their descendants. While the ethnic segregation within European cities today cannot be understood in exactly the same terms as that of colonial cities, as it results from a complicated matrix of discrimination, disadvantage and individual choice (Johnston, Poulsen, and Forrest 2007), there are some parallels to be drawn. In the case of Paris, Ossman and Terrio (2006) discuss the historical construction of the *banlieue* as a 'liminal space associated with social marginality, uncontrolled movement, and spatialized poverty' (7). The authors draw parallels between French urban planning in the colonies and the 'accommodation' of racial others on the outskirts of French cities in 1960s as a way to 'clean up' the city centres of immigrant 'shanty-towns' (8). For Ossman and Terrio, the process of dividing up French cities into centre and periphery is a way of 'mapping out social differences on a plan and imposing the plan on a territory' (8), a practice not unlike the ideological principles behind the structuring of space in the colonies.

What Ossman and Terrio allude to throughout their analysis is the way in which popular spatial associations are also mapped onto the individuals who inhabit those spaces. In this case, the liminality of the *banlieue* with its historical and media

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[2] For example, The 1993 Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act included the construction of purpose-built detention centers to control the movement of new arrivals and the 1999 Act restricted access to social housing and child benefit (Gibson 2003, 370), both of which can be interpreted as measures of 'containment.' Further legislation has led to the dispersal of new arrivals around the country. Though this policy has been framed as a means to offset localised drains on housing resources, it is also intended to limit the effects of high concentrations of 'difference' on local populations, which is associated with fears surrounding immigrants' lack of assimilation (Mynott 2002; Gedalof 2007).

associations of poverty and degeneracy becomes synonymous with the figure of the 'immigrant' or the 'ethnic minority' in France (see also Derderian 2004). We see this intertwining of space and individual played out in Mathieu Kassovitz's film *La Haine* (1996), which follows the life of three residents of the Paris *banlieue* with different ethnic and religious backgrounds. As one critic has pointed out, when Vinz, a character of Jewish descent, states that he doesn't want to be another Arab killed in a police station, his 'honorary' Arab status stems from a movement from biological to cultural forms of racism (Siciliano 2007, 220). However, this 'cultural racism' can only be mapped onto Vinz through his residential proximity to those already marked as racially undesirable.

In Britain, this spatial association is similarly embodied in the image of the council estate, which is often also equated with immigrant 'parasitism' of social welfare. One only needs to read Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* (2004) to get a sense of the discursive spatial division between the economically stagnant Tower Hamlets estate and the hyper-productivity of the office buildings of the City of London so near by. However, while the space of the *banlieue* tends to get constructed as 'outside' and liminal, the council estate can also be read as a kind of 'inside' that is both protective and resistant to strangers. I further interrogate this formulation in Chapter 5 through an analysis of the way Monica Ali's novel constructs both the domestic workings of the protagonist's council flat and the ethnic boundary-drawing of the surrounding community.

If we move down the scale from the accommodation of im/migrants within the European city space to the domestic space itself, we also find a barrage of xenophobic discourses that draw, implicitly or explicitly, on colonialist tropes of pollution, miscegenation and moral degradation. James Procter (2003) and Wendy Webster (1998) have both done extensive work on the non-literary discourses surrounding immigrant domestic spaces and practices in post-war Britain. In his analysis of sociological and

ethnographic studies of West Indian communities in 1960s Britain,[3] Procter identifies

several recurring tropes in descriptions of immigrant homes. He argues that the

domestic façade became 'the site at which to diagnose and make sense of the new

immigrant communities' (2003, 21–22), such that physical dilapidation on the outside

of immigrant houses, marked by the presence of garbage, fading paint and cracked

wood, were read as evidence of the moral dilapidation of their racialised inhabitants

(*ibid*, 23). Furthermore, he contends that such mythologised 'composite images' of

immigrant homes came to be viewed as *representative* of the black dwelling place at the

time (*ibid*). Despite the fact that many of these houses were in disrepair before the

arrival of their immigrant inhabitants and that it was precisely the racism of British

landlords which forced new arrivals to settle in such run-down areas, these signs of

dilapidation were repeatedly presented as *symptoms* of black settlement rather than pre-

existing problems (*ibid*, 24).

Procter identifies the apparent contamination between the so-called 'separate

spheres' in British West Indian communities as a particular source of anxiety in the

studies he analyses. He notes a recurrent preoccupation in descriptions of immigrant

dwelling places with the 'convergence and disturbance of the boundaries between

private, domestic space and the public/political realm beyond them' (*ibid*, 29).

According to Procter, the West Indian shebeen,[4] with its unorthodox use of domestic

space, emerges as a particular site of moral condemnation and social anxiety (*ibid*, 30).

We see in Procter's analysis here a redeployment of the association between the

domestic and the reproductive, as he argues that these transgressive interior spaces were

seen as facilitating sexual permissiveness, miscegenation and contributing to an over

'fecundity' among immigrant communities by allowing an 'unnatural' invasion of the

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[3] Procter draws most of his examples from Ruth Glass's *Newcomers* (1960) and Sheila
Patterson's *Dark Strangers* (1963), in addition to further references to assorted
newspaper accounts and political speeches.
[4] Procter defines shebeens as unauthorised places for drinking, dancing and gambling
that were generally found in residential areas, and draws inspiration from Paul
Gilroy's discussion of these spaces in *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack* (2002).

private by the public. Such discourses contributed to an imagining of the immigrant domestic space as not only disturbing the rational separation between public and private but also threatening to the very fabric of the British nation itself.

For her part, Wendy Webster (1998) produces a more gender-sensitive analysis of such anxieties,[5] making an explicit link between such negative portrayals of West Indian homes in the post-war years and discourses circulating about black women at the time.[6] She reminds us that women were recruited from the Caribbean alongside men, a point which Procter largely ignores throughout his analysis. Webster draws on the work of black British feminist Hazel Carby (1997), who launched a vehement critique against (white) feminism's disavowal of motherhood (as in de Beauvoir's critique above). Carby draws attention to the uneven valuation of black and white family life by the welfare state:

> Rather than a concern to protect or preserve the black family in Britain, the state reproduced common-sense notions of its inherent pathology: black women were seen to fail as mothers precisely because of their position as workers. (49)

Webster further unpacks this discursive double-bind, arguing that national(ist) anxieties over miscegenation and (non-white) overpopulation combined with exclusionary social and economic policies to make it very difficult for black women to look after their children without resorting to various kinds of foster care. Then, these apparent domestic failings, which stemmed largely from such attitudes and policies, were fed back into racist discourses that deemed black women unfit for roles as wives and mothers

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[5] While providing an intriguing commentary on the racialised disturbance of these boundaries, Procter mobilises the terms 'public' and 'private' in a fairly unproblematised way without accounting for their contested gendered histories. I elaborate more on the lack of attention to gender in Procter's analysis of the domestic in the next chapter.

[6] As Carby (1997) and hooks (1982) both point out, we can find a clear link between such discourses and colonial images of enslaved black women as over-sexualised and lacking in the 'gentle' qualities associated with (white) womanhood, qualities which were seen as fundamental to being a good wife and mother. As in Webster's analysis of black women in Britain, the material conditions which prevented black women from having full access to domestic roles in the colonies (except as workers looking after white children) then served as a means to reinforce their supposed unsuitability for such roles.

(thereby reinforcing their position as workers). I elaborate more on this issue with reference to Buchi Emecheta's novel *Second-Class Citizen* in Chapter 4, but what is key for my purposes here, is that both Webster and Procter draw attention to the dialogic relationship between discursive representations of immigrant homes and public (mis)conceptions about those who live within their walls. With these examples, along with my discussion of the 'accommodation' of immigrants within Paris and London above, we can see how the homes of immigrants are made into mythological spaces by xenophobic discourses and policies and, in turn, how this mythology has the potential to define and construct the immigrants who inhabit them.

AT HOME IN DIASPORA THEORY?

Up to this point, I have largely been using the word 'immigrant' to refer to migrated peoples. Due to its use in government policy and in an older (though continuing in some sectors) body of sociological scholarship, this has been the most appropriate term to use in the previous section (as Procter does in his analysis), though it begs unpacking a bit more at this point before I move on to discussing its possible alternatives. Though technically only applicable to individuals who have physically done the migrating themselves, 'immigrant' is 'sticky' and, in many cases, continues to apply to descendants of those who came from elsewhere but are nevertheless citizens of the European country in question.[7] For example, constructions such as 'immigrant community' often embody a combination of those who have recently arrived, those who have lived in the country for decades, and those born in the so-called 'host country.' Furthermore, media accounts of government initiatives to do with integration and/or assimilation, which often also apply to second and third generation 'migrants,' often become intertwined with discussions of 'immigration policy', making it a category that appears difficult to escape from. Furthermore, in racist and xenophobic discourses, 'immigrant' and its twin 'foreigner' have come to apply to any group that is in some

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[7] See Sarah Ahmed (2004) for her analysis of the 'sticky' associations between certain signs, figures, and objects in recent political rhetoric on migration.

way constructed as 'other,' regardless of how many generations may have passed since arrival.

In order to distance scholarship on migration from the sticky generalisations of 'immigrant,' another term was needed and a counter-discourse created. The term 'ethnic minority' or simply 'minority' has been deployed in various contexts,[8] but this too has its issues. As Avtar Brah (1996) articulates, 'the numerical referent of this dichotomy [between majority and minority] encourages a literal reading, reducing the problem of power relations to one of numbers, with the result that the repeated circulation of the discourse has the effect of naturalizing rather than challenging the power differential' (1996, 187). Also, the use of 'minority' as a shorthand for groups who lack power does not account for minority populations who hold positions of authority, such as in apartheid South Africa, nor does it adequately address fictitious 'minorities', such as women. Furthermore, 'minority discourse' is seen as an incomplete mode of identification because it strips such communities of their historical contexts (Brah 1996).

As a way out of/beyond these terms which have so many problematic associations, scholars and critics who deal with migration have in recent years been rallying around 'diaspora' as a viable alternative. Communities and scholars that embrace diaspora discourse do so because it allows for a more open form of identification that makes histories of movement central to group identity. Furthermore, unlike minority discourse which presupposes a 'majority' that it is relative to, 'diaspora' has the potential to operate outside the confines of the nation-state, allowing for solidarity among communities in different geographic locations. When multiple geographic spaces are taken into consideration, the minority/majority binary begins to break down. As Clifford articulates, 'Diaspora discourse articulates, or blends together,

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[8] James Clifford (1997) makes a distinction between the theorisation of 'minority' as a resistance practice within the U.S. academy ('minority discourse'), and its use in Britain as an official discourse, such as in the common political construction Black Minority Ethnic (BME) (364, f.n. 7).

both roots *and* routes to construct […] alternative public spheres, forms of community consciousness and solidarity that maintain identifications outside the national time/space in order to live inside, with a difference' (1997, 251).

Diasporic identifications are seen as less problematic than those of 'race' and 'ethnicity' because they do not rely on pseudo-scientific (and colonialist) notions of biological difference, of 'culture coded in the body' (Anthias 1998, 558). This is why, for example, Paul Gilroy's trope of the 'black Atlantic' has become a well-established alternative to other articulations of collectivity, such as those framed by a potentially essentialist and exclusionary pan-Africanism (Gilroy 1993). However, 'diaspora', in Gilroy's mobilisation in particular, still relies on a kind of origin myth which is seen to bind together all those in a particular 'diasporic community'. As Floya Anthias articulates, 'the concept of diaspora, whilst focusing on transnational processes and commonalities, does so by deploying a notion of ethnicity which privileges the point of "origin" in constructing identity and solidarity' (1998, 558). Although there is a strong preoccupation with the concept of 'home' within diaspora theories and discourses, because of this orientation towards a geographically removed place of origin, this 'home' is most often an elsewhere, rather than the place of (re)settlement. By positioning the 'true' home as separated by space and time, there is a tendency in scholarly deployments of diaspora to privilege tropes of displacement and dislocation over of those of placement and location. As James Procter argues:

> Travelling rhetorics [such as those deployed by Clifford] tend to
> underplay the extent to which diaspora is also an issue of *settlement* and
> a constant battle over territories: over housing and accommodation, over
> the right to occupy a neighbourhood, over the right to 'stay put'. […] A
> deconstruction of the concept 'diaspora' provides a means of returning to
> the politics of place, location and territory within diaspora literature – a
> politics that too often gets endlessly deferred. (2003, 14)

Despite Clifford's assertions that 'Diaspora […] involves dwelling, maintaining communities, having collective homes away from home' (1997, 251), his conception of diaspora as a blend of 'routes' and 'roots' actually does not leave room for these so

called 'homes away from home'. Because 'routes' refers to travel and 'roots' to the point of origin, the only 'dwelling' in Clifford's concept of diaspora is actually the one left behind. Put another way, the roots/routes construction requires a third term to indicate the process of re-rooting which is a necessary part of dispersal, however fraught and difficult this process might be.

Moreover, if we are to take Clifford at his word, the 'home' he invokes is not the domestic, private space of the house but rather an 'imagined community' of 'dispersed networks of peoples who share a common history of experiences of dispossession, displacement, adaptation' (Anderson 2006; Clifford 1997, 253). It is very much a carving out of home within the 'public' spaces of nation and trans-nation. This lack of attention to the domestic can be understood as a symptom of a general lack of attention to gender specificity in theorisations of diaspora.[9] For example, there is no attempt within Clifford's analysis to discern how women's experiences of dwelling within diaspora networks might be very different from that of men's. Likewise, criticising Paul Gilroy for not giving women any agency within his conceptualisation of the black diaspora, Floya Anthias asks, 'how central are women to the ethnic projects of diaspora groups?' (1998, 571). One way of 'gendering' diaspora scholarship is to focus on women's role in the creation of the 'home away from home.' However, this also has some problematic resonances. As Anthias articulates, women tend to be positioned as 'transmitters and reproducers' of culture, and are often called upon to do this work more vigorously when ethnic or national ideologies are perceived to be under threat (Anthias 1998, 571; see also Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1989; Yuval-Davis 1997). Living in diaspora is one such context where 'traditional' cultural practices can harden in the midst of a potentially hostile host country, and women bear the brunt of this 'cultural burden'. This is a worrying situation if we look at it through Gillian Rose's analysis of

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[9] However, we do see a healthy attention to gender in specific historical/sociological (Blunt 2005; Hussain 2005; Gourdine 2002) and literary (Nasta 2002; Mehta 2009) studies which use diaspora as an organising principle.

home/place-as-woman: if creating strong diasporic communities is dependent on women's maintenance of traditions from a definable home-land, then that makes them responsible not only for being 'home' to their own families, but to the transnational community at large.

At the same time, however, media representations and political policies in the host country that repeatedly mourn the plight of isolated and oppressed female im/migrants also feed into a process of 'traditionalising' (certain) women, positioning them as representative evidence of an entire ethnic or religious group's failure to integrate and/or assimilate. However, also bearing in mind Iris Marion Young's concept of 'preservation' discussed above, 'reproduction' and 'maintenance' should not be understood as processes of sameness. For example, Floya Anthias mentions that women may become empowered by retaining and passing on home traditions, but that they also may abandon them when they are not useful as strategies of survival (1998, 571), though she does not elaborate on this point. Providing some empirical backing for such an assertion, Irene Gedalof (2009) has argued from her work with first-generation Sierra Leonean female migrants, that the process of transmitting cultural values and practices involves an 'intertwining of repetition and innovation,' such that 'reproduction' always entails an element of 'production' (*ibid,* 86, 90). Basing her conclusions on the daily material practices described by these migrant mothers, she argues that this process is not simply about repeating fixed cultural traditions but involves 'actively negotiating difference' (*ibid*, 87).

One theorist who has developed a conceptualisation of diaspora which attempts to redress the privileging of movement over location while also accounting for gender in a way that does not fix women in prescribed roles is Avtar Brah (1996). In particular, her concept of 'diaspora space' is of key importance and will serve as the basis for my deployment of the term diaspora throughout the rest of this thesis. In her re-framing of diaspora, Brah draws on the work of Adrienne Rich (2003) in calling for 'a politics of

location' over one purely shaped by dislocation. However, this location is not a static rooting but, rather, is reminiscent of Doreen Massey's 'progressive sense of place' in that it is about looking at the intersections of different local and global subjectivities that are in constant flux within a given material space. In arguing that diasporas are spaces marked by both 'confluence' and 'differentiation' (1996, 183–84), Brah accounts for differences of gender, sexuality and class as well as the different ethnic and religious identifications that both shape and continually reconstitute any given diaspora (and encounters between different diasporas). She also draws attention to what she describes as 'the intertwining of genealogies of dispersion with those of "staying put"' within a given diaspora space, problematizing the binary between native and foreigner (*ibid,* 209). Furthermore, Brah's concept of diaspora space makes explicit the importance of settling in the process of diaspora identifications, drawing attention to the material conditions that diasporic subjects face when attempting to make 'homes away from home'. In so doing, Brah moves beyond the notion of home as a 'mythic place of desire', asserting that:

> home is also the lived experience of a locality. Its sounds smells, its heat and dust, balmy summer evenings, or the excitement of the first snowfall, shivering winter evenings, sombre grey skies in the middle of the day…all this, as mediated by *the historically specific everyday of social relations*. (*ibid*, 192, emphasis added)

'The question of home', she goes on to say, 'is intrinsically linked with the way in which processes of inclusion or exclusion operate and are subjectively experienced under given circumstances. It is centrally about our political and personal struggles over the social regulation of "belonging"' (*ibid*).

Here, through Brah's (re)conceptualisation of home in diaspora, we are returned to the private and the everyday as important for constituting belonging within larger, more explicitly 'political' (diaspora) spaces. If the work of cultural transmission by diasporic women can be re-framed as a process that involves as much production as reproduction and as much negotiation of cultural traditions as maintenance of them,

then the activities of making home that go on in the so-called private sphere are not unlike those that occur in the public realm. The homes of migrants and their descendants are therefore part of the 'diaspora space' and the work that goes on there is tied to the same struggles of belonging 'with a difference' that occur in the larger spaces of local community and nation. It is with this in mind that I want to move on in the next chapter to a discussion of the body of literary and critical work that has frequently drawn on and contributes to this body of scholarly discourse on diaspora.

3. HOMING IN ON MIGRATION FICTION

THE HOUSE IN/OF FICTION

In the previous chapter, I have attempted to establish the primary theoretical, historical and political contexts that will feed into my conceptualisation of home and the domestic in the migration narratives that I am concerned with in this thesis. However, before I move on to discuss how I situate my study in relation to the existing literary criticism on this body of fiction, it is important to first say a few words about the centrality of house and home within the English literary canon, particularly in the development of the novel form.

In their article 'Reading the House: A Literary Perspective', Kathy Mezei and Chiara Briganti argue that 'the house – and architecture – have served as foundational, powerful, and recurring analogues throughout the history of literary interpretation', citing key critical formulations such as Walter Pater's 'literary architecture', Henry James's 'house of fiction', Edith Wharton's 'house of mirth', as well as Bachelard's 'poetics of space', already discussed (2002, 837–38). The authors go on to trace the interconnection between the rise of the novel and the rise of 'the great age of the English house', citing Philippa Tristram, who argues that novels 'can tell us much about the space we live in' and that, conversely, 'designs for houses and their furnishings can reveal hidden aspects of the novelist's art' (1989, 2). 'It is no accident,' she says, 'that many of the terms used in critical discourse – structure, aspect, outlook, even character – are related to domestic architecture' (*ibid*). To these analogous characteristics Mezie and Briganti add other literary/architectural crossings such as 'content(s)', 'threshold', 'entry point', 'style' and 'perspective', among others (2002, 838).

Going beyond a merely analogous relationship between the house and the novel, Nancy Armstrong has explored the novel's role in mediating the historical development of the discursive complementarity of private and public spheres. In *Desire and Domestic Fiction* (1987), Armstrong provides an alternative literary history, tracing the

origin of the British realist novel not to the adventure genre of Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, as is commonly done, but to eighteenth century domestic conduct manuals and their literary progeny, the domestic novel. Citing Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* as a key transitional work between the two forms, Armstrong makes an explicit connection between the rise of the novel and the rise of the middle-class domestic woman. According to Armstrong's analysis, middle-class values rooted in the codes and manners of domestic life actually circulated in fiction before a true middle-class existed in fact. In Armstrong's estimation, it is precisely the domestic novel which 'helped to formulate the ordered space we now recognize as the household, made that space totally functional, and used it as the context for representing normal behaviour' (*ibid,* 23-4). She even goes so far as to assert that it is due to the circulation of these norms in novel form that the middle-class as we know it came into being. I explore the specifics of Armstrong's argument and its implications for women in greater detail later in this thesis, but what is important to draw out here is that Armstrong's analysis has shown us that by paying closer attention to those aspects of fictional works which appear to be wholly concerned with the personal and the domestic, we can often gain a greater understanding of their engagement with and intervention in that which we generally associate with the public, political realm of social life.

However, as in the deployment of the metaphor between the house and the self discussed above, we must be careful of over-romanticising the house's place within a universally implied, though Eurocentrically rendered conception of literary history. Though Armstrong's analysis makes an important intervention into male-dominated genealogies of the history of the novel, her conclusions are drawn on the basis of European conceptions of literary tradition and domestic womanhood, without accounting for imperialism's role in codifying both. While Armstrong produces a convincing argument for the dialogic relationship between the rise of the domestic woman/novel and the middle-class's struggle to define and police its boundaries, she

makes no reference to the simultaneous dialogue taking place between the values associated with this new woman/novel and the discourse of colonialism, itself engaged in a process of defining and policing the boundaries of Europeanness.

These gaps and silences in Armstrong's account of the history of the novel come to engender an idea of the middle-class British household which, though conscious of its embattled ground between the aristocracy above and the working-class below, is completely ignorant of the debt owed to the colonial encounter. In *Culture and Imperialism* (1994), Edward Said attempts to redress this silence through his analysis of Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*. In an apt comparison, Said contends that 'the empire functions for much of the European nineteenth century as a codified, if only marginally visible presence in fiction, very much like the servants in grand households and in novels, whose work is taken for granted but scarcely ever more than named, rarely studied' (1994, 63). Through his interrogation of Austen's novel, Said argues that it is precisely because of this clandestine presence of empire that the sense of domestic order attributed to these novels becomes possible. He writes:

> More clearly than anywhere else in her fiction, Austen here synchronises domestic with international authority, making it plain that the values associated with such higher things as ordination, law and propriety must be grounded firmly in actual rule over and possession of territory. She sees that to hold and rule Mansfield Park is to hold and rule an imperial estate in close, not to say inevitable association with it. What assures the domestic tranquillity and attractive harmony of one is the productivity and regulated discipline of the other (*ibid,* 87).

Bearing Said's point here in mind, we could interpret a novel like Caryl Phillips's *Cambridge* (1991) as a kind of 'contrapuntal reading' (to use Said's term) of domestic novels like *Mansfield Park*. In Phillips's version, the regulation and continued profitability of colonial investments required to sustain the Cartwright's home in Britain

are brought to the centre of the narrative,[10] as is empire's role in the subjective development of the novel's female protagonist, Emily. In so doing, Phillips reverses the paradigm found in the nineteenth century novelistic tradition, which positions 'England – socially, politically, morally charted and differentiated in immensely fine detail – at the centre' and 'a series of overseas territories connected to it at the peripheries', resisting the Eurocentric notion that '(following the general principles of free trade) outlying territories are available for use, at will, at the novelist's discretion' (Said 1994, 74).

Since Said's now famous critique, there has been an increasing awareness in the literary world that the celebrated 'home' of British fiction has been built by virtue of its oppositional relationship with a correspondingly uncivilised and uncultured imagined colonial space, and the migration novels I discuss in the body of this thesis have all been formed in the crucible of this binary. In his essay, 'The World and the Home' (1992), Homi Bhabha suggests critics must acknowledge and embrace the presence of 'unhomely' texts in the 'house of fiction' as a way of resisting imperialising frameworks. Deploying a comparison that chimes with the concerns of this thesis in that it forges a discursive link between migration and the porous nature of the boundary between public and private, Bhabha explains that:

> In the stirrings of the unhomely, another world becomes visible. It has less to do with forcible eviction and more to do with the uncanny literary and social effects of enforced social accommodation, or historical migrations and cultural relocations. The home does not remain the domain of domestic life, nor does the world simply become its social or historical counterpart. The unhomely is the shock of recognition of the world-in-the home, the home-in-the-world. (141)

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[10] There is a useful parallel to be made here between the stately British home's dependence upon the continued wealth of the colonial plantation, laid bare in Phillips's novel and in Said's reading of Austen, and the relationship between conquered colonial territory and the British nation itself, as it is precisely due to resources (both human and material) plucked from the empire that Britain's true entrance into Enlightened and industrial modernity (with its associated properties of order and progress) became possible.

The works covered in this thesis are double-edged examples of such unhomely texts. Not only do they represent in fictional form the 'historical migrations' and 'cultural relocations' which produce a sense of unhomeliness for British 'mainstream' society, they also inhabit British literary forms with alternative and resistant cultural modes, with varying degrees of self-consciousness about their place within this troubled literary history. The descriptions of homes and domestic mores contained in these works bear the ghostly echoes of these nineteenth century domestic novels but, at the same time, their representations of 'other' domestic spaces within a British literary and national context adds new layers to this novelistic inheritance. Furthermore, as I will later explore in Chapter 8 in particular, 'playing' with such inherited forms can become a way of undercutting the destructive binaries produced by the body of textual and discursive production from this period in British history.

MIGRATORY JOURNEYS

In order to focus my discussion of the body of literary scholarship within which I situate this thesis, I first want to establish what I mean by 'migration fiction'. There is now a large body of critical work on what many have termed 'diasporic fiction', which deals with contemporary literary works in European languages produced by writers who are in some way marked by migration and who are (usually) resident in Western nations. This term has been used to refer to both a subset of works within and as an alternative to the large and now cumbersome category of 'postcolonial literature'. While there is a significant overlap in texts between diasporic fiction/literature and what I am calling migration fiction,[11] I deploy my term as a kind of genre or sub-genre within the larger body of diasporic literature, including only those works of fiction that specifically deal

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[11] As far as I am aware, no one else uses this particular formulation, at least not as an organising principle for selecting and analysing works in a comparative study. The term 'immigrant fiction' has been used in some places, such as in the title of a special issue put out by the *Journal of Contemporary Literature* (Walkowitz 2007), within which it is interpreted quite broadly (including, for example, the migration of books through transnational publishing networks), and in Rosemary Marangoly George's analysis, which I discuss below.

with the migratory process. In the same way that diasporic fiction need not necessarily contain postcolonial themes or concerns, migration narratives do not necessarily have to involve movement from colony to metropole. However, because this thesis is concerned with the relationship between domestic representations and the discursive processes of (largely British) colonialism, all of the novels I have chosen to analyse engage with postcoloniality as a primary concern.

By 'migratory process', I am referring to particular plot markers which recur in fiction of this kind, to the point that they have now become tropes in and of themselves. In the epigraph to her novel *Anita and Me*, Meera Syal mocks the now recognizable plot of such migration stories. This plot trajectory begins with a difficult departure from the home-country (necessarily implied, if not actually narrated) and then comes the arrival of 'bewildered' new immigrants

> blinking back tears of gratitude and heartbreak as the fog cleared to
> reveal the sign they had all been waiting for, dreaming of […]
> WELCOME TO BRITAIN. And then there's the early years of struggle
> and disillusion, living in a shabby boarding houseroom with another
> newly arrived immigrant family, Polish […]. (Syal 1996, 9)

The speaker here admits that this is an 'alternative history' which she 'trot[s] out in job interview situations or, once or twice, to impress middleclass white boys who come sniffing round, excited by the thought of wearing a colonial maiden as a trinket on their arm'. However, she justifies her 'lies' by arguing that 'those of us deprived of history sometimes need to turn to mythology to feel complete, to belong' (*ibid*, 9-10).

This familiar narrative of departure, arrival and settling, each fraught with difficulties and conflicting emotions of loss and gain have come to signify the process of migration. Despite the fact that many migrations are non-linear, often involving multiple arrivals and departures, and sometimes a return, and that many who write this narrative have not actually migrated themselves, it becomes a mythology that belongs to those marked by geographical movement and one that they can do with as they please, as Syal's narrator does. The writers I discuss in this thesis do different things with this

narrative, some sticking to its linear chronology, while others abandon it altogether. However, it is always there in the background, a kind of skeletal structure which any story of migration must somehow address. Buchi Emecheta's novel *Second-Class Citizen*, for example, sticks closely to the conventions of the form, moving from her female protagonist's maritime arrival, complete with descriptions of the uninviting British weather (paralleling the uninviting British people), to her time in an immigrant boarding house and the difficulty in finding better lodging due to the racism of landlords. By contrast, though Andrea Levy's *Small Island* contains all of Syal's stock elements, Levy rearranges them in non-linear form, adding multiple departures and arrivals, toying with her readers' historical knowledge of the archetypal dawn of mass migration to Britain – the arrival of the *Empire Windrush*. In Levy's version, it is not only her 'migrant' characters who do the migrating, but their British counterparts also engage in their own migratory journeys – Queenie to Yorkshire to her parents' farm during the war and Bernard to India and Burma with army – complicating the 'migrant' label even more.

Rosemary Marangoly George (1999) makes a similar argument for a genre classification for this kind of fiction, deploying the term 'immigrant genre' and including under its banner such works as Bharata Mukherjee's *Wife*, Buchi Emecheta's *Second-Class Citizen*, Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses* and Sam Selvon's *Lonely Londoners*. However, she maps this category using different terms than I do here, defining the genre by its 'political and ideological contents rather than by formal attributes' (171). She describes this 'immigrant genre' as contemporary literary writing 'in which the politics and experience of location (or rather of "dislocation") are the central narratives', not specifying whether the migratory process is actually narrated in the work itself (*ibid*). While she does not address her formulation's relationship to 'diasporic fiction', she distinguishes the genre from 'postcolonial literature', while

emphasising that the works contained in it do participate in 'decolonizing discourses' (*ibid*).

Where my reading of this category of fiction departs significantly from George's, however, is that George argues that this genre is marked by what she describes as 'a curiously detached reading of the experience of "homelessness"' (*ibid*), titling her chapter on these works of fiction 'Traveling Light' in reference to the absence of emotional or spiritual (and often material) 'baggage' carried by migrating characters in such works. In George's reading of migration, such baggage has the potential to impede the process of belonging to a new place. To this end, she draws special attention to narratives in which characters 'determinedly leave their native land without baggage', such as Annie John's hasty departure in Kincaid's novel of the same name and Oliver's empty-handed arrival in *Lonely Londoners* (*ibid*, 173). She contrasts the 'immigrant genre' with what she calls 'the writing of exile', stating that 'the vicious debilitating injustice of exile […] is missing from the immigrant novel' (*ibid*, 175). She goes on to argue that:

> The sentiment accompanying the absence of home – homesickness – can cut two ways: it could be a yearning for the authentic home (situated in the past or in the future) or it could be the recognition of the inauthenticity of all homes. In the context of the immigrant novel it is the latter that usually prevails. (*ibid*)

While George provides a thought-provoking analysis of the recurrence of this trope of baggage in the novels she discusses (most extensively in M. G. Vassanji's *The Gunny Sack*), I find the application of this reading to the genre as a whole to be too limiting, as it reinforces the tendency to privilege displacement over placement, casting experiences of settlement and home-making out of view. Rather, as I will expand upon below, I would suggest that George's assessment is more applicable to the majority of critical discourse on this body fiction than as a universal characterisation of the works themselves.

In George's reading of what she calls the 'immigrant genre', the home of the nation and the domestic home are both sites of suspicion. George argues that such fiction is marked not only by a 'disregard for national schemes', but her analysis also draws out the ways in which narratives of migration valorise shirking off the 'encumbrances' of domestic objects brought from the place left behind (*ibid*, 173, 175). Furthermore, in the prologue to her book, George explicitly states that she wants to 'read more than the domestic into representations of home', gesturing at the notion that this space and its attendant activities are unimportant as producers of meaning *in themselves* (3). 'Home', in George's reading of the 'immigrant genre', is also always separated from migrated characters by both space and time, while a sense of 'belonging' is mobilised as the only legitimate (and attainable) attachment in the present.

While George does not make explicit reference to it in her text, such a reading bears the echoes of Salman Rushdie's influential essay 'Imaginary Homelands' (1992), in which he famously declares that the 'the past is home, albeit a lost home in a lost city in the mists of lost time' (9). Whether explicitly invoked or not, as I will show, Rushdie's paradigm, itself shaped by postmodern theoretical formulations, has created an enduring 'mythology of migrancy' that as has greatly shaped literary criticism on migrant and diasporic writing (Krishnaswamy 1995). As Krishnaswamy aptly asks, 'Has th[is] mythology of migrancy provided a productive site for postcolonial resistance or has it willy-nilly become complicit with hegemonic postmodern theorizations of power and identity?' (*ibid*, 127-8). Attending to this question is one of the central aims of this thesis, as it seeks to find an alternative way of conceptualising migration which avoids this theoretical conflict of interest. In this section, I do not intend to produce an exhaustive summary of all the critical work on im/migrant and diasporic fiction, but rather, through an exploration of key studies, to unpack some of the ways that Rushdie's conception of home in 'Imaginary Homelands' continues to circulate, and then to map

out how I intend to move beyond this formulation through my analysis in the rest of this thesis.

As mentioned above, one of the key threads running through Rushdie's essay is the idea of temporal and spatial dislocation from 'home', as he begins with the assertion that it is his present that is foreign and his past that is home. Rushdie elaborates on this point by describing his experience of finding that his father's house in Bombay is still there: 'as if we had never gone away to the unmentionable country across the border' and the feeling of continuity that this produces for Rushdie (*ibid*). However, despite this reference to a particular domestic location, the 'home' in Rushdie's essay is more of an amorphous space, inhabited by language, culture and memory. It is a space perhaps not quite as large (or unproblematically bounded) as 'nation' but certainly on a grander scale than 'house'. For Rushdie, accessing this 'home' through the dislocation produced by migration is inevitably to deal with what he calls 'broken mirrors', some of whose fragments, he says, 'have been irretrievably lost' (*ibid*, 10). This, Rushdie suggests, transforms the act of remembering into an act of 'imagining', akin to the process of writing fiction.

Rather than seeing this fragmented relationship with his past as negative, however, Rushdie valorises the sense of dislocation as creatively productive, saying that 'the broken mirror may actually be as valuable as the one which is supposedly unflawed.' He goes on to say that, '[t]he shards of memory [from the mirror] acquired greater status, greater resonance, because they were *remains*' and that 'fragmentation made trivial things seem like symbols, and the mundane acquired numinous qualities' (1992, 11, emphasis in original). While Rushdie's image is extremely powerful, it does raise some questions. Namely, who exactly benefits from investing these 'shards of memory' with symbolic power? And who or what gets excluded? Is there a danger in elevating the 'trivial' and the 'mundane' to the status of symbols? And how might our understanding of migrant/diasporic writing shift if we started to think of 'home' as a

place of location rather than an abstract space of dis-location, always elsewhere in time and space? As is the case in George's analysis, interpreting literary works that deal with migration from within the confines of Rushdie's trope can fix our conception of where exactly 'home' is located in such fictions. By deploying Rushdie's conceptualisation, we sometimes lose sight of the ways in which such narratives engage with home as a place of arrival rather than departure, a contested material space in the present that must be actively negotiated and lived in.

In the more than thirty years since Rushdie's essay, there has been an explosion of literary works that fall into the category of what I am terming 'migration fiction'. This is due in large part to a greater presence of well-established communities of those who have migrated to Western countries from the erstwhile colonial or 'third' world (and their descendants) combined with an increasing thirst by the readership in these countries for fiction that straddles geographic and cultural spaces, mixing the familiar with the 'exotic'.[12] Alongside this increased production of raw material, unsurprisingly, there has been a growing critical interest in such works and their thematic preoccupations. However, as discussed above, this literature is more commonly discussed within larger frames of 'diasporic' or 'postcolonial' fiction.

From my reading of the key studies on this body of fiction, I have sketched out two broad conceptualisations of 'home' which both share similarities with Rushdie's paradigm in 'Imaginary Homelands'.[13] Firstly, there is what I am calling the 'imagining home' approach, which draws most explicitly on Rushdie's ideas in 'Imaginary Homelands'. Critical texts which employ this conceptualisation focus on the ways that fiction (re)constructs the migrant's lost home/land and often make reference to writers'

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[12] See Graham Huggan's *The Postcolonial Exotic* (2001) for a brilliant exploration of the publishing industry's role in this phenomenon.
[13] Of course, one can find exceptions to these (such as Procter's *Dwelling Places* (2003), which I will address later) and cases in which both conceptualisations are at work in a single critical text (such as Nasta's). However, these are the approaches that tend to recur and which appear to carry the most critical weight in terms of citations, appearances on university reading lists, etc.

personal experiences of dislocation and rupture in their analyses. There is a strong attention to memory in this body of scholarship and how it plays out as a rhetorical trope in works of fiction. In this approach, home is framed as historical, akin to Rushdie's 'lost city in lost time' and also separated by space. It is important to note, however, that my assessments are in no way intended to diminish the contributions made by these important critical works, as my own approach builds on these critical formulations as much as it attempts to produce alternative readings.

In the influential critical work on African and African diasporic women's writing, *Black Women, Writing, and Identity: Migrations of the Subject* (1994), Carole Boyce Davies argues that 'home is often a place of exile for the woman, as are, sometimes, community and nation' (22). Extending this idea, Myrian Chancy's *Searching for Safe Spaces* (1997) employs 'exile' as the central trope of dislocation in her analysis of writing by Afro-Caribbean women in the diaspora. In Chancy's reading of the works she discusses, home is also very much directed elsewhere. In Chancy's view (as in Davies's), for women writers in the Caribbean, the feeling of 'home' can only be achieved by leaving the restrictive space of the home-country. As Chancy articulates, 'home was always the place to escape to, not the place where I resided from day to day' (xiv). It is from this home-in-exile (as opposed to exile-in-home) outside the Caribbean (whether Britain, Canada or the US), Chancy suggests, that Afro-Caribbean women are able to confront the gaps and silences of their own histories. In Chancy's view, it is precisely the feelings of alienation produced by racism experienced in their adopted countries that provides Afro-Caribbean women writers with the critical distance necessary to write 'home' as a recuperative process. Although Chancy does not explicitly cite Rushdie, we can see some parallels with his trope of 'imaginary homelands', namely the sense of perpetual spatial and temporal distance from (feelings of) 'home' and a valorisation of the migrant position as creatively productive for imagining, or in this case re-imagining (as a counter-narrative to the imaginings of male

writers), the home-land. In a related critique, Allison Donnell (2006) takes both of these critics (Chancy and Boyce-Davies) to task for an over-reliance on the idea of 'crossings' in their analysis of Caribbean women's writing, stemming, she argues, from the pervasive influence of Paul Gilroy's trope of the Black Atlantic (1993). While Donnell argues for a re-centring of the place of *departure* in Caribbean migration fiction, my aim is to complement her analysis by re-orienting the focus on the location of *arrival*.

Another key study which employs (though with a critical eye) the 'imagining home' approach is Susheila Nasta's *Home Truths* (2002). In this far-reaching work, Nasta builds on Rushdie's premise by tracing representations of 'home', which in this case is the Indian subcontinent (real or imagined), through a number of geographically dispersed writers and texts of the South Asian diaspora. While Nasta asserts that diaspora is 'as much about settlement as displacement' and 'a symbolic longing to create imaginary homelands' (7-8), the book's organising principle necessarily orients the focus on home as an elsewhere which can either be affirmed or denied in the fictions she discusses. In a section entitled 'Imaginary Homelands', Nasta explicitly frames her analysis with the central trope of Rushdie's essay. While she maintains a certain amount of critical distance from the writers she analyses in this part of the book (namely V.S. Naipaul and Rushdie himself), she makes clear the centrality of what she describes as 'the diasporic umbilicus of continually "writing home"' to her interpretation of their works (*ibid*, 9). In reference to Naipaul's novel *The Enigma of Arrival*, for example, Nasta states:

> [H]is work can be seen to represent the enactment of a 'single journey', where the textual spaces created by the writing process itself become a fictional frame, an 'imaginary homeland' built on the fragments of memory and desire that enable the heterogeneous elements of his complex past to be constantly negotiated and refigured. (*ibid*, 131)

In this quotation, we see the echoes of Rushdie's mirror trope – the 'fragments of memory' and the valorisation of the writing process as a recuperative (re)imagining of the lost home.

In the final section of her book, Nasta discusses a younger generation of South Asian diasporic writers for whom, she argues, 'It is no longer possible to create imaginary homelands of the kind inhabited by Rushdie […], for the present is not a foreign country' (2002, 10). However, in her analysis of works by Hanif Kureishi and Ravinder Randhawa, the domestic is presented as a space that must be escaped/rejected in order to carve out more fulfilling 'hybrid' homes in the public spaces of the metropolis. Nevertheless, Nasta asserts that her final analysis is aimed at 'shift[ing] the gaze away from the seemingly narrow and repetitive thematic prescriptions for the migrant of loss, absence or displacement' (*ibid*), so in this way, we share a common theoretical goal. However, we attempt to accomplish this goal through different means, as Nasta does so by bringing home into abstraction, as a fictional place 'within the text itself' (2002, 10). Her final chapter on works by Romesh Gunesekera, Sunetra Gupta and Aamer Hussein presents a reading of home in diasporic fictions that resembles George's, in that the way beyond/out of the constraining 'umbilicus' of (the lost, far-away) home is figured as a rejection of the materiality of home altogether, embracing instead textual journeys into the self. By contrast, I am concerned with re-framing the domestic home as a potentially hybrid space of resistance to the exclusionary processes of both cultural/national 'homes' (i.e. the one left behind in the past and the one migrated to in to present).

The second broad critical framing of literary works that deal with migration is what I am calling the 'imagining London' approach. This body of scholarship is largely concerned with the ways that post-colonial fiction deconstructs the metropolitan centre. While this may not necessarily be London itself or even Britain, as many works look at 'new world' spaces,[14] there is still a similar framing at work in that the organising principle orients on the space migrated to rather than the one migrated from (as it is in Nasta and Chancy). In this approach, home is conceived as of the 'present', as it is less

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[14] See, for instance, Seyhan's *Writing Outside the Nation* (2000) and Bromley's *Narratives for a New Belonging* (2000).

interested in the ways that writers imagine past homes than it is in how they re-write and re-imagine the homes of others. However, spatial displacement is still a key concern, as these critical works are about how writers attempt to 'unhome' the dominant culture of the place they now find themselves, instilling it with some of the dis-locatedness experienced by migrated peoples.

The title of John Clement Ball's book *Imagining London* (2004), from which I borrow my term for this approach, pays direct homage to Rushdie's trope. We find a valorisation throughout of displacement and dislocation as solutions to the exclusionary discourses of home and nation. According to Ball, the 'real or imagined journeys' found in the works he discusses seem to 'collapse the boundaries of time and space', turning London into an increasingly 'borderless and global space', an 'ever-more fluid, worldly space' (173). While it is important to draw out the ways in which migration fictions engage in this process, there is a danger in only reading through this lens. Ball's celebratory view of migrants as 'people who root themselves in ideas rather than in places, in memories as much as material things' (quoting another essay by Rushdie) is too neat, as it also does not take into account the ways in which different genders, sexualities, classes and migrated groups might inhabit the condition of 'migrancy' differently and how the material conditions faced by migrants and their descendants come to bear on this experience (*ibid,* 221). Furthermore, Ball's conclusions do not account for the potential for the setting up of new borders and new exclusions as migrated peoples re-imagine the spaces they live in.

John McLeod's *Postcolonial London* (2004) is probably the most well-known of the works which fall in this category. In this ambitious critical study, McLeod focuses his analysis on how migrant representations of urban spaces create what he refers to as 'another London', one which admits 'the times and places of overseas' (2004, 1). While McLeod provides a less heroic reading of the state of migrancy than both Rushdie and Ball, displacement remains the central recurring trope, as McLeod dubs postcolonial

London a 'profoundly disruptive location' where there are possibilities for 'new forms of identity and belonging which contrast with the sense of exclusion beyond the city's limits', setting the city and the nation 'at odds' (*ibid,* 19). McLeod's secondary aim is to explore the ways in which imaginative discourses circulating within the metropole are as central to the process of decolonisation as those circulating in the colonies themselves. In this way, McLeod shares one of the broad concerns of this thesis, in that he sets out to address the discursive crossings between 'home' and empire. However, while McLeod (like Ball) is ostensibly concerned with the space of the city, my analysis is trained on interior, domestic geographies.

From this short discussion of key critical studies on literary works which thematise migration as a central preoccupation, we see two distinct ways of conceptualising their deployments of home. On one hand, there is the remembered home, distant from the migrated subject but re-constructed through the creatively productive trope of Rushdie's 'broken mirrors'. On the other, there is the exclusionary home of the erstwhile metropole, which must be displaced in order to properly admit the migrated body. In both of these conceptualisations, the migrant does not inhabit the home of the here and now, but is always in the process of either re-assembling the shards of a past home or dis-assembling the present one. As I have shown, there is an overwhelming tendency to valorise the role of metaphysical displacement in such narratives, which, as discussed in the previous chapter, is potentially problematic because it can lose sight of the material conditions that produce such a position, while obscuring the experiences of 'marginal' migrants, such as women.

James Procter (2003) has also called attention to this recurring critical stance and attempts to provide a corrective to its dominance in literary studies by re-centring the role of 'dwelling' in conceptualisations of migration. In this way, Procter's approach matches most closely with my own in that he looks at narratives of movement for the ways that they engage with processes of settling. As Procter argues:

> Post-war post-colonial migration to England in the 1950s and 1960s amounted to more than the abandonment of "home", or to an ontological condition of "homelessness". It also involved a desperate territorial struggle *for* home […]. (*ibid,* 4)

He goes on to assert that, far from being travel's other, dwelling 'constitutes a kind of para-site, within travel', while also cautioning that 'dwelling is a spatial and temporal process, rather than a signifier of closure or resolution' (ibid, 14-15). Unlike many of the other critical studies on migrant and diasporic fiction, Procter provides an extensive discussion of the interior space of the home alongside his analyses of exterior spaces of the urban street, the suburbs and rural localities. In addition to a consideration of the non-literary texts which have served to mythologise and in many cases pathologise the immigrant dwelling place in post-war Britain (discussed in Chapter 2), he also reads this space through a selection of literary narratives, namely George Lamming's *The Emigrants* and Sam Selvon's 'Moses trilogy'. He focuses on 'basements and bedsits' as the key sites of dwelling found in these early migration narratives, drawing attention to the transient nature of these immigrant homes. Rather than valorising the creative potential of such a position, however, Procter emphasises the narrative engagement with the difficult material conditions of inhabiting such spaces. Through his analysis of these works, Procter argues that such narratives 'expose the emotional and cultural preoccupation in home and housing, an investment that was heightened rather than displaced by the fear of homelessness' (*ibid,* 31).

However, Procter's choice to focus only on male writers who depict the migration stories of single male migrants has skewed his reading towards a masculine conceptualisation of the domestic. In Procter's analysis, domestic spaces are marked by 'stifling interiority', where male immigrants are 'Lock up…with London life on the outside' (*ibid*, 45). Procter unpacks the image of Moses's basement flat in *Lonely Londoners* as a 'church', interpreting it as 'an important repository for group consciousness' and 'communal memory' (46). While he makes the important point that these are 'not just memories of Caribbean but of 'here'" (*ibid*), there is a universalising

tone to Procter's analysis in this section that paves over gender and other differences that might disrupt this apparent solidarity. As in the chosen novels themselves, women are marginal characters in Procter's analysis of these dwelling places. As a result, his conclusions do not account for the ways in which gender might impact on the meanings ascribed to migrant dwelling places. While in an earlier section Procter provides a discussion of the unsettling presence of white women within black dwelling places at the time (adding to fears of miscegenation and the decline of the British 'national stock'), aside from a brief mention of Tanty's shopping trips in *Lonely Londoners* and a reference to Lamming's description of the illegal hairdressing salon in Miss Dorking's basement flat, black women in particular are largely absent from the domestic spaces inhabited by the migrants in his discussions. Importantly, there is no mention of their potential roles as wives or mothers, or even lovers, within such spaces. Seen in the context of the discourses about black women's apparent failures in the domestic realm explored in the previous chapter, this omission has the potential to reinforce rather than subvert racist mythologies of the black domestic space.

Though Procter's work has been hugely significant in that he explicitly challenges the centrality of tropes of displacement within critical readings of migration fiction, while also drawing attention to the importance of the domestic home within such narratives, any discussion of the domestic that does not take full account of the gendered politics surrounding such a space will necessarily be incomplete. It is this aspect that will be central to my reading of domesticity and homemaking in the migration novels I discuss in this thesis.

INTERSECTIONALITY AND THE LITERARY SPACE

Before I move to outlining the chapters to follow, it is necessary to say a few words about my broad interpretive approach. As has hopefully been clear up to now, I am concerned with looking at the operations of power which circulate in and around my chosen texts across axes of gender as well as race, ethnicity and other forms of

'othering'. As is evidenced by the different readings of home within feminist theory, there is a central tension between the desire to build solidarity between women in order to combat their disenfranchisement within certain spaces and the desire to account for differences between women across lines of race, class and sexuality. This has been a longstanding conundrum within gender/women's studies as a field of scholarly inquiry, as well as within feminist activism.

There have been complementary debates occurring within the literary world, as different critical approaches jostle for prominence. While both feminist and postcolonial approaches to literary works are now part of the literary mainstream (as evidenced by their increasing requirement as part of most university English courses), there have been fewer critical roadmaps provided on how to usefully employ them together. In his far-reaching exploration of current debates within postcolonial literary theory, *Beginning Postcolonialism*, John McLeod attempts to chart the shifting relationship between postcolonial and feminist criticism. He cites Elleke Boehmer's critical examination of African literature, *Stories of Women* (2005), as a key foundation text of 'postcolonial feminism'. This work has indeed been central to drawing attention to the fact that within the field of postcolonial studies, 'gender is still conventionally treated in a tokenistic way or as a subsidiary to the category of race' (McLeod 2010). We see this problem in some of the critiques launched at key postcolonial theorists like Homi Bhabha and Edward Said for not adequately taking account of gender in their analyses. On the other hand, others have criticised Boehmer's approach for overstating the 'feminist' characteristics of African women's writing while ignoring the ways that it engages with the politics of postcolonial nationalisms (Andrade 2011). At the other end of the spectrum, there have been vehement critiques launched at mainstream feminist literary

studies for its blindness to the operations of colonialism within texts and a lack of attention to literary works by non-white women.[15]

McLeod cites Gayatri Spivak's 'Can the Subaltern Speak' (1994) as providing the most carefully rendered explanation of the fundamental difficulty employing postcolonial feminist approaches to textual artefacts, which is that '[t]he subaltern as female is always being written with recourse to a form of representation which is incapable of bearing adequate witness to her subject-position'. Spivak concludes that the only solution is to 'instead critique those discourses which claim to rescue the "authentic" voices of the subaltern as female from their mute position' (McLeod 2010, 221). Despite paying homage to Spivak's point, McLeod acknowledges that this creates a critical 'impasse' for postcolonial literary scholars because it 'shows the limits of postcolonial theory itself' (*ibid*). Rather than creating a useful critical strategy for reading the female (post)colonial subject, Spivak's essay calls into question the very act of interpretation, leaving critics who wish to be attentive to the operations of power she outlines feeling that they failed before they even begin.

While not providing any concrete critical tools to circumvent this impasse, McLeod suggests some critical texts that succeed in bridging the gap between 'first' and 'third' world women. He cites Susheila Nasta's *Motherlands* (1991) as one work which engages in 'theoretical bridging' by setting up 'creative dialogue' between West and non-West in a way that is *mutually* transformative rather than prescriptive (McLeod 2010, 225). In Nasta's text, rather than attempting to impose feminist frames that derive from a history of gender activism in the West onto texts arising from different geographical spaces and which often have very different gendered concerns, the focus is instead on 'critical relationality' and rigorous attention to cultural, historical and political context (*ibid*). We can draw a parallel between Nasta's methological approach

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[15] See, for example, Donaldson's *Decolonising Feminisms* (1992) and Gayatri Spivak's critique of Gilbert and Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1984) in 'Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism' (1985).

to literary texts in *Motherlands* to that set out by Chandra Mohanty in her influential essay 'Under Western Eyes' (2003). In this critique of feminist sociological and historical studies of 'third world women', which has now become a founding text of postcolonial feminism, Mohanty, like Nasta, also emphasises the importance of remaining mindful of historical, geographical and cultural context in any analysis of marginal(ised) women.

Nasta's critical approach in *Motherlands* can be usefully compared to the principles behind 'intersectionality', a term which has gained credence within recent feminist scholarship. This concept, which has been put forward predominantly by black feminist scholars, has been endorsed as a critical practice for conceptualizing the effects of 'multiple forms of oppression' (see Crenshaw 1991; Lewis 2009; Yuval-Davis 2006). Advocated as an alternative to discourses of addition (race+class+gender=more oppression),[16] 'intersectionality' is intended to take account of the fluid nature of categories of identity and their contingency upon social, historical and political contexts. The literary critic Barbara Christian appears to gesture at the concept in her essay 'The Race for Theory', where she calls for an approach to reading black women's literary works in a way that pays attention to 'the intricacies of the intersection of language, class, race, and gender in literature' (2007, 42). However, despite the evident interest in debating the interactions between gender and various other kinds of marginality in fiction, the term itself has yet to cross over into postcolonial literary

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[16] We see a similar logic at work in the notion of 'double-colonisation', which some postcolonial theorists have employed as a way of conceptualising women's position in (post)colonial societies (see, for instance Petersen and Rutherford's *A Double Colonisation: Colonial and Post-Colonial Women's Writing* (1986)). Like the concept of addition, such a construction serves to unproblematically homogenise women in such spaces and fixes them within a frame of marginalisation, denying them any agency to resist their own disenfranchisement.

criticism in any significant way.[17] In addition to methodologies stemming from the

literary realm, I draw on approaches like intersectionality that have their origins in non-

literary scholarship in my textual analysis. In each chapter, I have attempted to take into

account the intersectional politics in both producing and reading the texts in question,

and how this comes to bear on the deployment of home and domesticity as rhetorical

tropes within the novels I analyse. This is employed alongside an attentiveness to the

power-relations across these different axes within the texts themselves.

OUTLINE OF THESIS

The broad narrative arc of this thesis builds from more transparent 'uses' of the

domestic towards more complicated rhetorical deployments that, I argue, are more

successful in holding in tension their critiques of hierarchies of gender alongside those

of race/ethnicity. There is a broad movement throughout from works which, despite

their endeavours to challenge (mis)conceptions of the domestic and its associated

practices through their fiction, remain in some ways constrained by the binary logic of

migrant/native, British/other, gender/culture, limiting the power of their critical

interventions, to those that make greater strides in challenging the binaries themselves.

However, in the process of disrupting these particular binaries, others may become

more solidified in their wake, as is the case in Aboulela's text.

     In the following chapter, I present Buchi Emecheta's 1974 novel *Second-Class*

Citizen as an alternative 'foundational' migration narrative because it represents a vision

of early migration to the UK which is told from a woman's perspective and centred on

the family and domestic life. I frame my discussion with an exploration of the apparent

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[17] I have come across a few recent exceptions to this. Firstly, in Claire Chambers's book
British Muslim Fictions (2011), where she describes her interview with Abdulrazak
Gurnah as concerned with 'Muslimness, religion, race, gender, class and their complex
intersectionality' (120) and secondly, in a recent special issue of *Feminist Review* on
'Affects and Creolisation', where Elina Valovirta analyses how to read 'across multiple
intersecting differences between the text and the reader' (2013). Such recent
appearances are perhaps a sign that this term is becoming more commonplace within
literary debates.

'conflict' between feminism and 'Africanness', proposing an alternative reading practice which takes into account the interconnections between public and private spheres as a way of 'reading between the lines' of these seemingly mutually-exclusive subject-positions. I argue that *Second-Class Citizen* engages in a critique of gender and racial hierarchies in diaspora that, though not without its flaws, can only be properly appreciated when read in this way. I go on to conclude that, contrary to earlier models of black diaspora writing which locate the metropolitan city-space as the source of creative energy, Emecheta positions the domestic as the space of writerly inspiration, challenging the value-separation of public and private realms.

Chapter 5 is concerned with one of the most widely celebrated recent works of diasporic literature, Monica Ali's 2004 novel *Brick Lane*. In this chapter, I look at the relationship between the im/migrant domestic home and the communal home of its surrounding 'ethnic' community. The novel, I argue, exposes the processes involved in shoring up the cultural authenticity of both spaces. Drawing on Judith Butler's work on performativity, I analyse the novel's female protagonist Nazneen, whose performative qualities undermine her prescribed role in maintaining the 'Going Home Syndrome' which afflicts the novel's male characters. By extension, I argue, the novel also exposes the performative nature of London's Brick Lane area, which is engaged in a process of presenting itself as an 'authentic' representation of Britain's Bangladeshi community. Furthermore, by representing Nazneen's character as a kind of performance, the novel complicates the widely circulated images of downtrodden and oppressed Muslim women. Such an intervention, I argue, challenges schematic readings of the novel which present it as a linear journey from cultural backwardness to 'feminist' liberation through contact with the West.

In Chapter 6, I work through Andrea Levy's highly acclaimed historical novel *Small Island*, which, in contrast to the earlier works covered, employs a non-linear narrative that, along with the novel's thematic content, resists a reading of migration as

an assimilative progression through the acquisition of 'mainstream' cultural modes and practices. Bringing the entangled history of Englishness and domesticity to the forefront of my analysis, I unpack Levy's deployment of 'English' domestic norms and practices as markers of belonging in Britain *and* the Caribbean. Drawing on the concept of 'respectability' as it has been deployed in a Caribbean context, I interrogate domesticity and its relationship to femininity in the character of Hortense. Then, reversing an existing analogy between house and nation, I analyse the space of Queenie's lodging-house, showing how its territorial contestations can be usefully mapped onto the space of the British nation, concluding that, through Hortense's painful encounter with the exclusionary 'home' of Englishness, she begins to establish a diasporic identity which provides possibilities for reframing Englishness itself.

Chapter 7 centres on the 2002 novel *By the Sea* by Zanzibari writer and literary scholar Abdulrazak Gurnah. As the only male-authored work I engage with in this thesis, this selection occupies an important, if somewhat contested, space within the wider themes of this thesis. Its narrative of refugee migration, which also sets it apart from the other migration novels I discuss, provokes valuable questions regarding the aesthetics of migrancy and its valorisation within postmodern theory. On one hand, we could place Gurnah's novel within a lineage of male exile writing, which heroically draws on tropes of nomadism and homelessness in both its modernist and postmodernist incarnations. However, as I argue, through Gurnah's self-conscious deployment in *By the Sea* of the feminised trope of storytelling rooted in the domestic sphere over a male-centred trope of authorship, he subverts the masculine resonance of the genre. Furthermore, by deploying houses and their material objects as the novel's primary narrative machinery, Gurnah establishes a link between the processes of homemaking and the processes of narration which, I conclude, produces a more fluid conceptualisation of the value of home that resists its otherwise exclusionary mechanisms.

Finally, in Chapter 8, I explore the gendered politics of cross-cultural (and, cross-ideological) publishing through Scottish-Sudanese writer Leila Abouela's 1999 novel *The Translator*. Drawing on Nancy Armstrong's influential analysis of nineteenth century domestic fiction, I navigate a path through conflicted readings of Aboulela's fiction as either feminist or staunchly anti-feminist. Focusing my analysis on the novel's rhetorical operations rather than on its apparent ideological stance, I argue that Aboulela transforms the nineteenth century domestic novel as a way of re-framing the dichotomy between 'East' and 'West', religious and secular. Challenging readings that cite the novel's valorisation of the domestic as evidence that Aboulela is endorsing a return to traditional roles for women, I argue that Aboulela's deployment of the domestic love-plot is actually a strategy for clearing discursive space for the voice of a distinctly modern kind of Muslim woman within a Western secularised (home)space. In this way, the novel navigates a path for its protagonist between the Orientalist figure of the subjugated Muslim woman and that of the overly Westernised 'native informant'. In the conclusion of this chapter, I return to some of the broader aims of this thesis, namely to reframe the private sphere as one which, precisely because of its perceived banality, may enable new discursive interventions into the highly contested space of British multiculture. I will then expand upon this point in my conclusion to the thesis overall, suggesting that an attention to the concerns of the domestic in fictional representations of migration can contribute to an alternative aesthetic of migrancy which resists essentialist deployments of race or nation as well as overly heroic readings of the migrant as unencumbered by any such 'homing' desires.

4. MOTHERING (IN) THE DIASPORA: CREATIVE (RE)PRODUCTION IN BUCHI EMECHETA'S *SECOND-CLASS CITIZEN*

Although Buchi Emecheta is most often referred to as an African or Nigerian writer, there is another lineage derived from her over thirty-year residency in Britain. Like her protagonist Adah in *Second-Class Citizen*, Emecheta came to the United Kingdom in the 1960s to join her student husband. Her early years in London contributed most of the material for her first two novels, *In the Ditch* (1972) and *Second-Class Citizen* (1974), which are heavily autobiographical.[18] She then moved on to write a series of novels set in Nigeria, including her most celebrated work *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979), but then returned to the UK with *Kehinde* (1994) and *The New Tribe* (2000). Emecheta's literary migrations serve to complicate her position within the African canon but they also place her within another literary frame, that of black British or black diaspora writing. Her novel *Gwendolen* (1989), about a young West Indian woman who goes to live in London, seems to gesture at this other literary affiliation.

Second-Class Citizen (1994a [1974]) is probably the 'purest' migration narrative discussed in this thesis, as the novel contains the genre's characteristic markers of departure, arrival and settling, narrated chronologically, following closely to the narrative arc of Meera Syal's stock immigrant story. In many ways, we can look at *Second-Class Citizen* as an alternative 'foundational' migration narrative to those normally deployed in critical studies on diasporic fiction or black British writing, most frequently Sam Selvon's *Lonely Londoners* (2006 [1956]).[19] While Emecheta's novel was published nearly two decades later, it contains many of the same concerns as this earlier work, such as the struggle for decent housing and accompanying experiences of

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[18] *The Bride Price* was actually the first novel Emecheta wrote but the manuscript was destroyed by her husband at the time, a scene that is replayed in *Second-Class Citizen*. A reconstructed version of the work was published in 1976.

[19] See, for example, in George (1999) (in the chapter on 'Immigrant Fiction'), Nasta (2002), Procter (2003) and McLeod (2004).

racism. However, unlike in Selvon's account, the disillusionment caused by these experiences is not counterbalanced by the male camaraderie that makes up the bulk of the earlier novel's episodic narrative. Instead, *Second-Class Citizen'*s female protagonist Adah is isolated from the possibility of developing any kind of community-consciousness with others in a similar position to her own. The most obvious difference between Selvon's and Emecheta's novels, however, is that the first is told from the perspective of a single male migrant living in the company of other single male migrants, while Adah's story is that of a woman coming to join her husband and accompanied by her children. As discussed earlier, such a perspective has been largely absent from earlier fictional accounts of commonwealth migration and its particular entanglements need to be recuperated in order to get a fuller picture of the relationship between migration and the private/domestic.

In *Second-Class Citizen,* Adah's subordinate status as a black immigrant in 1970s London runs parallel to the similar position she finds herself in her domestic life. As Adah attempts to negotiate the often-conflictual terms of belonging in host and diaspora collectivities, Emecheta situates the home as the battlefield of these conflicts. With *Second-Class Citizen*, Emecheta expands the notion of 'citizenship' to include the workings of the domestic sphere by showing how its seemingly private practices can become elevated to define belonging in larger collectivities. Domestic choices that would normally be seen as wholly 'private' matters take on much greater significance in the context of Britain's post-war race and gender politics, becoming symbolic markers of belonging in both British and African diasporic communities (albeit in different ways). Emecheta's representation of this period in *Second-Class Citizen* exposes the intertwining of private and public concerns which impact upon her female migrant protagonist, while also challenging the division between the so-called separate spheres.

In this chapter, I will look at how Emecheta deploys a story set largely in 'the private' to interrogate the entanglements between gender and national/ethnic

collectivities. In order to demonstrate what is at stake in representing such entanglements, I will begin with a discussion of how Emecheta and other African women writers have attempted to negotiate the imposed binary between a feminist self and an African self. As Ellah Shohat asserts, 'a discourse which is "purely" feminist or "purely" nationalist [...] cannot apprehend the layered, dissonant identities of diasporic and post-independent feminist subjects' (2006, 53). Drawing on the recent work of Susan Andrade, I will discuss a possible strategy for reading that will enable a greater attentiveness to the nuances and potentially contradictory nature of such a subject-position. With this approach in mind, I will analyse Emecheta's *Second-Class Citizen*, looking at how this migration narrative provides an alternative vision of London life for a black immigrant during this period. By introducing mothering and the workings of domestic life as central concerns, Emecheta places gender at the forefront of the racial politics brought about by post-war immigration. Although limited in some respects, Emecheta sets up a critique of both gender and racial hierarchies that can only be properly appreciated by reading across the so-called 'separate spheres'. In the end, Emecheta subverts the division between public/productive and private/reproductive spaces by creating a space of resistance *within* the domestic, challenging its normative positioning as an unproductive and uncreative realm.

READING BETWEEN THE LINES

Buchi Emecheta's attention to the everyday struggles of African women in her fiction has caused her work to receive a great deal of attention from European and American feminist literary critics and scholars, contributing greatly to her literary success (Stratton 1994). However, some of these readings have tended to gloss over the anti-colonial elements of Emecheta's fiction in favour of the moments when she can be shown to critique the 'patriarchy' within her own culture in a way which serves the claims of imperialist-feminism. In such readings (see, for example Frank 1984), 'feminism' and 'African culture' are dichotomised, such that any critique of gender

hierarchies gets celebrated as a rejection of 'traditional African culture' in favour of the gender-equality provided by Western cultural paradigms. Despite her involvement with feminist networks, Emecheta often expresses her frustration at such readings. In her autobiography, for example, she describes being invited to give a speech to the International Women's League shortly after the publication of *Second-Class Citizen*, only to be dragged into a discussion about the suffering of 'Third World women'. Remembering her disdain at such conversations, she recalls:

> I think that like the black boys in the school I taught, one simply becomes fed up with seeing oneself as a problem. So I got up and shocked all those ladies, telling them to mind their own business and leave us Third World women alone. (1994b, 177)

Perhaps partly in response to the imperialist overtones of such readings, though in another way reinforcing their binary logic, (primarily) male African writers and critics have often used Emecheta's reception in feminist literary circles as evidence of her lack of commitment to promoting African unity and advancement. As Omar Sougou suggests, Emecheta is often viewed as a writer 'who has let the questions of male domination blind them to the necessary solidarity between man and woman' (2002, 51).

The positioning of feminism as inherently Western and ultimately damaging to the decolonization of African nations is a common topic of discussion among African scholars and activists alike. In Adeola James' book, which she describes as, 'a collection of interviews with African women writers, in which they discuss their creativity in light of the two major, irreversible, though accidental facts of their lives – being born an African and a woman', this issue comes up frequently with varying responses (1990, 1). To a question posed about whether focusing on the oppression of African women undermines the political, social and economic liberation of Africa, for example, Ghanaian author and playwright Ama Ata Aidoo responds, 'It shouldn't, but part of the resentment which our brothers feel about any discussion on women is because they feel it diverts from the "main issues"' (James 1990, 25). Such a position is expressed in a poem by Felix Mnthali entitled 'Letter to a Feminist Friend', which starts

by asking, 'Why should they [feminists] be allowed to come between us?' and finishes by declaring, 'When Africa is truly free...there will be time for you to share the cooking and change the nappies – till then, first things first!' (qtd. in Sougou 2002, 22).

In the above poem, the speaker criticises his 'feminist friend' for focusing too much on so-called 'women's issues', explicitly associated with domestic and mothering duties through the references to 'cooking' and 'changing nappies'. These concerns are seen to detract from the primary work of postcolonial nation-building, which is set against this domestic world, positioned as it is in the realm of the 'public'. Similarly, Emecheta's fictions are often concerned with motherhood and domestic life, and, like the 'feminist friend' of Mnthali's poem, these thematic choices have often caused her work (along with that of her female contemporaries) to be read as avoiding the 'main issues' of African liberation, to use Aidoo's language.[20] This question of what constitutes the 'main issues' is directly related to women's position with respect to nationalist projects. As Deniz Kandiyoti's asserts, 'the integration of women into modern "nationhood", epitomised by citizenship in a sovereign nation-state, somehow follows a different trajectory from that of men' (1994, 377). While women are often made to stand for the nation in such formulations as 'Mother Africa', they are simultaneously placed outside its political will precisely by situating their concerns as secondary to the work of nation-building, as the speaker does in Mnthali's poem.

By extension, normative constructions of African literary history make the same interpretive move, placing African women writers such as Emecheta in an apolitical 'no-man's' land. In her revisionist literary history *The Nation Write Small* (2011), Susan

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[20] It is worth highlighting here that the devaluation of motherhood and the domestic by Western/second-wave feminists (influenced by the ideas of Simone de Beauvoir as discussed in Chapter 2) has also been challenged by many female African writers and scholars. This includes Emecheta, who has famously declared herself a feminist 'with a small "f"' (1988a), in order to register her unease at some of Western feminism's central tenets, and I will return to this point in the latter part of this chapter. Often locally articulated as 'African feminism', such critiques should nevertheless be understood as part of the wider call by black and 'third world' women for an appreciation of 'difference' in feminist theory and practice (see, for example hooks 1982; Carby 1997; Walker 1983).

Andrade argues against this tendency to read the older generation of African women writers (i.e. those in the generations prior to the recent rise of explicitly politically-engaged female African novelists like Chimamanda Adichie), of which Emecheta is included, as antagonistic or at least indifferent to the political aims of anti-colonial nationalism. Rather than pointing the finger at Emecheta's reception within feminist literary circles as the cause of such literary exclusion, as others have done,[21] Andrade analyses the way in which the 'political' itself has been conceived in relation to literature emanating from the once-colonised world. As Andrade points out, neither Gerald Moore's 'canon-shaping' book of African criticism *Seven African Writers* (1962) nor his expanded version *Twelve African Writers* (1980) includes any female authors (2011, 7). Such an exclusion, Andrade argues, is down to the particular rubric that critics have used to measure the worthiness of African fiction. Critical attention to African literature, she says, has focused on a 'narrow conception of resistance' such that those who did not conform to the 'resistance model of cultural nationalism' were left out of the literary narrative (6). In other words, from its very inception, African literary studies evaluated its object based on whether or not it could be seen to 'do' something in the political realm, and this 'doing', was/is anti-colonial nationalism, measured by the terms set by early celebrated writers like Chinua Achebe and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o.[22]

Andrade examines the specific terms of this 'resistance model of cultural nationalism' with reference to the work of Frederic Jameson, particularly his controversial essay 'Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism' (1986). In this text, Jameson presents allegory as the key mode through which the fiction from once-colonised nations operates. He argues that:

> Third-world texts, even those which are seemingly private and invested with a properly libidinal dynamic – necessarily project a political dimension in the form of national allegory: the story of the private

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[21] See, for example Stratton (1994).
[22] However, Andrade also makes it clear that such terms did not only affect African women writers, as she argues that the initial neglect of Amos Tutuola's magical realist writing was a symptom of these same restrictive interpreting mechanisms.

individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society. (68)

Although acknowledging that there are many problems with the over-simplified nature of Jameson's assessment, which have been well-voiced by postcolonial scholars,[23] Andrade still sees a place for an allegorical relationship between the 'private' and 'public' concerns in the work of the female African writers she analyses. However, she argues for a reassessment of allegorical reading *practices* themselves to enable a full appreciation of the nuances of their work.

In the quotation above, Jameson presents the private as merely the *vehicle* through which the national is revealed. The personal and domestic in this reading therefore become subservient to the real 'purpose' of the narrative. As Andrade articulates:

> [B]ecause of his desire for an uncontaminated space of resistance, the libidinal that Jameson describes can *only* serve as a vehicle of illumination, in other words, metaphor of the public […]. It can therefore never narrate a politics of its own. (27)

Andrade argues for a different kind of allegorical reading practice when approaching novels by African women (and, I argue, all of the works covered in this thesis). African women's novels, she argues, expose the 'critical blindness' of Jameson's model, because their political practices are simply unintelligible to its mechanisms (36). As a result, they became excluded from the space of national literature altogether. Contra Jameson's model in which the private narrative disappears in service to the public, Andrade argues that 'the political meaning [of African women's writing] does not reside exclusively in either tenor or vehicle but in a conversation between the two' (35).

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[23] See, most notably, Ahmad (1987). In addition to the issue of over-simplification, Jameson's essay problematically positions the 'Third World' as the space where the true 'cultural condition' of postmodernity exists. Here, we see this tendency of postmodernist theorists to present the marginalised as a kind of container for the ideals of (European) postmodernism, presented as it is in Jameson as an 'uncontaminated space of resistance'(Andrade 2011, 26–7). As Andrade points out, this essay was described by Jameson as a 'pendant' or supplement to his book on postmodernism (1991), presenting the ex-colonial world as an afterthought or addendum to his explorations of the central spaces of postmodernity, even as it is made to stand for the postmodern condition itself.

She asserts that the private should not be read as merely 'synechdochal' in relation to the public sphere as it is in Jameson's version, but that meaning is produced through a 'productive interchange between different levels [of the narrative]' (38). In such fictions, she goes on to explain:

> [F]amily doesn't disappear so that the glory or pathos of nation might be revealed. Instead, family retains its literalness, its banality, as well as its real material and social significance, thereby troubling the tendency of the national allegory to soar into the realm of the transcendent. The allegory produced under these circumstances is characterized by a quality of productive interchange between the figural and the literal. Family rarely dissolves into a symbol. (38-39)

She argues that readers need to develop 'new forms of literacy' in order to be attentive to the mode of political resistance found in these women's novels (36). This 'corrective reading' of Jameson's essay, Andrade suggests, serves to illuminate what she calls the 'progressive feminist politics of decolonisation' found in such fictions by African women (29).

Andrade uses the example of Emecheta's novel *The Joys of Motherhood* (1988b) to illustrate how this reading practice might be put to use. This novel, she explains:

> does not merely metaphorize one form of domination in terms of another. By illustrating the overlapping public and private realms and narrating them simultaneously, it comments on domination within the family and within the colony and points out how colonial and patriarchal relations structure not only the public realm of politics, war and employment, but also the private one of food procurement and children. (35)

In this way, Emecheta exposes the *interaction* between marital power and colonial power through her novel, and meaning is made precisely from the readers' having to 'traverse [the allegory] dialectically', rather than substituting one meaning for another (27). So, unlike the work of authors like Achebe or Ngũgĩ, Emecheta's does not use the private merely as an allegory for the public. Rather, her novels insist that the politics of colonialism enter the domestic space and alter it. The *form* of her work then reflects such an interdependence of the two 'spheres', as we are made to read across the 'threshold' dividing public and private, productive and reproductive narrative spaces.

As I will aim to show in the rest of this chapter, in Emecheta's earlier novel *Second-Class Citizen,* we see the beginnings of this technique, as it highlights Adah's second-class citizenship in both the public and private realms, demonstrating how both racism and sexism come into play across both spaces. However, as I will discuss at the end of this chapter, in this earlier rendition, Emecheta occasionally lapses into essentialisms of gender, race and culture which take away from the nuances produced by reading across the two spaces/spheres. Although Emecheta provides an important gendered intervention into representations of post-war immigration, this tendency consigns the novel to its 'proto' status (Sougou 2002, 32). The allegorical relationship which Andrade points to in the later work has not yet been fully worked out so that, rather than always complicating categories, the text at points reproduces the very binary logic that the novel as a whole attempts to undercut.

BELONGING IN THE DIASPORA

Despite the fact that Emecheta did not begin writing until she left Nigeria for a new life in London and that her first published novels were drawn from this experience, Emecheta's work is rarely discussed in any significant way within critical studies on migrant or diasporic writing.[24] Furthermore, while she is taught widely on African literature courses on both sides of the Atlantic and frequently anthologised (though by no means always, for the reasons set out above) in volumes of the same topic, her position within the canon of black British/black diaspora writing has been waning in recent years.[25] John McLeod, in his *Postcolonial London* (2004), offers up one possible explanation for this exclusion. He argues that Emecheta's representation of London life in the early 1970s 'unsettle[s] the dominant metanarrative of black British women's resistance' by presenting racial identity as a less useful emancipatory strategy than the

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[24] An important exception to this is John McLeod's *Postcolonial London* (2004), which I discuss below.

[25] Although Emecheta won the Best Black Writer in Britain Award and the Award for the Best Young British Writer in 1980 and 1983, respectively, she seems to have dropped out of the more recent boom in popular and academic interest in 'diasporic' or 'ethnic' fiction in Britain.

dominant history of post-war social and political movements would like to assert (95), calling into question 'the effectiveness of London's diaspora community as a source of support and survival' (105). However, such a reading also suffers from some of the 'critical blindness' of the nationalist test described by Andrade above, as it sets out specific parameters for what constitutes anti-racist resistance, articulated in public, political terms. Because Emecheta's narrative of migration is less concerned with political articulations of racial solidarity than it is with the effects that racial politics have on family life and the position of women, there is a similar tendency to see her intervention as apolitical and therefore of less use to the claims of identity-based resistance movements.

On one level, however, Emecheta's representation of Adah's first encounter with London does much of the same work of anti-racist critique as other novels that fit much more comfortably into the canon of black diaspora writing, such as Selvon's *Lonely Londoners* (1956) and George Lamming's *The Emigrants* (1954). In James Procter's (2003) analysis of these early migration narratives, he reminds us that the struggle for housing was a primary preoccupation of these works which have become so central to the canon of black British literature. Emecheta narrates a similar tale of racism at the hands of London landlords in her chapter 'Sorry, No Coloureds' in a way which echoes these earlier accounts. Despite the fact that Adah's migration to London is intended to be an escape from the various events in her life which have kept her from achieving her own homely space (the death of her father which leaves her as a dependent in her uncle's house, the pressure to get married in order to secure a home for herself and then the influence of her in-laws over her life-decisions), she quickly learns that 'home' is not something easily attained as a black immigrant in 1970s London. Although more acceptable for a woman to live on her own than in Lagos, the colour of Adah's skin determines the kind of housing that she and her husband Francis have

access to, such that '[e]very door seemed barred against them; nobody would consider accommodating them, even when they were willing to pay double the normal rent' (71).

Adah and Francis's experience in the housing market shows the importance of the home as a symbol of belonging and unbelonging in Britian. It is not a simple issue of economics but a question of what sort of people are given access to the kind of dwelling imbued with homely qualities. Instead, Adah is faced with a 'half-room […], very small, with a single bed at one end and a new settee bought with the money Adah had sent to buy her a new top coat with.' (35). As in Selvon's novel, this denial of access to a decent living space is presented as having psychological effects on the new immigrants, who must quickly learn their place as 'second-class citizens':

> She [Adah], who only a few months previously would have accepted
> nothing but the best, had by now been conditioned to expect inferior
> things. She was now learning to suspect anything beautiful and pure.
> Those things were for the whites, not the blacks. (71)

Adah's prior status as a member of the 'elite' class in Nigeria who now must live in the same house with 'such Nigerians who called her madam at home' further highlights the fall in social position (36). Class distinctions that may have kept different facets of the population apart in Nigeria become flattened into one 'immigrant community' in the face of rising racism on the part of the host nation. However, Adah chooses to resist this relegation, employing various strategies to circumvent the limits placed upon her by her skin colour, such as changing her accent when speaking to potential landlords over the phone.

Where Emecheta's narrative diverges from those of the male-authored novels that Procter analyses is that such tactics of resistance are not presented as an extension of immigrant solidarity, but rather as a necessary response to community exclusion. According to Procter, 'within Black British literature of the early post-war years the house is not simply a point of departure but a conspicuous locus of return and recollection', owing to the importance of the space for support and solidarity between immigrants in the same situation (2003, 31). However, for Adah, the home is instead

where she is singled out by her Nigerian neighbours who eventually rally to have her family evicted. By working at the North Finchley library she is seen to be taking a 'white man's job' and is berated for refusing to foster her children out. She was, as her neighbours describe it, 'having her cake and eating it too' (69). Rather than lauding Adah's success, her compatriots resent her for transcending her allocated position as a black immigrant. However, this resentment is deeply gendered, as the possibility of obtaining a 'white man's job' is understood as the natural goal of the male African students who come to study in Britain in the years following decolonization. As the narrator of *Second-Class Citizen* articulates:

> [G]roups of men calculated that with independence would come prosperity, the opportunity for self-rule, posh vacant jobs and more money, plenty of it. One had to be eligible for these jobs, though, thought these men. The only place to secure this eligibility, this passport to prosperity, was England. They must come to England, get a quick degree in Law and go back to rule their country. What could be more suitable? (81)

However, as Francis reminds Adah, 'that privilege has not been extended to females yet' (34). Adah's husband also becomes an extension of the opinions of the group, as Adah 'could feel their neighbours speaking through [him]' when he complains about Adah's refusal to conform to accepted behaviour (43). bell hooks (1982) identifies a similar dynamic among African-American families in the United States in the wake of the Civil Rights Movement. She describes how black women who were not willing to take on menial jobs were cast as 'uppity' while their male counterparts were not subject to the same criticism, demonstrating how even collective movements of progress (such as the Civil Rights Movement and other campaigns against racial discrimination) have their internal inequalities. In representing the lack of solidarity between Adah and other Nigerians in London, Emecheta, like hooks, exposes the potential pitfalls of a movement whose only category of resistance is race or national affiliation.

Nevertheless, Emecheta represents this breakdown in community solidarity as also deeply entangled with the politics of racial exclusion in Britain. The jealousy

directed at Adah is presented as a symptom of the wider racism experienced by black immigrants. Furthermore, it is precisely the knowledge of the difficulties Adah and her family will face in looking for a new place to live that makes their actions all the more successful in sabotaging Adah's attempts to better herself and her family: 'They knew how difficult it would be for them, but that was the desired effect' (70). In tying the harsh and gendered treatment Adah experiences at the hands of her compatriots to the racism experienced by black immigrants as a whole, Emecheta produces an anti-racist critique at the same time that she exposes the limits of racial or national solidarity in diaspora. It is the criticism of the Nigerian diasporic community generated here which has most likely contributed to the perception that in *Second-Class Citizen*, Emecheta promotes the message of gender equality above that of racial equality, and at the expense of her own community. However, in a similar manner to how *The Joys of Motherhood* points to colonialism's impact on gender relations, *Second-Class Citizen* shows the effects of intersecting forms of discrimination, which intertwine public and private concerns in complex ways. In the next section, I look at how mothering is used in the novel as a bridge between these two seemingly competing critiques.

THE POLITICS OF MOTHERING

As mentioned above, it is not only Adah's 'first-class job' that garners criticism from her compatriots (43), but also the fact that she refuses to foster her children out to a white British family. In the midst of this conflict, the narrator of *Second-Class Citizen* provides readers with a detailed explanation of the practice of private fostering among West African families at the time:

> They say that in England Nigerian children have two sets of mothers –
> the natal mother, and the social mother. As soon as a Nigerian housewife
> in England realised that she was expecting a child, instead of shopping
> for prams, and knitting little bootees, she would advertise for a foster
> mother. […] Most Nigerian wives would say that they had to send their
> children away because they lacked suitable accommodation for them,
> and there was a great deal of truth in this. But what they would not admit
> was that most of them were brought up in situations, far, far, different
> from the ones in which they found themselves in England. At home in
> Nigeria, all a mother had to do for a baby was wash and feed him and, if

he was fidgety, strap him on to her back and carry on with her work
while that baby slept. But in England she had to wash piles and piles of
nappies, wheel the child round for sunshine during the day, attend to his
feeds regularly as if one was serving a master, talk to the child, even if he
was only a day old! Oh, yes, in England, looking after babies was itself a
full-time job. This was difficult for a Nigerian wife to cope with,
especially when she realized that she could no longer count on the help
the extended family usually gave in such situations. (44-45)

This description of private fostering comes as an aside from the chronology of the

narrative and the tone of this section bears the signature of what many refer to as

Emecheta's 'sociological' or 'documentary' style (Brown 1981; Kenyon 1991; Sougou

2002). Here, and in other explanatory moments in the novel, the ordinarily Adah-

centred voice of the narrator shifts into a different, almost pedagogical register. In this

section, the narrator seems to be addressing readers directly, not as the narrator of

Adah's experiences, but as a social commentator.

The practice of fostering, according to the narrator, is a problem of culture clash,

and the inadequacy of housing for black immigrants in London is downplayed as an

excuse to cover up the fact that the women cannot cope with the change in mothering

practices expected of them and the absence of the communal family structure. However,

there is also a somewhat mocking tone to this passage, signalled by the reproduction of

exclamatory punctuation and the distancing mechanism 'Oh, yes', as if the narrator is

not necessarily expressing Adah's own views but rather a kind of composite of

discourses circulating about fostering among West Africans in Britain at the time. Such

discourses are apparent in a sociological text entitled *West African Families in Britain:*

A Meeting of Two Cultures (Ellis 1978), published only a few years after Emecheta's

novel, which describes the practice in similar terms as Emecheta's sociologist-narrator.

The authors devote most of the book to explaining the differences in family structures

and mothering practices in West Africa from what British social workers might expect,

and is intended to generate cultural sensitivity on the part of those who might come in

contact with this particular group of immigrants. The biographies of the authors indicate

that they have each spent time living and working in West Africa, conferring a sense of

authority upon the cultural knowledge asserted within the text itself. However, despite this background and well-intentioned aims of its authors, it tends to deal in essentialisms, where 'West African' and 'British' are stable categories of analysis, and 'traditional society' (a term only applied to the West African context, never the British) is crystallised into a static referent that can be transparently transmitted to readers.

To back up their claims, the authors often draw on African literature as a source of ethnographic information, as in the following statement about the relationship between the individual and the community:

> Anyone who wishes to appreciate traditional African society and culture can in fact do no better than start to read the novel *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe […]. In this book, […] Achebe portrays the strengths and rhythms of the collective life with dignity, its sense of harmony and its traditional mechanisms for dealing with disputes. […] Clearly this is a society in which the ideas [about individual autonomy] that have been suggested as important in British society have little place and indeed are counter-valued. (1978, 7)

There is no acknowledgement in this section that Achebe's representation of 'traditional African society' is a fictional imagining of one particular ethnic group, and is instead presented as a credible source of knowledge about Africans as whole. There is also no reference to the historical moment in which the work is set (just before the onset of colonialism), such that 'traditional society' appears as an unchanging form moving through empty time. Using a similar framing, the authors also supply a list of further reading at the end of the book, which is described as a selection 'based not primarily on literary merit but on the insight the writer gives into West African family life and traditional society' (132). Here, Emecheta's novels *Second-Class Citizen* and *In the Ditch* are cited and described as essential reading for all social workers (133).

The book noticeably downplays the role that institutional racism might play in the relationship between West African families and the British welfare state, as any failures of the system are put down to misunderstandings and a lack of 'cultural awareness' on the part of social workers. At points, there is almost a dismissive tone to the possibility that racism might be a factor. Alluding to the charge that the scarcity of

available day care places might be ideologically motivated, the authors retort that 'it is not easy [for West African mothers] to appreciate the complexity of legislation relating to the care of children and not to regard it as yet another conspiracy of white society to make life more difficult for blacks' (65). The study also fails to consider social changes that were occurring in Britain or the complexities of immigration politics at the time.

In her book *Imagining Home: Gender, 'Race' and National Identity, 1945-64* (1998), Wendy Webster produces an alternative account to Ellis's, demonstrating how women – both white and black – became implicated in the wider discourses of racism and xenophobia that were circulating in this period. She describes a post-war shift in attitudes which fused together the two major moral panics of the time: the fear of national moral decay brought about by the influx of dark-skinned immigrants and by challenges to the status quo of gender relations. As Webster articulates:

> In the post-war period [domesticated versions of national identity in Britain] were developed into an increasingly classless idea of home as the imagery of two nations. Rich and poor, employed and unemployed, North and South were reworked into a distinction between *a common Englishness of well-kept homes and families in opposition to the 'blacks next door'*. (xiii, emphasis added)

This narrative of 'common Englishness' served to translate fears of the decline of the male-headed nuclear family into racial terms. In this narrative, (white) women are mobilised as guardians of the domestic sphere, and it places upon them the burden of maintaining the boundary between 'us' (white Britons) and 'them' (non-white immigrants). Because these 'well-kept homes and families' depended a great deal on non-working mothers, a further distinction was created between the good (white) mother and the neglectful (black) mother who would 'rather' work than look after her children properly. Webster also describes how this period marked a definitive change in the definition of 'good mother', such that an earlier focus on hygiene and discipline gave way to the importance placed on developing an emotional connection with children. The narrator of *Second-Class Citizen* seems to allude to this norm with the

exclamation that a mother in Britain was expected to talk to her children even though they are far too young to understand her.

However, as Webster points out, there was an inherent catch at the heart of this 'two nations' logic. She describes how black women at the time were positioned as workers rather than as wives and mothers, stemming from fears about miscegenation and overpopulation. In essence, black women were recruited to the UK for their *productive* value in the economy but not for their *reproductive* value as mothers. The result of this imagery of two nations was that a racial hierarchy was constructed in which the domestic and reproductive practices of white mothers were seen as vital to maintaining their membership within the nation of Englishness, while black mothers' right to belong in the nation became conditional upon their concealment of these same practices. On one level, that of the sociological, Emecheta's novel appears to reinforce the cultural explanation laid out by Ellis above. However, if we look beyond the seemingly straightforward explanation supplied by the narrator to Adah's experiences within the narrative itself, we find a very different account that serves to interrogate and add another level of meaning to that of the narrator's, bringing it within the interpretive frame that Webster sets out.

Contrary to the assertions of the narrator above, Adah does not appear to struggle with the change in cultural norms, but rather, her main issue is to do with the balance between work and childcare and the raced and gendered politics and discourses which transform it from a personal struggle to a public political one. Although the resentment of Adah's landlady is figured as a reaction to the hyper-visibility of Adah's reproductive capabilities in the face of the her own childlessness (placing it in the realm of 'culture'), the wider negativity surrounding Adah's decision not to foster her children is presented in explicitly racial terms. Channelling the admonitions of her neighbours and her husband Francis, she laments that 'only first-class citizens lived with their children, not the blacks' (46). The racial hierarchy implied here is evocative of Webster

imagery of 'two nations', where 'citizenship' refers to the mode of belonging afforded to each group. The fact that, in Britain, Adah is continually chastised by her compatriots for the presence of her children while, as she (and Ellis) often points out, children are highly valued back home in Nigeria, also suggests an explanation beyond the purely 'cultural'. Rather, it implies an adherence to the 'rights' available to them as so-called 'second-class citizens'. Therefore, the pressure placed upon Adah to foster out her children from within the diasporic community indicates that they have become entangled in the racist agenda at the heart of crafting belonging in domestic and gendered terms. Adah, in choosing not to foster her children out, is contesting the terms offered by both the 'host' society and the developing (gendered) norms of the Nigerian migrant community, claiming her full reproductive role alongside her working life.

We see the entanglement of these raced and gendered politics in Adah's various interactions with the welfare system in the form of predominantly female social workers and NHS staff. These feminised representations of the state consistently construe Adah's reproductive capabilities as a problem that must be contained by technological means such as birth control or are placed within the racist parameters available in the narrative of Englishness described above. In one such moment, just before the birth of Adah's third child, she is assessed by two midwives who immediately construe her as one such 'neglectful black mother':

> 'Can't you read English?' asked the older midwife with the white hair. It dawned on Adah that, to the big midwife, if you couldn't read or speak English, then you were illiterate. Adah did not want to be regarded as an illiterate, so she told her that she could. Then the big midwife with white hair and an authoritative air asked her why then had she not called them to come sooner? Had Adah not read the instructions that she was to call at the onset of pains? What did she think she was doing, being so bloody clever?

Here, the fact that Adah *can* read English becomes evidence of her failure as a mother, even before the birth of her child. Furthermore, when the 'Japanese or Chinese' midwife examining Adah exclaims 'Rook, rook, she's breeding' (109-10), the play on the word 'breeding' further inscribes the birth into racist discourses about the over-fecundity of

black women and national fears of being 'out-bred' by immigrants. The practice of fostering then serves to obscure biological reproduction by removing the visible signifier of this 'breeding' from urban centres.

In the imagery of two nations described by Webster, black women are presented as more 'naturally' suited to menial labour (see also Carby 1997). The flip side of this is that white women came to be understood as more capable in the domestic realm. However, the narrator in *Second-Class Citizen* asserts that it was not only white Britons who subscribed to this logic, but that it also influenced Nigerian women's selection of a foster-mother for their children:

> No one cared whether a woman was suitable or not, no one wanted to know whether the house was clean or not; all they wanted to be sure of was that the foster-mother was white. The concept of 'whiteness' could cover a multitude of sins. (44)

Here, the narrator alludes to another paradox at the heart of the racial politics of domesticity: that not all white women are good mothers with good homes, but that 'whiteness' actually compensates for the potential *lack* of these qualities. While Adah's decision to keep her children with her challenges the racial hierarchy that denies the visibility of biological reproduction to black immigrant mothers, Emecheta's introduction of the character of Trudy serves to undercut this mythology of whiteness. Although Adah does not seek a foster mother, her work commitments and Francis's proclamation that he can no longer look after 'her' children mean that she must find a child-minder to take them during the day. Adah finds Trudy through a Nigerian neighbour, who seems to follow the trend of the women described above in recommending her without any sort of checks. Adah, in her desperation, relies on Francis's descriptions of Trudy and agrees to leave her children with her. Noticing changes in their behaviour, Adah goes to meet the woman herself:

> She did not like what she saw. Trudy's house, like all the houses in the area, was a slum, a house that had been condemned ages ago. The backyard was filled with rubbish, broken furniture, and very near an uncovered dustbin was the toilet, the old type of toilet with faulty plumbing, smelly and damp. […] She walked in and entered the sitting-

> room. She saw Trudy, a plump woman with too much makeup. Her lips
> were scarlet and so were her nails. The colour of her hair was too black
> to be real. Maybe it was originally brown like that of her little girls; but
> the jet black dye gave her whole personality a sort of vulgarity. She was
> laughing loudly at a joke which she was sharing with a man who was
> holding her at a funny angle. (49-50)

This description of Trudy's house and Trudy herself paints a picture of an environment that is completely unsuitable for children and a woman who is much more akin to the image of a prostitute than that of a mother.

When her son Vicky gets sick with meningitis, Adah goes to confront Trudy about her neglect, only to find she is the one accused of causing the illness herself from 'the water you drank at home, you know, before you brought him here [to England]' (65). Here, Trudy uses Adah's appointed status as a 'neglectful black mother' to divert attention from her own failings as a child-minder. Trudy's accusation serves the function of 'othering' Adah and her family in order to reaffirm her own precarious citizenship in the nation of English domestic respectability. Adah reacts to such an accusation with incredulity:

> Was she dreaming? What was it Trudy was saying about the child she
> had had in the best hospital in Nigeria, in the best ward, under the most
> efficient Swiss gynaecologist that the Americans could get for her as a
> member of staff, which was one of the innumerable fringe benefits
> attached to working for the Americans? (65)

Here we see the contrast between the way Trudy views Adah, as a neglectful black immigrant mother, and how Adah sees herself, as an elite member of Nigerian society. The reader is made to understand that Trudy is in fact guilty of causing Vicky's illness and therefore clearly fits into the 'bad mother' category, in spite of her whiteness. However, we are also continually reminded of Adah's status as a 'good mother,' in spite of her blackness. Her description of Vicky's birth in the 'best' hospital in the 'best' ward with the 'most efficient' gynaecologist stands in opposition to Trudy's position at the bottom of white society in London. Adah's mothering credentials are further bolstered by her almost superhuman abilities to 'know' when her child is sick:

> Yes, how had she known? How could a mother tell another woman who
> had never given birth to a baby that sometimes she lived in her children?

> How could she explain that if her son underwent an operation her own
> body would ache; how could Adah tell Cynthia that when she was
> looking at a fishcake, she had seen Vicky's wet face, twisting in pain,
> reflected in the window? (57-58)

Emecheta's depictions of white English women as childless (Cynthia) or prostitutes (Trudy) – both perversions of woman's role as a loving mother – serve to emphasize Adah's good qualities. As a result, Emecheta performs the same rhetorical othering of English women that Trudy does to Adah. This move serves to undermine the racist logic that defines 'whiteness' as the basis for good mothering practices while also legitimizing Adah's position in her host nation. By emphasizing that her mothering credentials are equal to, if not better than, her white counterparts, Adah can claim membership in the nation of Englishness defined by particular norms of domesticity. However, this discursive turn is accomplished by (re)deploying essentialist categories of womanhood, such that Adah is produced as the 'Madonna' to Trudy's 'whore', which does very little to interrogate the gendered terms through which this membership is determined, as it still articulates 'good' mothering as women's only legitimate path to belonging in the nation.

What Emecheta's representation does succeed at, however, is showing how attitudes towards mothering are produced in public discourse, which in this case is formed at the intersection of national anxieties about gender and race. While the narrator of *Second-Class Citizen* and the authors of *West African Families in Britain* interpret fostering as a consequence of the clash of two cultures, Adah's experiences undercut such explanations. The perceived essential difference in the 'values' attributed to mothering in each culture is used to obscure the possibility of institutionalised inequality, and it is through the tension produced between Adah's experiences of mothering in Britain and the narrated discourse which attempts to explain away those experiences that Emecheta's critique emerges. Through her representation of private fostering, Emecheta shows how a concern ostensibly rooted in the 'private' gets deployed as a measure of belonging and unbelonging within larger collectivities. Her

critique is aimed at the diasporic community for subscribing to gendered notions about black woman/motherhood and at the larger national narratives in Britain which facilitate such attitudes. It is by reading across the two levels of discourse within *Second-Class Citizen* – the personal/narrative and collective/sociological – that this interplay can be revealed. In the next section, I will look at some of the ways that Emecheta undercuts the division between the public and private itself, both in the novel and in the conditions of its production, and how this sheds further light on her representation of mothering/motherhood in diaspora.

BOUNDARY CROSSINGS

As should be clear from my analysis so far, there is a tension throughout *Second-Class Citizen* between its critique of gender hierarchies and its critique of racial hierarchies. As in Andrade's reading of the interaction between the private/feminist and political/nationalist elements of Emecheta's later work, there is a need to read across these seemingly competing preoccupations in order to adequately interpret Emecheta's project in *Second-Class Citizen*. John McLeod attempts to rectify this tension by arguing that Emecheta's 'Adah' novels are concerned with envisioning what he refers to as a 'resistant subaltern space' for their female protagonist which allows her to move beyond 'the exclusionary realms of class, race and gender' (2004, 101). Such a space, McLeod asserts, is glimpsed in the moments when Adah is exposed to transcultural influences, such as during her time working at the Chalk Farm Library in *Second-Class Citizen*. This space becomes, for McLeod, a 'hopeful alternative' to the family home and the 'squalid street' where her second-class citizenship is created (*ibid*). In this reading, the home represents the private sphere where Adah is subjugated by her husband on account of her gender and the street that of the public, where she is subjugated by British society on account of her race. McLeod's argument then seems to suggest that, in the 'imaginative projection' of such London spaces as the Chalk Farm

Library, Emecheta is creating a realm between and outside of the rigid structure of public and private spheres.

He comes to this conclusion by setting up a contrast between what he calls 'filial obligation', described as 'an adherence to the social mores of a family or tribe' and 'affiliative encounters', which occur 'where groups are formed and renegotiated across the boundaries of race, gender, nation or culture' (*ibid*, 95). In his reading of *Second-Class Citizen*, McLeod argues that Adah rejects the 'filial' obligations put upon her by family (both hers and her husband's) and the surrounding ethnic/diasporic community in London in favour of the 'affiliative' relationships she builds at such places as the Chalk Farm Library. In McLeod's assessment, 'Filial relationships are rarely enabling in [Emecheta's] writing', arguing that, in Emecheta's fiction, 'families are rarely happy places [...], and the achievements of her heroines are often judged on the extent to which they leave the restricted enclaves of their families, which often means their home' (*ibid,* 103). While this reading does highlight the fact that Emecheta is looking to move beyond models of nation and race as the only forms of belonging available, it also produces some important inconsistencies.

Firstly, this reasoning sets up a somewhat problematic binary between what are essentially designated as 'natural' connections and those which are cultivated in a person's life through their encounters with the world. In another article in which McLeod deploys the same contrast (2006), he makes a more explicit link to Edward Said's use of the filiative/affiliative model in his essay 'Secular Criticism' (1991). In this later article, McLeod writes:

> Said's observations [in 'Secular Criticism'] offer a vocabulary –
> especially the terms 'filiation' and 'affiliation' – which one might
> borrow to engage with the often tangential trajectory of postcolonial
> writing, particularly as regards the rendering of the family. (2006, 46)

In Said's 'vocabulary', filiative belonging is explicitly associated with the natural, biological and reproductive,[26] while affiliative modes are 'provided by institutions, associations, and communities whose social existence was not in fact guaranteed by biology' (1991, 17; qtd. in McLeod 2006, 46). Therefore, in relying on the filiative/affiliative model for his analysis, McLeod essentially re-establishes the public/private division he is arguing that Emecheta is looking to move beyond in her representation of London space.

The second problem is that McLeod's conclusion that what he refers to as 'filial relationships' are rejected within Emechata's writing seems to neglect the important role that children play, both in her fiction and in the conditions of its production. 'Home' and 'family' in McLeod's assessment above, are understood in a somewhat limited way, denoting either the in-laws that Adah must contend with in Lagos or the nuclear family of husband, wife and children that she experiences in London. There is no suggestion, for example, that what Adah creates when she leaves her husband Francis in *Second-Class Citizen* might also constitute a 'family'. In some ways, his reasoning actually serves to reinforce rather than counteract imperialist-feminist (mis)readings of Emecheta's fiction, where the traditional structures of ethnic community and family are read as constraints on the female protagonist's development, and escape to the freedom of metropolitan spaces and institutions is posed as the only viable solution. McLeod's conclusion seems to set up the same either/or situation, in which Emecheta's protagonists are seen to exchange an African identity (characterised by 'filial' modes of belonging) for the 'affiliative' encounters offered by the Western nation-state.

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[26] Said cites recurring images of 'childless couples, orphaned children, aborted childbirths, and unregenerately celibate men and women' as evidence of a turning away from filiative modes of belonging in Modernist writing (1991, 17; qtd. in McLeod 2006, 46).

In contrast to McLeod's assessment that the only 'resistant subaltern space' available to Adah is found in the transcultural encounters she has in the public sphere, I argue that Emecheta interrogates both raced and gendered hierarchies in *Second-Class Citizen* by creating an alternative space *within* the domestic that challenges the logic of the public/private divide itself. It is true that the home Adah shares with her husband in London is certainly not a happy one, given the physical and verbal abuse that she experiences at his hands within its walls. This abuse is accompanied by the pressure Francis puts upon Adah to be the primary earner for the household, while she is afforded little in the way of rights within the home space. As one critic articulates, Adah's position in the household resembles that of a female 'slave' who must toil to feed her 'master' as well as satisfy his sexual urges (Oha 1996, 298). There is also a pronounced shift in Francis's attitude towards his own children between Lagos and London. While Emecheta's childbearing capabilities are highly valued at home in Nigeria, Francis goes the way of the neighbours in encouraging Adah to foster them out and he eventually rejects them altogether by the end of the novel. For Francis, the children are an 'inconvenience' that prevents Adah from earning money for the family. He resents the time she must spend away from work during her pregnancies and expects her to return shortly after giving birth. In this way, there is a parallel between Adah's perceived role within the British state, as a worker rather than a mother, and her role within the home, where Francis values her productive work over that of the reproductive. By reading across the two spheres, we see how the novel's critique of gender hierarchy within the family home interacts with its critique of racial hierarchies outside of it. In both spaces, practices of mothering become a form of resistance against the reduction of black womanhood to a status defined only in relation to wage labour.

However, there is also another critique enacted by Emecheta's representation of Adah's position within her marital life, which is aimed at a British feminist movement with limited capacity to appreciate and incorporate the experiences of black women. As

discussed earlier in this thesis, one of the central aims of 'second-wave feminism' was a campaign to get women out of the home and into paid labour in the public sphere and that one of the consequences of this approach was that it tended to reify the division between the spheres while also devaluing the work that is done in the realm of the private. Emecheta's awareness of these changing gender politics at the time in which she was writing is evident in moments in the novel where she appears to speak directly to potential feminist readers through her protagonist:

> She had been reading a number of women's magazines, and was surprised to read of mothers saying that they were bored just being housewives. She was not that type of woman. There were so many things she planned to do, and she did them. (173)

As previously articulated with reference to the work of Simone de Beauvoir, the case for women's emancipation from the private was often made on the basis that women are unable to become full subjects without engaging in productive work, seen to exist only in the public sphere of politics and the market.

The abuse Adah experiences at the hands of her husband in spite of the work she does outside the home is testament that having a job is not necessarily a guarantee of agency within the home itself. Although it is Adah's salary that pays the rent for their flat, Francis still positions himself as its rightful owner. When Adah tells him about the completion of her first novel, for example, he reacts mockingly saying, 'Whatever was he going to hear next? A woman writer in *his own house*, in a white man's country' (178, emphasis added). As Oha articulates, 'Adah is perceived not as house-owner or as co-house-owner, but as a squatter' (1996, 298). The paid work that Adah engages in does not have the effect of liberating her from patriarchal subordination in the way feminists might expect, but instead reinforces her position as servant in the 'master's' house where she resides but will never 'belong' in any real sense.

However, Emecheta presents a third possibility in *Second-Class Citizen* which operates outside of this public/private framework, while incorporating the valuable aspects of both. After the birth of her fourth child, Adah is insistent that she will not go

back to work straight after and uses various tactics to convince Francis to go to work at for the Post Office. She describes this period as follows:

> [F]or the first time in her life she was a real housewife. It only lasted five months but how she wished that her life pattern could have continued that way. […] All Adah had to do every day was to take Titi to school, do her shopping at the Crescent, take the three babies to the park for an hour or two, come home, give them their lunch, tuck them up to rest, and write *The Bride Price*. (173)

Statements such as these are perhaps why the work has been described as a 'flawed' feminist novel, given that it appears to endorse the idea that women's place should be in the home (Porter 1996, 268). However, given that it is explicitly set against the complaints Adah reads in 'women's magazines' in the quotation above, we are meant to understand it as a direct rebuttal of the limited awareness of middle-class British women who have no appreciation of the experiences of someone like Adah, who is inscribed within a different set of gender politics and whose wages are a necessity to support her family. Like her refusal to relinquish her mothering responsibilities, Adah's glorification of domestic labour here can be interpreted as another form of resistance against commodification by her husband as well as the British state.

Even more importantly, however, the positive impact that being a 'real housewife' has for Adah is explicitly linked to the time that she now has to write her novel. This entangling of the domestic and the creative is a key element of Emecheta's writing, both inside and outside of the text. In *Second-Class Citizen,* Adah transforms a traumatic domestic space into a productive, creative space where she can achieve a kind of self-actualisation that is never fully possible via wage labour because of its participation in hierarchical structures both inside and outside the home (i.e. it facilitates the racist agenda of the British state and Francis's attempts to turn her into his (wage) 'slave'). Importantly, the writing Adah does is not immediately aimed at earning money, but is instead framed as something she does only for her own personal development:

> During the time she was writing [*The Bride Price*], she was oblivious of
> everything except her children. […] It mattered little to her whether it
> was published or not, all that mattered was that she had written a book.
> (175)

For Adah, it is the writing of her first novel within the home rather than the jobs that she holds outside of it that enables her to become a fully-fledged subject and exert her agency. Significantly, it is only when Francis's long-time abuse of Adah culminates in the burning of her completed manuscript that she resolves to finally leave him.

The fact that Adah uses her time as a housewife to engage in creative production also challenges the separate spheres model through its blending of productive and reproductive space. In her essay 'Feminism with a Small "f"' (1988a), Emecheta describes an encounter which indicates how such a mixing of the two was seen as incompatible with 'feminist' ideals:

> I had my photograph taken once in my office where I do my writing. The
> photo-journalist was a staunch feminist, and she was so angry that my
> office was in my kitchen and a package of cereal was in the background.
> I was letting the woman's movement down by allowing such a
> photograph to be taken, she cried. But that was where I worked. (1988a,
> 179–180)

This journalist's objection to taking a photo of a renowned female writer in such a domestic setting implies that an image of success in the realm of 'the public' should have no trace (in this case, a box of cereal) of the domestic work that continues to go on in the background. Adah's statement above that she was oblivious of everything except her children while writing gestures at this mingling of the productive and creative with the reproductive and domestic. It also seems to refer back to the dedication at the beginning of *Second-Class Citizen*, which reads, 'To my dear children […] without whose sweet background noises this book would not have been written.' In her autobiography, Emecheta comments on the disbelief that surrounded such an inscription when the book was first published:

> Critics have since doubted the sincerity of this dedication, saying 'How
> could the noises of five young children be sweet?' But they forget many
> things. They forget that when I was that age, I did not have a place I
> could call my home. […] My own children had a home, a proper
> breakfast, clean clothes on their backs, and by God's grace they didn't

have to worry if they were having any lunch – they knew they would.
Thus I found the mischievous noises of my contented children sweet.
Then critics have asked, 'But how can you write with the children?'
Again, I have to write because of them. (60-61)

Alice Walker discusses Emecheta's dedication in her treatise on womanism *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* (1983), asserting that 'Emecheta is a writer and a mother, and it is because she is both that she writes at all' (67). In *Second-Class Citizen*, Adah expresses this mingling of the maternal and the creative using a bodily metaphor – she describes the completed manuscript of *The Bride Price* as her 'brainchild,' saying, 'I felt so fulfilled when I finished it, just as if I made another baby' (176).

This explicit framing of the 'productive' work of writing with the 'reproductive' work of mothering poses a challenge to the structures (both inside and outside the home) which position Adah, a black female immigrant, as a worker rather than a mother, as she constructs a creative space within the domestic in which the female subject can be fully actualised. Emecheta's insistence that her domestic role is part and parcel of the process of creative production also challenges feminist models that only perceive the domestic and reproductive as inhibitors of women's creativity and subjectivity. Emecheta thus provides an alternative to a familiar trope of women's writing in the home which has been so often embraced by feminist critics, that of Virginia Woolf's 'room of one's own' (1989). Where Woolf's 'room' is a separate space, cut off from the reproductive functions of the private sphere, Emecheta's is best represented by her kitchen-office, where the creative and the domestic, productive and reproductive intertwine in a positive way. The image of the kitchen-office thus provides a model through which to fully appreciate both the content of Emecheta's fiction and the conditions of its production.

This brings us back to McLeod's reading that the only 'resistant subaltern space' available to Adah is in the world of paid labour. As I have shown, there are elements of both her position within the British state and her marriage life that threaten to undermine this as a fully resistant space. In tying the culmination of Adah's personal

development to creative production rooted in the domestic sphere, Emecheta attributes a value to this space and the reproductive work that goes on there which is often excluded from feminist readings. Furthermore, Emecheta's explicit reference to her children as essential to the success of her writing, such as in the dedication to *Second-Class Citizen*, challenges the idea that home and family are always rejected in her writing. Instead, it is about carving out a new kind of home space where female creativity and agency can thrive alongside the domestic labour and familial relationships which facilitate its coming into being.

EMECHETA'S AMBIVALENCES

As should be implicit in the position of this chapter within the thesis overall, I wish to present Emecheta's *Second-Class Citizen* as a point of departure for approaching contemporary narratives of migration, an alternative 'foundational' novel from the ones that are normally deployed in such studies. Unlike the male-authored works ordinarily discussed in this manner, Emecheta supplies a much-needed female vision of London life for black immigrants in the post-war years. This vision is accompanied by different struggles and preoccupations which straddle the realms of public and private, exposing how the intersection of gendered and racial forms of discrimination come to bear on both spaces. By representing domestic and reproductive practices as implicated in exclusionary nationalist narratives as much as the more commonly referred to 'public' concerns such as housing and work, Emecheta genders the racial politics of the time. Furthermore, where walking through London's city streets becomes an expression of creativity for Sam Selvon's 'lonely' migrants (through the renaming and remapping of its iconic spaces), Emecheta's autobiographical protagonist draws creative energy from the maternal labour she carries out in the domestic realm.

Second-Class Citizen also challenges the limited vision of the women's movement at the time by asserting the value of domestic and reproductive labour for those who may otherwise be denied it. While the reproductive and domestic labour of

white, British women was held up as the ultimate mark of belonging in the nationalist narrative, that of black women came to be represented as a 'problem' needing to be contained or obscured from view. As mentioned above, Emecheta's critique of gender hierarchies has been described as ultimately 'flawed'. However, the 'flaws' in its feminism are not down to its apparent endorsement of housewifery, but rather in its occasional lapses into reproducing essentialist notions of 'womanhood', which come through in her representation of Trudy described above.

Similarly, John McLeod's reading suggests that the novel's postcolonial, anti-racist message is also incomplete. However, as I have shown, this is in part down to a failure to read 'across the threshold' to see how resistance to racial hierarchies is a central aspect of the novel's (re)valuation of the domestic. Emecheta's resistance against the racist attitudes circulating at the time is nevertheless still let down by the same reductive reasoning which hinders the 'feminist' credentials of the novel. Despite the fact that Adah's representation of private fostering and the tension between sociological and personal discourse serves to undermine the 'cultural' explanation provided by external commentators such as June Ellis and her co-authors, some of Adah's own pronouncements threaten to re-harden essentialist definitions of culture and race. These are most evident in her descriptions of Francis, during which Adah laments that he has not been changed by his encounter with 'English' ways and often points to his 'Africanness' as the source of his 'uncivilised' attitudes towards women (24, 173, 175). Given the closeness of Emecheta's own experiences to Adah's, much of this is most likely down to Emecheta's anger coming through the text, however, as McLeod rightly points out, it could also be seen as colluding with the othering of African migrants in London (2004, 105).

This tendency to lapse into binary logic regarding gender and culture in *Second-Class Citizen* detracts from Emecheta's otherwise nuanced representation of the entanglements of public and private, productive and reproductive. Although Andrade

cites productive ambivalence as a feature of Emecheta's later work, which can be made meaningful by the kind of allegorical reading she suggests, in *Second-Class Citizen*, there is instead a sense of contradiction between the novel's overall message and the interjections of reductive reasoning by its protagonist. This shows that Emecheta has not yet fully worked out how to formulate her critique on two levels, i.e. to challenge gender hierarchies without reducing them to a matter of culture or to challenge racial hierarchies without resorting to narrow conceptions of woman/hood to make her point. In the next chapter, I will look at Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* which, I argue, is more successful in negotiating this difficult terrain. Deploying a more complex rhetorical structure, *Brick Lane* undercuts essentialist ideas about womanhood and culture by pointing more explicitly than Emecheta does to the discourses of 'authenticity' which circulate around her characters and the settings in which they act.

5. Performing Home in Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*

> It was the way she might look at a familiar object, […] a blankness
> reserved for known quantities like pieces of furniture or brown women in
> saris who cooked rice and raised children and obeyed their husbands.
> (Ali 2004, 391)

Monica Ali's 2003 novel *Brick Lane* is probably the most well-known recent contribution to the genre of migration fiction, following (for the most part) the conventional plot structure of departure, arrival and settling, accompanied by periods of culture shock, adjustment and adaptation. Specifically, a young Bangladeshi woman called Nazneen is brought to London following her marriage to a much older, though 'educated' man named Chanu and they make their home on a council estate in London's East End. The novel begins with the moment of Nazneen's troubled birth, telling the story of how she was 'left to her fate' rather than brought to hospital to struggle against destiny (15). This is then followed by a flash-forward to her married life in London, narrated chronologically over a sixteen-year period. However, this narrative is frequently interrupted by letters from Nazneen's sister, Hasina, whose much more turbulent path leads her from marriage to the garment factories of Dhaka then, following a brief spell in prostitution, to domestic labour and eventual remarriage. These textual representations of another Bangladeshi woman's trajectory provide a contrast to the life of the novel's main protagonist while also introducing a comparative urban setting.[27]

Despite the title's explicit reference to a well-known urban space, the majority of the novel's action unfolds within the intimate spaces of the home. This limits the reader's knowledge of the world beyond Nazneen's flat to the 'shapes and shadows' she can see from her window and the fragments of public life that come through her front door (Ali 2004, 17). At the same time, the novel has been praised by critics for the way

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[27] As is widely noted, the original title of the novel was not *Brick Lane* but 'Seven Seas and Thirteen Rivers' to denote the distance between the novel's two settings, London and Dhaka, giving them more equal weight. The idea to change it came from Ali's publishers.

it opens up a hidden world, giving the reader the feeling of trespassing into spaces not easily accessed. In the words of one reviewer, *Brick Lane* 'opened up a world whose contours I could recognise, but which I needed Monica Ali to make me understand' (Bedell 2003). Although the novel has been embraced as an important document for bringing London's Bangladeshi community out from obscurity into popular consciousness, for many who live in this community, *Brick Lane* was a blatant misrepresentation of the private world on show. In a letter signed by a local organisation called the Greater Sylhet Welfare and Development Council and sent to Ali and *The Guardian* newspaper shortly after the book's publication, the signatories asserted that the novel was 'a completely stereotypical view of Bangladeshis living in Brick Lane and one we simply do not recognise' (Taylor 2003).

The novel's realism and unmasked geographic specificity is partly to blame for this reaction, but also, as Sukhev Sandu remarks, the very fact that the novel is so often celebrated for having 'mapped out a new, invisible London' actually affects our reading of the work, giving us expectations that are not normally applied to a work of fiction (2003). Therefore, what both the defenders and detractors of Ali's novel have in common is that they problematically treat the work as a document that promises to reveal some sort of authentic 'truth' about the Bangladeshi community in East London. They simply disagree about the value and accuracy of what is revealed. However, Jane Hiddleston complicates this tendency to measure the novel's validity by the success of its truth-telling by pointing out the ways that *Brick Lane* calls attention to its own artifice. She argues that the work alludes to its own myth-making tendencies, thus exposing the 'traps and lures of the representation process itself' (2005, 60).

One of the greatest tendencies for myth-making portrayed in the novel is around the very notion of home itself – both in its physical incarnation as a domestic space and a more abstract notion of home as a space linked to cultural identity and belonging. This tendency to mythologize home is summed up in the novel by the character of Dr Azad,

who diagnoses Brick Lane's Bangladeshi community with what he calls 'Going Home Syndrome' (32). This syndrome eventually manifests itself as a literal return home for Nazneen's husband Chanu, but for most of the novel's characters, home is something that can and must be created in the diaspora space of London's East End.

In this chapter, I want to unpack the two meanings of home as played out in Ali's novel, showing how they overlap and inform one another. In order to do this, I will draw on Judith Butler's work on performativity which, though not explicitly concerned with migration or cross-cultural encounter, is useful for the way that it reconceptualises identity as something fluid. This conceptualisation can then be set against the various processes and discourses that attempt to fix specific migrant identities in time and space (i.e. as clinging to the past through 'tradition' or as persistently 'foreign' or 'exotic'). With particular reference to Butler's assertion that identities are performed and acted 'in concert', I argue that the novel's protagonist, Nazneen, and its setting, Brick Lane, both 'perform' home in different ways and that by exposing this performativity, *Brick Lane* actually disrupts its mythological power (Butler 2004). Although Dr Azad applies his diagnosis to the whole community, the burden to perpetuate the 'Going Home Syndrome' falls largely on the novel's female characters. While on the surface Nazneen and the place of Brick Lane serve to reinforce stable cultural identities that sustain the community's Going Home Syndrome, by exposing their performative processes, the novel presents a picture which is much more contested, involving complex negotiations and improvisations. Furthermore, simplified readings of *Brick Lane* as the progress narrative of an oppressed woman's journey away from the constraints of her culture towards freedom and emancipation in the West become less convincing once these performative elements are laid bare. Instead, what emerges is a female protagonist whose role-playing exposes our own limited terms for 'reading' a character like Nazneen, caught as she is between the figure of the subjugated victim of 'tradition' and that of the Westernised and liberated 'traitor' to her culture.

In her book, *Undoing Gender*, Judith Butler introduces the idea that in order for us to exist as socially viable (human)beings, we must present ourselves in a way that makes us *recognizable* to the sociocultural and historical world in which we live. She asserts that this recognition (or unrecognition) is further mediated through the body, its terms changing depending on '[the body's] race, the legibility of that race, its morphology, the recognition of that morphology, its sex, the verifiability of that sex, its ethnicity, the categorical understanding of that ethnicity' (2004, 2). What she stresses, however, is that our personhood cannot be said to be fully in our control, but is always mediated through norms that are 'authored' in our absence.

In the process of challenging gender norms, Butler argues that the desire to be recognized runs counter to the desire to undo the very norms that prevent one from accessing a 'liveable life', turning recognition itself into a site of power. Nevertheless, Butler does not abandon the possibility of change in the face of this paradox. Rather, she says, 'if gender is a kind of doing, an incessant activity performed, […] it is a practice of improvisation within a scene of constraint' (1). To what extent this improvisation is possible is determined by the discourses and institutions available to support it and how well one is able to navigate such discourses and institutions.[28]

In the above epigraph, Nazneen takes on the role of this recognized body, the 'known quantity' that is understood within the bounds of how she is marked by her brownness and her sari. In this moment, the gaze of the woman Nazneen passes on the street interprets her within the confines of the 'knowable' Nazneen, limited by the terms available within the space she finds herself to be recognized as human. However, this kind of recognition reduces Nazneen to object-status: 'her keys that she had just found, the kitchen table as she wiped the juice her daughter had spilled, a blankness reserved for pieces of furniture' (391). And yet, Nazneen challenges the woman's gaze – she

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[28] The example Butler gives is the diagnosis of Sexual Identity Disorder that must be achieved before someone is granted permission for sex reassignment surgery. This means that in order to access a more 'liveable life' as a different sex, one must first negotiate a discourse which pathologises such a desire.

waves. This simple gesture does not completely free her from the objectifying gaze, but it challenges the terms on which its recognition is given. To return to Butler, the practice of performing gender is not done in isolation: 'One does not "do" one's gender alone,' she says, 'One is always "doing" with or for another even if the other is only imaginary' (2004, 2). The moment described above is about Nazneen's (mis)recognition by those outside her community, yet for a character who spends most of the novel within the confines of the domestic space (if we include the extended domestic space of the estate) this is not her main audience. Nazneen's ability to challenge the terms on which she is recognized by outsiders is constrained by the more pressing need to be recognized by those within.

Ali sets out this scene of constraint early on in the novel, introducing us to several female characters who have pushed the boundaries of improvisation, to the extent that they are no longer recognized by their peers. Firstly, there is the figure of Mrs Azad, whose perceived over-assimilation into British culture is presented as a shameful secret preventing Dr Azad from returning Chanu's hospitality. Chanu imagines ways to 'prod' Azad to invite him to dinner, including a humorous 'So, Azad, what are you hiding at your house?' (89). When Chanu resolves to find out by turning up at Dr Azad's home unannounced, we are made to understand that what he is actually hiding is his wife. The image at the door, with 'purple lacquered nails' and hair 'streaked with some kind of rust-coloured paint' is so unrecognizable that it leads Chanu to assume they are at the wrong house (106-7). In addition, there are other minor characters in Nazneen's world whose attempts to challenge the norms that shape their lives threaten their position in community and kinship structures. We hear of Jorina's job at a garment factory from Mrs Islam before we even meet her in the text, almost a hundred pages later. We learn that she has been 'shamed' along with her children and that her husband has begun to sleep with other women as a result (97). We also hear

about Hanufa, whose decision to take a massage class has caused the women, including Nazneen, to freeze her out of their social group.

Jorina, Hanufa and Mrs Azad have improvised themselves into unknown territory. However, because of Mrs Azad's class and physical separation from the world of the estate, the terms on which she is recognized by others are different from those felt by Nazneen and the other women in her social circle. Mrs Azad is no longer marked by her sari or lack of English. Instead her varnished nails and hair dye, though unrecognizable to Chanu and Nazneen, allow her to be understood by the white Britons among whom she lives and works. In fact, Mrs Azad's seemingly uncomplicated transition to British cultural norms leads her to condemn women who 'sit in the kitchen grinding spices all day and learn only two words of English' (114). With a glance at Nazneen, who we already know has only learned the English words for 'sorry' and 'thank you' at this point in the novel, we are meant to understand that Mrs Azad's judgements are directed at her. With this statement, Mrs Azad seems to be interpreting Nazneen in similar terms as the white woman she passes on the street.

The presence of characters such as Jorina and Hanufa, whose actions challenge community norms to the extent that they become excluded from that community, sets the scene of constraint for the reader. The consequences they endure help us to understand the lines that cannot be crossed. Although, externally, Nazneen remains within the confines of recognisable norms, throughout the first half of the novel we are constantly being made aware of another Nazneen that lives inside the character that speaks and acts and it is through the tension between this speaking, acting Nazneen and the narrative voice which renders her thoughts that her resistance to such norms can be revealed.

NAZNEEN AND PERFORMANCE

In an article about the effects of realism in *Brick Lane*, Alistair Cormack (2007) argues that the novel's third person narrative voice is a form of mediation that prevents us from

fully accessing Nazneen's consciousness. His reasoning is firstly that the narrative is a
translation, knowing as we do that Nazneen can only think and speak in Bengali for
most of the novel. Secondly, he notes that much of the descriptive narration is in a
linguistic register that Nazneen would not possess. What I would argue, however, is that
the narrative voice is made deliberately distinct from the character Nazneen that acts
and speaks. Although the narration is not a direct rendering of Nazneen's
consciousness, it serves a greater function than to simply translate Nazneen's un-
educated Bengali into English literary prose. The fact that it is a very different voice
from that which we might reasonably assume Nazneen could possess performs the
function of distancing Nazneen's thoughts from her words and actions. As a result, we
get the impression that the Nazneen that acts and speaks for most of the novel is a kind
of performance so that she may be recognized (in Butler's sense) by those around her.

This performative aspect of Nazneen's character is made explicit in an early
scene in the novel, in which the glimpse of an African bus driver launches Chanu into a
history lesson on the trans-Atlantic slave trade, to which Nazneen simply replies, 'If you
say so, husband'. However, this line is followed by a narrative explanation:

> She had begun to answer him like this. She meant to say something else
> by it: sometimes that she disagreed, sometimes that she didn't
> understand or that he was talking rubbish, sometimes that he was mad.
> But he heard it only as, 'If you say so'. (99)

Here, we are made aware that the phrase 'if you say so' is a form that can contain many
different meanings, while Chanu has no knowledge of its hidden content.

In fact, nowhere is the sense of Nazneen's doubleness more striking than in dialogic
encounters with her husband, such as in the scene mentioned earlier in which Chanu
wonders why Dr Azad has not asked him to dinner:

> 'Maybe he never thinks of it,' Chanu continued. 'He just needs a little
> prod. Or it could be that he doesn't consider me part of his circle. A
> doctor is a cut above. But what is a doctor, really, when you think about
> it? He memorizes everything from books: broken legs, colds and viruses,
> […]. It's learning by rote. Symptom and cure. Hardly an intellectual
> pursuit. No. He's just a finger blown up to the size of a banana tree. Let

him guard his house, and put some barbed wire around it too. I am not interested'

Nazneen put the baby on the floor while she hunted for the spoon. Beneath the table, the files and papers had been breeding, intermarrying with balls of string, boxes of staples, rolls of labels chains of clips. A pair of pants lay exhausted on the heap; a sock sat fossilized in dust. The spoon was nowhere to be seen. The baby crawled under the table with her and pulled her hair. […] 'Hello,' she told him, 'I'm looking for your spoon'

'Maybe if I get the promotion,' Chanu went on, 'then he will be more inclined to extend his hospitality. That's probably the kind of man he is.'

Nazneen came up. She scooped the baby under one arm. She checked Chanu's face to see if he required a response from her. He was mulling over his words, scrunching them this way and that, into a wrinkled brow, a taut cheek. His eyes looked somewhere far off. She was not needed. (89-90)

The simultaneity of this passage – Chanu thinking out loud about whether Dr Azad is snubbing him while Nazneen's mind is focused on her new baby – adds to the sense of performance. Nazneen's body goes through the motions of listening ('She checked Chanu's face to see if he required a response from her') but the narrative voice is engaged in expressing Nazneen's observations in highly wrought imagery (the 'breeding' files and papers, the 'fossilized' sock). The contrast between Chanu's ramblings and Nazneen's thoughts is employed frequently in the novel as a way of adding humour, but it also produces a feeling of disjointedness, where the extensive narrative commentary in scenes like the one above creates distance between the realm of Chanu's speech and the mind of the protagonist. Nazneen goes through the motions – performs – but is not really 'there'.

We can contrast the scene above with one in which Nazneen and Razia discuss Jorina, only a few pages later.

'I talked to Jorina. There are jobs going in the factory.'

'Oh,' said Nazneen. 'Mrs Islam says Jorina has been shamed. Her husband goes with other women. She started work, and everyone said, "He cannot feed her." Even though he was working himself, he was shamed. And because of this he became reckless and started going with other women. So Jorina has brought shame on them all.'

Razia snorted. 'Is that what Mrs Islam says? Let her say what she likes, it will not stop me.'

'What about the community? She will not be the only one.'

> 'Will the community feed me? Will it buy footballs for my son? Let the
> community say what it will. I say this to the community.' And she
> flicked her fingers.
> 'What does your husband say?'
> Razia narrowed her eyes. She looked down her long, straight nose at the
> baby. 'Mrs Islam is one to talk. She's a fine one to talk.'
> 'Mrs Islam?'
> 'She of the thousand hankies.' Razia smiled for the first time.
> Nazneen laughed. 'What is it all about? All those handkerchiefs.' (97)

In this scene, we get much more quoted speech from Nazneem and almost no narrative commentary. Unlike in her discussions with Chanu, Nazneen says exactly what she thinks (even if this may not be particularly palatable to her interlocutor) without need for qualification to the reader. Furthermore, we get a genuine bodily response to the conversation – she laughs. Scenes such as this give the reader respite from the extensive narrative commentary that serves as a replacement for Nazneen's side of the dialogue, as in the earlier scene with Chanu. The shift from narrative commentary to quoted speech in these two passages signals a narrowing of the distance between the interior Nazneen and the one who acts and speaks, implying that the purely female spaces and moments in the novel may offer more freedom from the pressure to perform.

In addition to these dialogic moments in which Nazneen's performativity is implicitly present, we also find it evident in her actions. Directly after Chanu denies Nazneen English lessons, we get a description of her night-time eating habits, involving a secret meal of yoghurt sprinkled with sugar. This ritual is framed as a side effect of her tendency to perform in Chanu's presence:

> 'Eat! Eat!' her husband told her at mealtimes. But for him, she would
> not. She showed her self-restraint like this. Her self-denial. She wanted
> to make it visible. (77)

Nazneen's 'restraint' at normal mealtimes is portrayed as a conscious affectation. It is partly a way of proving her capacity for self-sacrifice, a desirable quality in a good Bengali wife and mother, but perhaps more significantly, it is presented as a form of resistance. The ritual yoghurt-eating is cast as an illicit activity: 'It became a habit, then a pleasure, taking solace in these midnight meals' (77). It becomes a kind of game for Nazneen, the performance of self-denial, followed by the secret indulgence.

Furthermore, this indulgence is on a particularly modern kind of snack – a one-portion size tub of yoghurt. The yoghurt is then made into a metaphor for the 'convenience' of life in London, a signal that Nazneen's nostalgia for life in Bangladesh is lessening. However, just as Nazneen begins to lose her romantic attachment to home, the 'Going Home Syndrome' experienced by the novel's male characters seems only to become more pronounced.

As evidenced by the yoghurt scene, it is too simplistic to conclude that Nazneen's performance has been completely imposed upon her, but is rather a persona that she actively cultivates. There is also evidence to suggest that it functions as a strategy for negotiating the everyday challenges of marital life. Consider the exchange below:

> If she wanted something, she asked her husband. But she deferred to
> him. Like this:
> 'The bed is so soft. Does it make your back ache?'
> 'No.'
> 'Good.'
> 'I am making a sketch.'
> 'Let me see. What is it?'
> 'A plan for the house I will build in Dhaka. What do you think of it?'
> 'What shall I say? I am only a girl from the village and I know nothing
> of big houses.'
> 'Do you think it is too grand?'
> 'I don't know anything about houses, or beds.'
> 'What about the bed? Is it too soft for you?' (51)

Here, by affirming to Chanu that she is 'only a girl from the village' Nazneen is able to disarm her husband so that he eventually bends to her wishes and 'decides' to buy a new mattress. Her line is delivered as if part of a script, fulfilling Chanu's interpretation of her, one we know she has heard often from the time they were married. By actively performing this role, Nazneen manages to undermine its meaning, challenging the gendered power-structure that it implies.

The distance between Nazneen as portrayed through the narrative voice and the Nazneen that speaks and acts is most striking in the first half of the novel, where her dialogic silences are (over)compensated by narrative commentary. The lack of narrative

movement combined with the domestic setting has led some critics to characterize the atmosphere in this part of the novel as 'claustrophobic' (Cormack 2007, 714; Lauret 2011, 208), emphasizing the restrictive nature of Nazneen's daily life (Lauret calls attention to the imagery of tombs and boxes in the first part of the novel, for example). On one hand, Nazneen's silences are a representation of her position as observer rather than agent in the social world she now finds herself in. At the same time, the observations she (as the narrative voice) makes on what she sees around her invite us to see beyond the recognised/recognisable body with limited capacity to act and speak. The tension built up between the two registers creates a sense of disjointedness and multilocality that expands and counterbalances the restrictive setting and undermines Nazneen's linguistic subordination within it.

IMPROVISATION AND THE SCENE OF CONSTRAINT

As the novel goes on, we begin to see a change in the relationship between the character Nazneen and the one portrayed through narration. While she does not stop performing, we begin to see deviations from the script that can be interpreted as 'improvisation', to use Butler's term. Just before the novel's second chronological gap following the death of her first child, Nazneen engages in a different kind of performance, one which actively transgresses the role she has inhabited thus far. Seeing a pair of Chanu's trousers draped over a chair, she decides to try them on. After a quick look in the mirror, she then opts instead to put her underskirt back on but to hitch it up to the knees:

> She imagined herself swinging a handbag like the white girls. She pulled the skirt higher, and examined her legs in the mirror. She walked toward the headboard, turning her trunk to catch the rear view, a flash of pants. Close to the wall, eyes to the mirror, she raised one leg as high as she could. She closed her eyes and skated off. (141)

This transformation from a 'simple girl from the village' into a man, then a 'white girl' and finally an ice dancer implies a fluidity of identities that would not have seemed possible earlier in the novel. Here, taking on the guise of a 'white girl' is accomplished by transforming Nazneen's sari into a short skirt, mobilising this symbol of women's

liberation as the marker of transition between roles/identities, as it often is in discourses linking the subjugation of Muslim women to the concealment of female bodies. By presenting us with this explicitly performative moment, Ali seems to be providing us with an acknowledgement of the performative nature of all identities. Through Nazneen's improvisation, the embodied emancipation accorded to the 'white girl' becomes as much a performance of particular recognisable codes and within particular structures as the sari Nazneen wears in her in her role/identity as the 'simple girl from the village'.

Significantly, this moment is bound up with Nazneen's realization that by bringing her son Raqib to the hospital, she has challenged fate in a way her mother would not have done. While she attempts to articulate this to Hasina in a letter, she muses, 'I fought for him.' […] Not accepting. Fighting.' […] Fate! Fate business. […] I move my pen. […] Nobody else here. Nobody else moving this pen.' (142). For the first time an 'I' crops up, not as a direct quote, but as part of the narration. Furthermore, these short lines are presented in a register closer to the one we might expect the character Nazneen to speak in. The 'I' gets created alongside this performance of transgression indicating that as Nazneen's scripted performance moves towards improvisation, we see moments in which the disjointed linguistic realms are brought together and the subject appears, albeit tentatively, for the first time.

As mentioned above, Butler contends that improvisation occurs in a 'scene of constraint' determined by the apparatuses (discourses and institutions) available to support (or prevent) such change (2004, 1). Within the storyworld of *Brick Lane*, we are provided with two different settings, London and Dhaka, each with different support structures for improvisation. Although London, with its celebration of multi-culturalism, should be better positioned as a space for supporting new ways of being, the myth-making tendencies around 'home' prevent Nazneen and the other Bangaldeshi women on the estate from accessing such support-structures. Although Chanu tells

Nazneen that 'coming here you are not missing anything, only broadening your horizons' (45), these words strike with irony because we know Nazneen does not have much opportunity for such 'broadening' as any attempt to integrate more fully into the place she now lives, such as by taking English lessons, is denied. Also, from Hasina's letters, we are made aware that the Bangladesh Nazneen and Chanu left behind has been transformed by its new role in the global garment trade.

The concept of 'purdah of the mind', a phrase repeated twice in the novel – first by Mrs Islam (29) and later by Hasina – highlights one way the novel's female characters negotiate the maze of contradictory discourses and institutions that surround them. As Hasina explains:

> Pure is in the mind. Keep yourself pure in mind and God will protect. I close my fingers and make fist. I keep my fingers shut like this you cannot open my hands can you? […] Same thing my modesty. I keep purdah in the mind no one can take it (153).

For Hasina and Mrs Islam, 'purdah of the mind' is a form of improvisation – a way to maintain the *content* of purdah (modesty) while changing its *form* (going out to work, not wearing a burkha etc.), enabling them to participate in and potentially benefit from the capitalist system around them. However, while Hasina keeps 'purdah of the mind' even as she is working in a garment factory among men, Nazneen keeps a kind of de facto purdah in London: 'Why should you go out', asks Chanu, 'If you go out, ten people will say, "I saw her walking on the street." And I will look like a fool' (45). He goes on to remind her that if she were living in Bangladesh it would be the same, but from Hasina's letters we know this is not necessarily the case. One way Nazneen negotiates this restriction on her movement is by taking up piecework, as it allows her to work and earn an income without facing the 'shame' that would come with going to work in a factory. However, paradoxically, it is precisely by keeping the form of purdah (remaining at home while working) that Nazneen completely flouts its content, as this is how she meets her lover Karim. In this way, Nazneen's observance of purdah becomes just another form of performance, a container that can hold multiple meanings.

The interjection of Hasina's working life in Bangladesh also shows us that the pressure on Nazneen to perform the role of a sequestered housewife can not simply be explained as the effect of an enduring 'tradition' but is rather a symptom of a diasporic community afflicted with Going Home Syndrome. While Bangladesh has adapted to the changing world around it, the Bangladeshi community in London is engaged in a process of defining and policing its boundaries. As Nira Yuval–Davis (1997) points out, despite its progressive intentions, multiculturalist policies can have detrimental effects on women, when those accorded the power to 'speak for' a community draw on constraining restrictions on gender relations and codes of female behaviour to (re)produce and reinforce ethnic boundaries. These boundaries then become the 'scene of constraint' which determines the degree of improvisation possible before recognition is no longer given. In *Brick Lane*, this process of boundary-drawing is represented by the leaflet war that takes place on the Tower Hamlets estate. On both sides of the 'war', the content of the leaflets is primarily concerned with the proper 'display' of women's bodies. From the English nationalist Lion Hearts we get:

> HANDS OFF OUR BREASTS
> The Islamification of our neighborhood has gone too far. A Page 3
> calendar and poster have been removed from the walls of our community
> hall.
> How long before the extremists are putting veils on our women and
> insulting our daughters for wearing short skirts?
> Do not tolerate it! Write to the council! This is England! (257)

To this the Muslim Bengal Tigers reply:

> We refer to a leaflet put recently into circulation by those who claim to
> uphold 'native' culture. We have a message for them.
> KEEP YOUR BREASTS TO YOURSELF.
> And we say this. It is not us who like to degrade women by showing
> their body parts in public places. (257)

Gesturing at Nazneen's improvisational moment above, the short shirt here is mobilised as the defence against 'Islamification', while for the Bengal Tigers, the visibility of women's 'body parts' is the symbol of their degradation. The effects of this rhetoric are felt in Nazneen's household. Unable to decide between these two opposing positions, Chanu begins to determine his daughters' clothing choices based on the point of view

he receives on the day – covering them up in defiance of a Lion Hearts leaflet and sending them to school in their skirts upon seeing a group of burkha-clad women.

While Chanu's Going Home Syndrome is directed towards a literal return home, Nazneen's lover Karim engages in more figurative kinds of return. In both of these processes, however, Nazneen gets positioned as the catalyst through which such return is possible. She becomes the 'symbolic bearer of the collectivity's identity', as her perceived 'authenticity' is what sustains the Going Home Syndrome of the men that come in contact with her (Yuval-Davis 1997, 45). Although Chanu describes himself as a 'westernized' and 'educated man', he often boasts that his wife is an 'unspoilt girl from the village' (45, 22), and he relies on her to perform this role in order to maintain his connection to a home(-culture) that is becoming more and more mythical. Similarly, Karim's infatuation with Nazneen is based on her being what he describes as the 'real thing': 'A Bengali wife. A Bengali mother. An idea of home. An idea of home that he found in her' (454). Karim's involvement in the Islamist movement on the estate provides a form of return that is strengthened by their relationship. According to Yuval-Davis, fundamentalist movements, or specifically what she calls 'cultural fundamentalism' like that of the Bengal Tigers, seeks to uncover what she describes as the 'cultural essence' of the collectivity (Yuval-Davis 1997, 66). Nazneen, in her traditional attire, including a sari that reminds Karim of one his mother wore, becomes the symbol of this cultural essence.

Yuval-Davis argues that a central part of fundamentalist projects is the control of women in the family. In these movements, she explains, stability in the home is presented as the key to the resolution of other social problems, while women's desertion of their proper social role is seen as a sign of impending social disaster (1997, 63). While Yuval-Davis focuses here on the importance of domestic stability in the context of state-supported fundamentalist movements, we can also extend this idea to the more grassroots ethnic boundary-maintenance represented in *Brick Lane*. Although it may not

spell 'social disaster' for the women in the novel to deviate from prescribed gender norms, it still becomes a source of anxiety because it threatens to disrupt the male characters' connection to a cultural 'essence' as part of their Going Home Syndrome. However, Chanu and Karim's reliance on Nazneen for sustaining their Going Home Syndrome should also be understood as an extension of masculinist notions about the function and value of home. As discussed earlier in this thesis, the feminist geographer Gillian Rose genders the sense of pleasure that stems from feelings of familiarity and belonging within the home(space) by pointing out that, while it is commonly women's labour that engenders such feelings, they are implicitly excluded from their positive effects. Rose concludes that because women are expected to *be* home for others, there is actually 'no place for women' (1993, 41).

It is with this idea in mind that I want to return to the significance of Nazneen's performance in *Brick Lane*. The desire for the familiarity of home in the face of discrimination and limited economic opportunities outside of it is a potent driver of the Going Home Syndrome which afflicts the novel's Bangladeshi community. Nazneen's role as the 'real thing' and the 'unspoilt girl from the village' thus functions on two levels – firstly as a way to maintain the male characters' connection to a 'cultural essence' which they have left behind in Bangladesh, and secondly, as a way to sustain a feeling of stability and security within the home-space in the midst of their increasingly uneasy position in the world outside its walls (though these two concerns are intimately linked). However, we have also seen that Nazneen's role as the authentic 'unspoilt girl from the village' is in part based in performance. Although, on the surface, Nazneen is seen to maintain home as a stable and culturally homogenous space, the performative aspects of her character actually serve to *destabilize* the illusion of safety and familiarity.

Nazneen's final break with Karim is an acknowledgement that a relationship sustained only by the performance of an ideal is not a viable one. She tells him, 'I

wasn't me, and you weren't you. From the very beginning to the very end, we didn't see things. What we did – we made each other up' (455). As discussed, Nazneen is a way for Karim to access a lost (or never gained) homeland, and for Nazneen, Karim represents all that her husband is not – a man with 'a place in the world' (264). She realizes that marrying Karim would not be an improvement, as the constant need to live up to the ideal would not give her any space for change or improvisation. In ending their relationship, Nazneen demonstrates a final resistance to fixed identities and a refusal to accept this 'burden of authenticity'. It is also significant that this break with Karim is bound up with her decision to remain in London in spite of her husband's return to Bangladesh. Therefore, at the same time that Nazneen rejects a literal return home, she also refuses to *be* home for those who remain.

So far, I have shown how the female characters in *Brick Lane* negotiate a scene of contradictory discourses and institutions through various performative strategies. In particular, the Going Home Syndrome so prevalent among the novel's male characters relies on the women around them to maintain home as a stable and culturally homogeneous space. However, the fact that this is accomplished through performance actually serves to undermine the safety and familiarity of the domestic realm. Furthermore, Nazneen's improvisational practices gesture at a fluidity of identity which challenge any reading of her (either from inside or outside the text) as a 'known quantity', whether that be as one of the 'brown women in saris who cook rice and raise children and obey their husbands' or the 'unspoilt girl from the village'. In the next section, I will focus on Ali's portrayal of the place of Brick Lane. As in the case of Nazneen, the novel's primary setting is also playing a role, performing a particular version of 'home away from home'.

BRICK LANE AND THE 'ESSENCE' OF CULTURE

In her article about British Asian communities in a number of northern towns, Deborah Phillips (2006) discusses how the ethnic disturbances that took place in the region in

2001 along with increasing Islamophobia following the September 11th attacks in New York and the 7/7 bombings in London has led to a resurgence of anxieties about 'ethnic enclaves', particularly in the case of British Muslims who are viewed as 'self-segregating' (28). She describes how these areas are often read as hotbeds of Islamic extremist activity, crime and other socially unacceptable practices, associations that mark the residents as not only separated from mainstream society but also a challenge to its safety. The emphasis on gender-specific 'cultural' practices such as forced marriage also serve to reinforce stereotypes about the subjugation of women within such communities. Furthermore, from her analysis of the government-commissioned Cantle Report produced in response to the 2001 disturbances, she observes that the ethnic areas covered in the report were solely cast in negative terms with 'little acknowledgement of their positive attributes; of inner city ethnic spaces as vibrant social spaces, as lived spaces, and as "home"' (28).

Brick Lane, however, has a very different 'branding' from that of the communities in the northern towns Phillips discusses in her article. Instead of being associated with a segregationist and potentially threatening form of difference, it is a place where one is beckoned to 'come hungry, leave edgy' (Sandhu 2003). As Sarah Brouilette (2009) explains, the commodification of Brick Lane as trendy, up-and-coming and tourist-friendly has led to an influx of middle-class professionals that are perceived to threaten the 'authenticity' of the area. However, she also points out that gentrification from outside runs parallel to internal forms of gentrification, namely the re-branding of the area as 'Banglatown' in 2002. This re-branding, she says, was about (re)defining Brick Lane as a 'mono-cultural enclave' with a 'commercially visible, viable, and essentialised image of Bangladeshi identity' (2009, 435).

There are clearly positive effects of this kind of re-branding. It becomes a way to 'sell' an ethnicized area with none of the unhomely associations that mark others as segregationist and potentially dangerous. Instead, it gets championed as an emblem of

the success of British multiculturalism. Furthermore, because Brick Lane is seen as easily accessible to and consumable by outsiders, increased tourism has brought an influx of wealth into the community. This branding also helps to dispel notions of ethnic areas as wholly negative spaces, reaffirming them as vibrant social and spiritual 'homes away from home' for a particular immigrant group. In this way, the Banglatown branding project functions as a kind of performance that sustains the community's presence economically, culturally and politically. However, any process that requires the propagation of an essentialised identity to function can be damaging as well, as it creates boundaries of belonging which must be continuously policed, leading to a homogenized version of culture with no room for 'difference'. Furthermore, the content of this essentialised identity is rarely driven by people's actual ways of being and thinking about themselves but rather by the function this identity serves for the community as a whole as it negotiates its position against the normalising pressures of the cultural 'mainstream'.

The novel *Brick Lane* problematizes this strategy of claiming space in this multi-cultural environment by drawing attention to the performative practices which sustain the community's (self-)image. Chanu points to one of these practices in his response to Nazneen's confusion at seeing statues of Hindu gods in a local restaurant window: '"Hindus" said Nazneen when the trend first started. "Here?" Chanu patted his stomach. "Not Hindus. Marketing. Biggest god of all." The white people liked to see the gods. "For authenticity," said Chanu' (446). According to this strategy, 'authenticity' is about presenting a version of Bengali culture that can be easily read by those passing through, even if this means playing with history. In this particular form of 'marketing', Orientalist stereotypes from England's colonial past are mobilized in the context of modern immigration patterns in order to sell poppadums and sweet lassis. Like the image of the 'unspoilt girl from the village', 'authenticity' here is exposed as a façade

that serves a particular purpose rather than being an accurate descriptor of the place or the people who inhabit it.

We are nevertheless shown the commercial success of this essentialised though, as it turns out, culturally hybrid, branding for Brick Lane. As Chanu exclaims, 'All this money, money everywhere. Ten years ago there was no money here' (253). Nazneen elaborates on the visible evidence of this increased wealth:

> There were smart places with starched white tablecloths and multitudes
> of shining silver cutlery. In these places the newspaper clippings were
> framed. The tables were far apart and there was an absence of decoration
> that Nazneen knew to be a style. In the other restaurants the greeters and
> waiters wore white, oil-marked shirts. But in the smart ones they wore
> black. A very large potted fern or blue and white mosaic at the entrance
> indicated ultra-smart. (252)

Here, the 'authentic' cultural products (in this case food) of the Bangladeshi community are mediated/performed through a symbolic system which is immediately intelligible to outsiders, as we are told that the customers of these restaurants and trinket shops are not the local community but 'young men in sawn-off trousers and sandals and girls in T-shirts that strained across their chests and exposed their belly-buttons' (253). Nazneen, too, becomes immediately intelligible to outsiders, as the 'known quantity' described in the epigraph to this chapter, through an equally potent symbolic system mediated through media portrayals of 'brown women in saris who cooked rice and raised children and obeyed their husbands' (391). As she moves through Brick Lane with Chanu, she notices a woman with a camera, only to find the lens focused on her. This reminds us that Nazneen is not the target audience of the marketing but rather an important part of its performative work. In the same way that Nazneen's role as the 'unspoilt girl from the village' helps to sustain the male characters' connection to a home, the image of a brown sari-clad body confirms the area's 'authentic' cultural credentials.

While the 'authenticity' of the cultural enclave is pronounced to outsiders with reference to *in*authentic cultural symbolism, the 'inside' that the novel promises to reveal by allowing readers to trespass into its intimate, domestic spaces, is shown to be

an equally fluid and culturally hybrid space. We see a culinary representation of this hybridity in the following passage describing the contents of a family picnic in St James Park:

> Chicken wings spread in a paste of yoghurt and spices and baked in the oven, onions sliced to the thickness of a fingernail, mixed with chilies, dipped in gram flour and egg and fried in bubbling oil, a dry concoction of chickpeas and tomatoes stewed with cumin and ginger, mishapen chapattis wrapped while still hot in tinfoil and sprinkled now with condensation, golden hard-boiled eggs glazed in a curry seal, Dairylea triangles in their cardboard box, bright orange packets containing shamelessly orange crisps, a cake with a list of ingredients too long to be printed in legible type. She arranged them all on paper plates and stacked up the plastic tubs inside the carrier bags. (297)

While the act of going for a picnic is already a kind of hybrid cultural exercise, in which the Bangladeshi characters become the tourists and engage in this quintessentially British activity, it is not a simple reversal, as evidenced by the kind of food on show. Here, we do not have the 'authentic' curry meal offered by the restaurants on Brick Lane or a completely British incarnation of tea and sandwiches, but rather a kind of diasporic picnic involving a mishmash of traditional Bengali cooking and modern British convenience.

The novel frequently employs detailed descriptions of domestic items, such as in the passage describing the picnic above. Some reviewers have found this tedious, one describing the tendency as 'flatly compendious' and 'pointlessly accretive' (Sandhu 2003). However, we should not be so quick to dismiss the content of these domestic descriptions, as they are an important part of what produces the place Brick Lane in Ali's novel. While Nazneen gets positioned and read as the bearer of an essentialised Bangladeshi 'home' by her male counterparts and the gaze of the tourist's lens, we see that the home she maintains involves much more internal conflict and negotiation than the 'mono-cultural' image being portrayed. Another passage, describing the interior of the family's flat also illustrates a similar attention to mundane detail:

> There were three rugs: red and orange, green and purple, brown and blue. The carpet was yellow with a green leaf design. One hundred per cent nylon and, Chanu said, very hard-wearing. The sofa and chairs were the

colour of dried cow dung, which was a practical colour. They had little sheaths of plastic on the headrests to protect them from Chanu's hair oil. There was a lot of furniture, more than Nazneen had seen in one room before. Even if you took all the furniture in the compound, from every auntie and uncle's ghar, it would not match up to this one room. There was a low table with a glass centre and orange plastic legs, three little wooden tables that stacked together, the big table they used for the evening meal, a bookcase, a corner cupboard, a rack for newspapers, a trolley filled with files and folders, the sofa and armchairs, two footstools, six dining chairs and a showcase. The walls were papered in yellow with brown squares and circles lining neatly up and down. (20)

While we are shown that the area's 'branding' relies on the importation of external cultural commodities in order to pronounce its 'authenticity', the banality of the objects on show in this passage (the 'nylon' carpet which is 'very hard wearing'; the 'practical' sofa; the table with 'orange plastic legs') resists conveying any cultural knowledge at all. Instead, the sheer accumulation of household goods gestures more at the influence of Western consumer culture than any maintenance of 'tradition' and does not reveal any more 'truth' about the Bangladeshi community than the faux gods in restaurant windows.

These images of a hybridized form of domesticity serve to undermine the essentialised 'branding' of Banglatown by showing that the everyday life of the novel's migrant characters in both public and private spaces is actually made up of complex negotiations and improvisations that defy simple binaries of West/East, modern/traditional. By exposing the performative aspects of the 'branded' public space of Brick Lane and the hybrid nature of the domestic life of its inhabitants, the area is produced in Ali's novel not as the cultural essence of a Bangladesh transplanted to the heart of London, but more akin to Doreen Massey's notion of a 'progressive sense of place', where a particular set of local and global processes and subjectivities converge to construct the place called Brick Lane.

Because Ali's fictional version undercuts the image the area would like to project about itself to outsiders, and seems to replace this careful branding with representations of radicalisation, drug use and gang violence, her novel could be read as

re-inscribing Brick Lane within the stereotype of the dangerous 'ethnic enclave' described above, and this has no doubt contributed to its negative reception within the Bangladeshi community. However, like its mechanisms for undermining the discourses of cultural authenticity which circulate around the novel's protagonist and the setting's self-image, *Brick Lane* also contains a critique of the media discourses which construct these social problems as the real 'truth' of Muslim communities. After the riot sparked by an encounter between the Lion Hearts and Bengal Tigers, reporters with camera crews come to the estate in search of 'sensations' about the various criminal activities on the estate. However, we are told that:

> There was nothing to film, so they filmed each other. They returned after dark and filmed the boys riding around in cars. They found the disused flats where the addicts gathered to socialize with their addictions, and filmed the grotty mattresses and the bits of silver foil. It was a sensation. (485)

Here, the cameramen impose their own expectations on the area and continue searching until they are confirmed. The images they produce construct a narrative of social and moral degeneration that serves to reinforce a link between criminality and the area's Bangladeshi population.

Nazneen is also a potential 'sensation' amidst this renewed interest in the area, as she is called upon to confirm her role as victim within the wider narrative of social degradation. When a local councillor visits Nazneen's flat, he is only able to 'read' her within the terms on offer. However, Nazneen's response when he asks if she finds it hard to cope is a flat 'no', indicating her refusal to be defined in this way (484). The councillor, refusing to leave without the story he came to get, tries one more angle, and asks Nazneen how many children she has, but when she replies that she has only two, we are told that he is left 'disappointed' (485). In the end, instead of finding a scandal about a downtrodden woman burdened with too many children, he leaves only with an unspectacular image of the peeling plaster in Nazneen's hallway that has already gone unnoticed for several years.

With this encounter, which comes only a few pages before the novel's close, the text seems to anticipate its own interpretation. It reminds us that the 'truth' many readers seek in *Brick Lane* is already made public in other ways. Like the councillor, we as readers approach Nazneen with a host of media images, positioning her and the place/culture in which she is inscribed at the intersection of raced and gendered politics. She is already a 'known quantity', recognized within the limited terms set out by these images. In this reading practice, the only options available to Nazneen are to become the fully emancipated feminist subject who represents her new liberated status by donning the characteristic short skirt, as in the 'improvised' moment earlier in the novel, or to remain the downtrodden veil-wearing victim of her own culture. In this vein, one critic has interpreted *Brick Lane* as an uncomplicated narrative of progress – a *Bildungsroman* in which a naïve and oppressed Nazneen reaches her full agentic potential through her contact with Western culture (Cormack 2007).[29] Drawing on a similar binary logic, Sandhu declares that *Brick Lane* employs 'the contemporary theme of a floundering woman's coming-to-(feminist)-consciousness' (2003).

Through my analysis of Ali's novel, I have shown that this reading is problematised in several ways. Firstly, as discussed in the first part of this chapter, the narrative distance between the narrated Nazneen and the character that acts and speaks undercuts her linguistic subordination within the storyworld itself. Secondly, by exposing Nazneen's presumed identity as the 'unspoilt girl from the village' as a performance, the novel undermines the power of this image for sustaining the Going Home Syndrome of the novel's male characters. Furthermore, through its various rhetorical operations, the novel succeeds in both acknowledging and subverting the various discourses which circulate around a space like Brick Lane and its imagined

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[29] Cormack defines *Bildung* as 'a development that is characterised as a change from being the passive object of historical forces to being in a position of control'. He then goes on to assert that, 'This is exactly the trajectory we follow in the case of Nazneen. She arrives in England imprisoned by her quixotic husband and her Islamic fatalism. By disposing of Chanu […] and confronting Mrs Islam, she overcomes her submissiveness and becomes the forger of her own identity' (2007, 712).

inhabitants. While often (mis)read as offering an authentic 'truth' about the community

which would normally be invisible to outsiders, the novel functions instead to

problematise 'authenticity' itself. On one hand, it undercuts the claims of authenticity

circulating *within* the community and the image that it projects to outsiders, drawing

particular attention to the burden such claims place on women to remain static

performers of an essentialised version of 'culture'. On the other, it subverts the

discourses circulating about the community (and others like it) from outside. We are

shown firstly the way in which media expectations mediate our 'reading' of so-called

ethnic enclaves as dangerous and unhomely spaces and, secondly, how the Muslim

woman is constructed as the default victim of such spaces.

Finally, it is too simplistic to conclude that Nazneen has rejected the perceived

constraints of her culture in favour of the 'liberated' gender norms offered by the

cultural 'mainstream' in Britain. Instead, by destabilising the binary of a stable

Bangladeshi cultural 'essence' embodied in the sari-clad woman against the miniskirted

Western female subject, the novel makes space for new kinds of femininity. 'Fusion

Fashions', the company started by Nazneen and her friends at the end of the novel,

seems to gesture at an alternative model of female subjectivity. The women who wear

this 'fusion fashion', which draws on a mixture of Western fashion, Bollywood style

and traditional Bangladeshi clothing, represent an emerging female diasporic subject,

which is neither the essentialised fantasy of the 'unspoilt girl from the village' nor the

assimilationist fantasy of the subjugated Muslim woman who finds liberation and

emancipation in the West.

The possibilities of this new kind of femininity is perhaps best summed up by

the novel's final image of a sari-clad Nazneen donning ice skates and taking to the rink.

Here, Nazneen's dream of ice-skating is finally achieved, but without her having to cast

aside her visible marker of difference. In a reprisal of Nazneen's earlier imagined

moment of ice-skating, in which the short skirt is an important feature of the shift in

roles, here the transformation is importantly left incomplete. The closing line, 'This is England. You can do whatever you like,' spoken by its most progressive female character, then becomes the novel's final message (492). Given the context in which it is spoken, this statement should not be interpreted as a simple representation of Nazneen's 'coming-to-feminist consciousness' through her encounter with Western gender norms, but rather that 'whatever you like' is the possibility of female subjectivity without having to bear the visible markers of such gender norms (i.e. the short skirt). Instead, the ending leaves us with a hybrid image that makes space for a *two-way* improvisation. It is not just Nazneen who goes through a process of *bildung* and comes out changed by her encounter with British culture but that a national symbol such as the Torvill and Dean–like image implied here is also altered through Nazneen's performance of it. The model of an essentialised Bangladeshi culture set against that of a mainstream British one then gets remodelled into something more akin to Avtar Brah's 'diaspora space', where 'native' and 'migrant' cultures are both destabilised and modified by their encounters with one another.

What makes Ali's ending less convincing, however, is the sense of an overly heroic *fait accompli* implied by the novel's final statement. While such a model of intercultural communication and exchange is poignant as an imaginative projection, and one that is showing signs of coming into being in the lived experience of everyday life in some places in Britain, it is still constrained by the various discourses which seek to explain encounters between different cultural communities (most frequently Muslim and the secular 'mainstream'). Such encounters are still read through restrictive interpretations of multiculturalism, especially around questions of women, who are still frequently mobilised by both sides as the immovable 'line' between cultures. In the next chapter, I look at a novel which, through the mechanics of its narrative form, represents the kind of two-way entanglements present in diaspora spaces. By dividing the narrative perspective between 'native' and 'migrant' characters, Andrea Levy provides a more

complex picture of migration, not as a linear movement of one group from 'otherness' towards assimilation, but as an intertwining of different social and cultural hierarchies across space and time.

6. (Un)Domesticating Englishness: Andrea Levy's *Small Island*

Andrea Levy's 2004 novel *Small Island* is markedly different from the migration narratives covered so far in this study. Firstly, it deviates from a linear chronology of departure, arrival and settling, opting instead for an intermingling of different phases of the migratory process. Secondly, unlike the other works discussed, the narrative focus is not only on the novel's 'migrant' characters but equal weight is given to the perspectives of 'natives', as the trajectories of its Caribbean characters, Hortense and Gilbert, intermingle with those of the British couple Queenie and Bernard. This has interesting ramifications for Levy's representation of the story of migration, as it gestures at a more complex process of cultural recombination than assimilative models would like to suggest. Furthermore, through its representation of the colonial space as an integral part of its narrative, Levy's novel makes explicit the role of the colonial encounter in shaping the migratory encounter which comes after. This is especially evident in its deployment of (a particular form of) domesticity as a marker of difference and cultural hierarchy, and one which earlier Caribbean women writers have used as a motif for 'writing back' to the (imposed) gender norms of the colonial centre.

As others have noted, Andrea Levy's work has from the beginning had a significant investment in the domestic sphere as a meaning-making space.[30] In her debut novel, *Every Light in the House Burnin'* (1994), for example, Levy represents her young protagonist-narrator Angela Jacobs's sense of belonging in Britain as contingent upon certain value-laden aspects of domestic life. In several moments in the novel, cooking and eating play an integral part in demarcating belonging and unbelonging through tropes of desire and disgust. For instance, when Angela's friend Sonia is faced with unfamiliar Caribbean food when she comes to dinner at the Jacobs family home,

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[30] Pready (2012) analyses the space of the home and Githire (2010) looks at practices of cooking and eating, both in relation to Levy's first three novels *Every Light in the House Burnin'* (1994), *Never Far from Nowhere* (1996) and *Fruit of the Lemon* (1999).

her evident disgust forms a barrier of difference between herself and Angela that threatens to dissolve their budding friendship. However, as Njeri Githire rightly points out, 'Sonia's hesitation is based less on the actual criteria of the meal itself than it is on pre-existing—albeit vague—notions of what might be eaten at Angela's home' (2010, 863), as such a culinary encounter is already inscribed within colonialist and nationalist discourses of pollution, miscegenation and racial inferiority. Also as a consequence of this discourse, Angela locates her own culinary desire in the quintessentially 'English' dishes she gets at school, lamenting, 'But *my* mum cooked different things […]. Everything she made tasted different' (*ibid*, 45). Mirroring Sonia, Angela manifests the same signs of disgust at Caribbean food as a way of laying claim to her English identity.

Such boundaries of difference are also brought to the fore through representations of the domestic space itself. The yearly trip to the Ideal Home Exhibition provides the Jacobs family with aspirational content, which is contrasted with the 'red brick' and 'grey, concrete yard' of 'our flats' (41). On a visit to her teacher's house, however, Angela comes to the sobering realisation that the curated domestic space of the Ideal Home Exhibition is actually 'someone's real world, not make-believe' (184). It is nevertheless understood that this 'someone' is not her or anyone like her, which 'securely places her within her own category as she becomes even more firmly inscribed in her marginalised position' within this space (Pready 2012, 24). This moment also introduces class as another factor in the intersectional mix which sets out the terms for belonging and unbelonging and we see what is at stake in maintaining such aspirations, as Angela's mother attempts to manage how the family is perceived by others. Coaching Angela before a visit to a neighbour, Mrs Jacobs makes her promise she will not reveal the true content of their Sunday meal:

> I don't wan' that woman thinking we had sausages on a Sunday – you
> hear? I mean, before you know, everyone will think that we have
> sausages on Sunday, that we can't afford to eat a proper Sunday meal.
> Don't say sausages – say chicken. (133)

While, for Angela, food is a marker of national and cultural belonging, Angela's mother

places it at the centre of class identity and respectability, a term that will be addressed in

more detail later in this chapter. Such moments of aspiration and exclusion, rendered

through the space of the home, introduce domesticity as a central mechanism through

which belonging is articulated in Levy's fiction. In her fourth novel, *Small Island*, Levy

places such domestic norms and practices into historical relief, exposing their place

within exclusionary narratives of Englishness.

Although Levy's first work of historical fiction, this novel forms part of a larger

trajectory in Levy's oeuvre of looking backwards in time in order to understand the

complicated matrix of belongings and exclusions in the present (Lima 2005; Knepper

2012). Levy's increasing interest in the historical can be understood as a consequence of

the liminality of her position as a second-generation Briton of Caribbean descent. Levy

articulates the generational divide in the voice of the grown-up Angela in *Every Light in*

the House Burnin', who asserts:

> I knew this society better than my parents. My parents' strategy was to
> keep as quiet as possible in the hope that no one would know that they
> had sneaked into this country. They wanted to be no bother at all. But I
> had grown up in its English ways. I could confront it, rail against it, fight
> it, because it was mine – a birthright. (88)

One way Levy has attempted to confront the silences of her parents' generation of

Caribbean immigrants has been to trace her own genealogy back through her family in

Jamaica, a process which she dramatizes in her third novel *Fruit of the Lemon*.

However, Levy's turn to history is also aimed at problematizing the national identity of

the country she calls her own. As she recalls in an article entitled 'This is My England',

'I was educated to be English. Alongside me – learning, watching, eating and playing –

were white children. But those white children would never have to grow up to question

whether they were English or not' (2000). With *Small Island*, Levy not only challenges

the mechanisms that had caused her to question her own Englishness, but also those

which made it possible for her white counterparts to be so sure of theirs. In this way, the

novel functions as a 'literary intervention' into an era of British history which has been key to defining the boundaries and limits of Englishness (Levy and Morrison 2009).[31]

Levy's choice to provide a re-remembering of the WWII period in particular is perhaps a response to a recent re-romanticising of this period in British contemporary culture, a turn which Paul Gilroy interprets as evidence of what he calls 'postimperial melancholia' (2004, 98).[32] As Gilroy writes:

> An uncertain generation for whom all knowledge of the [WWII] conflict arrives on very long loops, usually via Hollywood, is still required to use an expensively manufactured surrogate memory of WWII as the favoured means to find and even to restore an ebbing sense of what it is to be English. (96)

With *Small Island*, Levy provides a retelling of this now longed-for period that calls attention to the inherent fictionality of the way we have come to remember the era and its legacy. Gilroy goes on to argue that the recent turning back to this historical moment is a way of turning away from the perceived dangers of pluralism and from 'the irreversible fact of multiculture', reminding us that no other war since has been able to command 'a comparable ideological and mythological space' (96-7). It is the contours of this 'mythological space' of Englishness that I want to interrogate in this chapter, focusing specifically on the role of 'English' domestic norms and practices in demarcating and policing difference across lines of race, class and gender. By exposing the contradictory genealogy of Victorian domesticity and its (mis)appropriation across

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[31] A project entitled Small Island Read 2007 seems to testify to this transformative function of Levy's novel. As part of a larger national initiative to mark the 200th anniversary of the abolition of the slave trade, residents of four cities across the UK were encouraged to read *Small Island* and share their reactions. This project is described as having an 'explicitly ideological purpose, that of generating understanding around multiculturalism and the historical roots of racism in modern Britain' (Lang 2009a, 319) and has been credited with changing British readers' perceptions of their own history (Lang 2009b). For more information about the novel's reception in the context of this and other public reading projects, see Benwell (2009) and Fuller and Procter (2009).

[32] Although Gilroy and Levy both published in 2004, we can still see evidence of this nostalgic turn to the WWII period in British cultural life in the years following their publication. This was particularly evident in the summer of 2012 when celebrations surrounding the Queen's Diamond Jubilee and the London Olympics were dotted with 1940s iconography, fashion and a resurgence of wartime dances like the Lindy-Hop. Furthermore, wartime slogans such as 'Keep Calm and Carry On' were recuperated into rallying cries during the 2008-10 economic recession.

different classes and within colonized spaces, *Small Island* de-mythologizes its power to define the essence of Englishness. Put another way, *Small Island* can be read as an archaeological mining of the history which produces Sophie's predetermined disgust of Caribbean food, as well as Angela's disavowal of her own mother's cooking. It also traces the aspirational pull of the Ideal Home Exhibition and the 'respectable' Sunday dinner back to the subtle power dynamics of empire.

DIASPORA SPACES

In *Cartographies of Diaspora* (1996), part of Avtar Brah's argument for speaking of diaspora *spaces* rather than of unified 'diasporas' is that it destabilises the position of the 'native', breaking down the binary between native and (im)migrant which exists in most conceptualisations of migration. As Brah explains, 'this conceptual category [of diaspora space] is "inhabited", not only by those who have migrated and their descendants, but equally by those who are constructed and represented as indigenous' (*ibid*, 209), such that 'the concept of *diaspora space* (as opposed to that of diaspora) includes the entanglement of genealogies of dispersion with those of "staying put"' (*ibid*, 181). As mentioned above, *Small Island* takes a different approach to narrating the story of migration by including the perspectives of 'native' characters as an integral part of its narrative machinery. In this way, Levy's novel produces a migration narrative which acknowledges that the spatial 'entanglements' that Brah speaks of are a central part of the migratory process.

Brah goes on to argue that within diaspora spaces, the multiple journeys that migrating individuals make can 'configure into one journey via a *confluence of narratives* as it is lived and re-lived, produced, reproduced and transformed through individual as well as collective memory and re-memory' (*ibid,* 183, emphasis in original). She also cautions, however, that 'all diasporas are differentiated, heterogeneous, contested spaces' (184). This tension between confluence and differentiation is also reflected in the form of Levy's novel, as the shifts between

narrators who each tell their own version of events work together to form a coherent narrative trajectory, leading to their convergence upon the same house in West London. However, the raced, classed and gendered tensions that are played out within this domestic space come to signify the contingent nature of such a convergence. As migration becomes reframed as something that involves 'natives' as well as 'migrants', the house/home as a bounded and stable space that one leaves from and returns to is also problematized in the novel, emerging as a diaspora space where multiple voices and experiences are *accommodated*, albeit imperfectly and temporarily.

Sarah Brophy makes productive use of the relationship between Brah's theory of diaspora space and Queenie's lodging house, examining how Levy's representation of the 'entangled genealogies' between native and migrant serve to unsettle 'postwar white nostalgia for what is imagined as a coherent ethnic-national past' (2010). However, her analysis of the domestic encounter is primarily focused on the role of white femininity, as represented by the character of Queenie, and is inscribed within a historical and cultural milieu that has Britain as its centre. While taking account of Britain's wartime past is of clear importance when analysing Levy's novel, as discussed above, this, I argue, is only half the story. In addition to the diaspora space of Britain (as represented by Queenie's lodging house), the Caribbean should also be read as a diaspora space, so that the complex intertwining of histories which occur *before* Hortense and Gilbert even arrive on Britain's shores (and at Queenie's door) are also taken into account. It is important to highlight the fact that Levy's Caribbean characters are *already* diasporic subjects before they arrive in Britain, as they are marked by a history of displacement through the middle passage and the influence of British colonial culture (not to mention the many other cultures and peoples that have come to bear on 'Caribbeanness').

As Brah articulates, within the diaspora space called England, different diasporas 'intersect among themselves as well as with the entity constructed as "Englishness"' (Brah, 209). She goes on to remind us that 'Englishness' is something

which 'has been formed in the crucible of the internal colonial encounter with Ireland, Scotland and Wales; imperial rivalries with other European countries; and imperial conquests abroad' (*ibid*). Therefore, if 'Englishness' is something which has been so dependent upon encounters that take place 'elsewhere', then it is impossible to isolate its mechanisms within the metropolitan 'centre' from those which occur in the colonial 'periphery'. As many have pointed out, the 'small island' of Levy's novel should be read as a reference to Jamaica and to Britain, so that, like the narrative weight given to characters from both places, Levy's title destabilises the hierarchical relationship between the two geographical settings, placing them on an even discursive plane. If we remain mindful of the ways in which Englishness plays out in Levy's Caribbean setting alongside its British one, a fuller picture can emerge of the role of domesticity in shoring up its cultural authority. Furthermore, in giving equal weight to the sections of *Small Island* which are set in the Caribbean, black femininity emerges as a key site of inquiry within the novel, something which Brophy's analysis largely ignores. As I will later show, it is only by looking closely at the intersection of gender, race and class in the characterization of Queenie *and* Hortense that we can get a full picture of Levy's representation of home and the domestic in *Small Island*.

DOMESTIC GENEALOGIES: HOME AND EMPIRE

As is made clear by the article 'This is My England', quoted above, one of the central concerns of Levy's work is challenging received notions of Englishness. As has been well-established through the work of scholars like Anne McCintock (1995) and Sara Mills (2003), the exportation of 'proper' domestic and gender norms to colonial spaces has had a fundamental role in shaping such notions. As Rosemary Marangoly George articulates:

> [I]t is the daily construction of the home-country as the location of the colonizer's racial and moral identity and as the legitimization of the colonizer's national subjecthood that made possible the carrying out of the work of empire. And [...] it was on the home, this 'unit of civilization', that the reputation of the entire civilizing project (as imperialism was often perceived to be) rested. (1999: 49)

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As George's point here indicates, in the colonial encounter, there is a dialogic relationship between the discursive construction of the home-country (in this case Britain) and the construction and management of the material home in the colonies. However, the home as a unit of civilization was not only tied to the way English women secured their status abroad, as George argues, but also became central to the way many (post)colonial societies structured themselves thereafter.

This is particularly true in the British Caribbean, where the history of enslavement produced a majority population which had been discursively rendered less than human. In the post-emancipation era and later during the transition to independence, at least a section of this population needed to be discursively recuperated in order to deem them fit to join the political process and, eventually, for self-government. In her essay 'Not Just Any(body) Can Be a Citizen', M. Jacqui Alexander argues that such a discursive turn was accomplished through adherence to a code of practice she refers to as 'respectability'. As she explains:

> It would indeed require a complicated set of cognitive and ideological reversals for the British to turn the savage into the civilized, to turn those believed incapable of rule into reliable rulers. Herein lies the significance of socialization into British norms, British manners, British parliamentary modes of governance; into conjugal marriage and the 'science' of domesticity. This would operate in effect as socialization into respectability (1994: 12)

Although the deployment of such principles was in the service of emancipation and eventual decolonisation, 'Englishness' (or 'Britishness' in Alexander's usage)[33] becomes the mark of 'respectability' and ultimately of social status, in large part due to the systematic destruction of any indigenous or African alternatives. Such a dependence on the social norms of (erstwhile) colonisers is evidently problematic due to the fact that it reinforces the very notions of cultural superiority used to justify the colonial project in the first place. This 'socialisation into respectability' would have particular implications

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[33] Although Alexander uses the term 'British' here, the fact that she is referring to particular cultural norms rather than nationality makes its usage comparable to Levy's usage of 'Englishness' as a marker of belonging/unbelonging in the metropole, which I have been using to frame my analysis in this chapter.

for black women, who were marked out by colonial discourse as possessing a particularly amoral and lascivious form of female sexuality (Green 2006). Where black women in the Caribbean had previously been excluded from the institution of marriage, justified with reference to Victorian codes of gender conduct, now their reputation and ultimate marriageability depended upon their success or failure to implement these same codes. In this way, 'respectability' was implicitly framed as a way to 'contain' the sexual permissiveness of black women.

The Antiguan writer Jamaica Kincaid produces a vehement critique of this process in many of her works of fiction. In *Annie John* (1985), for example, the young narrator of the same name deplores her mother's attempts to turn her into a 'lady' through a series of lessons in Victorian domestic conduct. This 'young lady business', as Annie calls it, becomes synonymous with colonial endeavours to 'domesticate' the colonised (27). As Carole Boyce-Davies notes in her introduction to *Black Women, Writing, and Identity* (1994), this figure of the mother-imperialist who imposes Victorian norms of domesticity and femininity on an unwilling black girl-child is a recurring trope, such that the home is often a contested, if not traumatic space in Afro-Caribbean women's writing. Migration then becomes a form of escape from the 'tyranny of home', reversing the paradigm of the domestic space as a realm of comfort and security. In *Small Island*, Levy reimagines this 'lady' figure through the character of Hortense, who is in many ways a caricature of the kind of woman Annie's mother is trying to turn her into. In contrast to Annie, however, Hortense represents the 'successful' appropriation of such 'respectability'.

It is important to note, however, that the proliferation of such domestic norms in the colonies also came out of a dialogue with changes 'at home' in British society itself. Nancy Armstrong (1987) and Anne McClintock (2003) both link the rise of the 'cult of domesticity' in the nineteenth century with the emergence of the British middle class. Armstrong analyses the role of fiction in solidifying and disseminating 'middle-class'

domestic norms even before a true middle class existed (1987, 23). Then, drawing on Armstrong's work, McClintock argues that the appearance of female idleness became central to these new norms and how, for the many women who aspired to middle-class status but could not afford enough servants, all evidence of their domestic labour needed to be rendered invisible to the eyes of husbands, fathers and visitors (2003: 651). The important point that both arguments highlight is the inherent *fictionality* of the cult of domesticity, thus problematising its centrality in demarcating social difference. Like the discourse of 'respectability' which served to regulate social structures in the colonies, its British equivalent, 'middle-classness', is also shown to be a predominantly discursive construct. In *Small Island*, the character of Queenie becomes the embodiment of the appropriation of middle-class norms, as the counterpart to Hortense's appropriation of the marks of respectability, and it is through the interaction between these two aspirational positions that Levy lays bare the mythic nature of English domesticity and, by extension, 'Englishness' itself. As I will show in the following section, by juxtaposing Hortense and Queenie's separate but related upbringings against a backdrop of the fraught domestic setting of the lodging-house, Levy exposes the hypocrisies of the cult of domesticity and its role in producing and maintaining social boundaries.

Domestic Intersections: Class, Race and Gender

We are introduced to the young Hortense as the illegitimate child of a well-known Jamaican 'government man' (2004, 37). Because her light complexion ('the colour of warm honey') promises a chance at a 'golden life', Hortense is quickly removed from the care of her mother (a 'bitter chocolate hue') and placed into the family of her father's cousins (38). It is there, she says, that she 'could become a lady worthy of my father, wherever he might be' (38). This culture of shadeism gives Hortense access to a higher social status, despite the precarious circumstances of her birth. Immediately, however, the transition in class is linked to gendered socialization into respectability –

the process of becoming a 'lady'. As part of this process, Hortense recalls the shift from

playing alongside her cousin Michael to being restricted by a list of things that girls 'did

not do':

> For one, I was not supposed to climb trees. Mr Philip told me it was not
> godly for girls to lift themselves into branches as a monkey would. Or
> come home wet from the stream […]. I was not supposed to hunt for
> scorpions, tipping them from their hiding place, tormenting them with a
> stick. Or dress a goat in a bonnet and attempt to ride her like a horse.
> (40)

This restriction on playing is also accompanied by a schedule of domestic chores,

implicitly coded as female: 'I had washing to do in the outhouse sink, cleaning of the

shades on the kerosene lamps. I was responsible for keeping the area under the tamarind

tree free from dirt and a pleasure to sit in' (40). These new responsibilities are set

against the comparative leisure of her male peer, Michael, whose attempts to distract

Hortense from her chores are regarded as devilish trickery aimed at preventing her from

carrying out her godly (female) duty (41).

Hortense's path to becoming a 'lady' continues at a teacher training college

reserved for girls 'from good homes' from across the island (62). Alongside her

occupational training is a course in 'domestic science' during which Hortense learns to

bake fairy cakes which are 'the best outside the tea-shops of southern England' (68) and

to 'cook an egg like the English do' (322). This egg instruction is accompanied by a

lesson in proper consumption, as she recalls, 'on no account were we to tap an egg with

a spoon to remove the shell, and only the uncouth could be found dipping a slice of

bread into the yoke' (323). This kind of training not only establishes food and its related

practices as markers of social boundaries but explicitly positions 'English' foodways as

the standard against which to calibrate such boundaries (as it is in Levy's earlier works).

For Hortense, this kind of 'gendered schooling' secures her position as 'rightful'

reproducer (both biological and cultural) of the 'respectable' coloured middle-class

(Green, 2006: 13), while also ensuring that this respectability is conferred upon the

profession she is about to enter.[34] However, upon Hortense's arrival in Britain and subsequent encounter with actually existing habits in the post-war period, this backdrop of lessons in 'English' domestic practices becomes a source of irony and, often, outright comedy. As we are shown England through Hortense's eyes, there is a sense of betrayal, as we realize the England that has been sold to her is not only inaccessible to a black Caribbean immigrant, but may not actually exist at all.

We meet the grown-up Hortense in 1948, when she arrives 'fresh off the boat' at Queenie's house in Earls Court to join her new husband Gilbert. As she approaches Queenie's door, she recalls a memory of a school-time friend:

> It brought it back to me. Celia Langley. Celia Langley standing in front of me, her hands on her hips and her head in the cloud. And she is saying: […] 'when I am older, Hortense, I will be leaving Jamaica and I will be going to live in England. […] Hortense, in England I will have a big house with a bell at the front door and I will ring the bell.' And she made the sound, ding-a-ling, ding-a-ling. (11)

However, on reaching the door, Hortense is only greeted by silence: 'But when I pressed this doorbell I did not hear a ring. No ding-a-ling' (12). Faced with the realization that Gilbert does not own the house but is renting from a landlady, Hortense is then horrified to learn that they do not even have the whole house to live in, but only one small room at the very top in which she is expected carry out all the activities of daily life.

The fantasy of ringing the doorbell on one's own house in England, immediately followed by the denial of this experience, performs two interrelated symbolic functions in the novel. On one hand, it operates as a metonym for the ideals of English domesticity taken up by the Caribbean colonies as the essence of 'respectability'. On the other, it is a metaphor for the arrival of the colonial immigrant at the metropolitan centre thinking they have arrived home, only to find themselves regarded, at best, as a guest, and at worst, as an unwanted intruder in a formerly happy home. Tied to the

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[34] In the Anglophone Caribbean, the term 'coloured' is used to refer to Afro-Caribbeans with visible European heritage (i.e. light skinned) and is usually associated (even now) with higher social status.

figure of the Caribbean mother-imperialist who imposes these domestic norms upon her female children, which is most pronounced in Jamaica Kincaid's writing, is the mythical image of the Mother Country – 'refined, mannerly, cultured' – an aspirational site of desire and social mobility, as evidenced by Celia Langley's doorbell fantasy (Levy, 2004: 139). However, for those colonial 'children' arriving at her shores, this 'mother' turns out to be a 'filthy tramp' who 'looks down at you through lordly eyes and says, "Who the bloody hell are you?"' (Levy, 2004: 139). Hortense's dejection upon arriving at this unwelcoming door in London is a consequence produced by the convergence of these two treacherous mothers.

Along with this fantasy of the ringing bell, Hortense brings an idealised image of English homes with her as the marker of being and belonging in Britain:

> A dining-table in a dining room set with four chairs. A starched tablecloth embroidered with bows. Armchairs in the sitting room paced around a small wood fire. The house is modest – nothing fancy, no show – the kitchen small but with everything I need to prepare meals. We eat rice and peas on Sunday with chicken and corn, but in my English kitchen roast meat with two vegetables and even fish and chips bubble on the stove' (100-101).

In addition to the swapping of a Caribbean-style Sunday dinner for a British one (once again making food integral to processes of identification and belonging), central to these expectations are ideas about the proper spatial division of domestic activities, with each room fitted out according to its appointed use. Such an image contrasts greatly with the reality of living as a black immigrant in post-war London and, as mentioned above, Hortense is particularly appalled to find that her use of the house is restricted to one room, reflected in the repeated phrase 'just this?' (21). According to McClintock, the arrangement of households around what she refers to as a 'geometry of extreme separation and specialization' was a symptom of the Victorian middle-class preoccupation with rational order and the clear demarcation of boundaries (2003: 653). This classification of space became a marker of ascendancy beyond a perceived lower class mixing of activities, objects and smells, so that 'domestic space was mapped as a

hierarchy of specialized and distinct boundaries that needed constant and scrupulous policing' (*ibid*, 654). For Hortense, the confinement of domestic rites to one room constitutes a gross violation of this principle of spatial demarcation.

James Procter (2003) makes a related point about the principles of domestic separation in his analysis of news media and sociological texts about immigrants during this time. He draws attention to the moral panic around the perceived 'convergence and disturbance of the boundaries between private, domestic space and the public/political realm beyond them' in the dwelling places of Caribbean migrants, especially in the morally questionable space of the shebeen (29). What is particularly interesting, however, is that Levy turns such discourses on their head by injecting the character of her female Caribbean migrant with their moralising disgust at such unholy mixings, while her British counterpart is the one who comes up short. For example, when Hortense specifies to Queenie that she needs three basins – 'one to wash the vegetables, one for the cups and plates and one for washing', Queenie retorts that 'One will do – just rinse it out' (333). Hortense is horrified at this suggestion, wondering, 'How can an Englishwoman expect me to wash myself in the same place where I must clean up the vegetables? It was disgusting to me. Surely it was distasteful to this Englishwoman' (333). For Hortense, the mere fact that Queenie is an 'Englishwoman' establishes her domestic credentials, and Hortense is dumbfounded that she seems to be lacking in this regard.

Hortense's bewilderment continues in the grocery shop, where she encounters yet another violation of her rules of hygiene as she goes to buy bread:

> The man enclose his big hand over the loaf, his freckled fingers
> spreading across it. I stared at him. Was I to eat this bread now this man
> had touch it up? With his other hand he wiped his nose as he held out the
> bread for me to take. I did not take it, for I was waiting on him to place
> the bread into a bag to wrap it.
> 'There you are,' he said to me, pushing the loaf forward enough for me
> to see a thin black line of dirt arching under each fingernail. (332)

Hortense's disgust in this scene can once again be linked to the preoccupation with classification and separation. Primarily, there is the contamination of domestic food items with 'dirt', which McClintock also reminds us has a specific classed history: 'Nothing is inherently dirty; dirt expresses a relation to social value and social disorder. Dirt […] is that which transgresses a social boundary. A broom in a kitchen closet is not dirty, whereas lying on a bed it is' (2003: 648). Therefore, it is not only a case of dirt touching her food, but the crossing of a social boundary which is at stake: for Hortense, it is not just any dirt that is touching her bread, but a distinctly low-class kind of dirt, carried on the body of a shopkeeper. Following the logic that yokes social respectability with particular kinds of domestic practice, Hortense sees herself as superior, not only in relation to the shopkeeper, but also in relation to this domestically incompetent kind of 'Englishwoman', Mrs Bligh (Queenie's married name). For Queenie, however, the social relationship between the two women is clear from the outset, as she automatically reads Hortense as inferior due to her race and origins in the geographic periphery. As a result of this 'double-crossing' of social boundaries, encounters between Hortense and Queenie are fraught with miscommunications, misunderstandings and prejudice on both parts. I use the construction 'double-crossing of boundaries' here to denote the fact that each woman is perceived by the other to be acting above their station, and to gesture at the sense that they are both to a certain extent 'double-crossed' (betrayed) by the aspirational discourses that produce their charged domestic encounters. For example, when Queenie confidently declares that 'It doesn't worry me to be seen out with darkies', Hortense is left confused wondering 'Now, why should this woman worry to be seen in the street with me? After all, I was a teacher and she was only a woman whose living was obtained through the letting of rooms' (231). While Queenie takes great pride in teaching Hortense the names of the shops, Hortense's narration calls attention to the ignorance with which this knowledge

is given: "'This shop is called a grocer's,' Mrs Bligh told me. I nodded. It had groceries in the window, what else could it be?' (331).

The ironic distance in such moments between Queenie's perception of Hortense, as an uncivilized black immigrant and how we as readers are meant to understand her, as a haughty member of the Caribbean coloured middle-class (as her husband Gilbert does), functions to destabilize the image of the uncivilized racial other as produced in colonial discourse. By presenting Hortense as more 'English' in her approach to domesticity than the genuine Englishwoman, Levy also problematizes xenophobic discourses that present 'composite images' of dilapidated and dirty houses as representative of the black dwelling place (Procter 2003, 23). Furthermore, by establishing that Hortense has been profoundly shaped by Englishness *before* she even leaves Jamaica, Levy challenges the tendency in contemporary discourses of migration to represent arrival as the beginning point in a process of 'assimilation' into British cultural norms and practices. However, like the policy of socialisation into respectability described above, such a move simultaneously serves to re-stabilize imperial power-relations which establish English middle-class domesticity as the mark of civilization. It is only when placed in conversation with Queenie's childhood narrative that the value-system itself can be undermined.

We can trace many parallels between Hortense and Queenie's childhood narratives, such as the division of labour between girls and boys in the same household and the deployment of 'lady' as an aspirational identification. The daughter of a butcher, Queenie describes herself as 'a cut above' the miners' children 'who ate scrag end and pigs' heads', but her family is clearly below 'the fancy ones who bought the topsides on Sundays then ham *and* turkey at Christmas' (241, 239). Social hierarchies here are once again described using the differences in food consumed, further evidence of Levy's tendency to articulate boundaries that exist in the public sphere in a language that is rooted in the private/domestic. Although ironically christened 'Victoria' because

'Queenie' is deemed to be too common a name, Queenie's domestic life hardly lives up to the ideals solidified during her namesake's reign:

> I was maid-of-all-poultry – scruffy apron, tatty headscarf with a scraper and bucket. While other girls were waving their hair and admiring their Cupid's-bow mouths in mirrors I took my bucket and scraper round poultry pens. […] And while other girls read love stories and dreamed of having a best boy, I had to find the eggs – perfect, delicate, oval white forms sitting in the middle of all that filth. (243-44)

Like Hortense, Queenie narrates the moment when her gender comes into play in the divvying up of household responsibilities. However, Queenie's brand of gender socialisation is set against the imagined lives of 'other girls' who are perceived to be the norm. Although Queenie has a clear idea of the ideals of girl/womanhood that she should be aspiring to, unlike her Caribbean counterpart, Queenie feels she is being denied access to the appropriate socialization, lamenting 'I should have been a lady' (246), echoing Hortense's (and Annie John's) relationship to this term. This all changes, however, when Queenie has a fainting episode at the sight of her father butchering a pig, is deemed too 'soft' for life on the farm and is subsequently sent to live with her mother's 'posh sister' in London (247). It is here that Queenie begins the elocution and deportment lessons that are to help her 'get on in polite society' and improve her marriage prospects (248). However, despite her aunt's attempts to call her by the more 'elegant' name 'Victoria', she maintains that, upon looking into her angled bedroom mirrors, 'hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of Queenies would appear, all smiling smugly at their good fortune. But not one Victoria was waving at me among that crowd' (250), alluding to the precariousness of this new middle-class identity.

What is key here is that Queenie's unglamorous upbringing introduces the question of class into the equation, demythologizing 'English' domesticity and the idea that all British girls are imbued with the qualities that get exported to the colonies as constitutive of 'Englishness'. Even though Queenie and Hortense come from very different backgrounds, we see that both women are positioned (and position themselves) by the same gendered discourse and that they are both striving beyond the

circumstances of their birth. While Hortense's light skin entitles her to 'become a lady' as a way of ensuring her social mobility, Queenie's move to London symbolizes an attempt to ascend to a new middle-class identity, obtained by affecting the same gendered attributes. While Brophy makes a similar point that both women are on a path of upward mobility (2010, 6), I would argue that Hortense inhabits her class position much more seamlessly than Queenie does. It is only in her encounter with Britain and the racism that accompanies it that her sense of her own social position starts to fall apart. It is therefore the intersection of gendered, classed and raced discourses and boundaries which produces the tension between the two women when they find themselves sharing the same domestic space, while also showing how their gendered genealogies are ultimately intertwined.

We see the importance of this rhetorical move in Levy's novel when compared to something like Emecheta's *Second-Class Citizen.* While Adah experiences a similar downward class mobility on arrival, we do not see this interaction with any complexly represented form of English femininity. Instead, the only British woman who is described with any detail is the character of Trudy, who only serves to harden essentialist categories of class and gender in the service of shoring up Adah's moral superiority and class position. Similarly, in *Brick Lane*, Nazneen's imagined performances are the only moments we get that point to 'native' forms of femininity (symbolised by the short skirt), which leave the binaries between native and migrant, modern and traditional relatively in tact. It is only at the very end, in the moniker 'fusion fashions' and in the skating scene, where we glimpse the possibility of hybrid forms. By contrast, in juxtaposing the characters of Hortense and Queenie, who are both marked by various forms of boundary-crossing, Levy guards against a reading of class or race (or indeed gender) as stable categories in her novel. Rather, she presents belonging within such categories as context-specific and 'mediated by the historically specific everyday of social relations' (Brah 1996, 192).

The entangling of raced and classed boundaries in *Small Island* comes to a head in the way these two characters negotiate spatial power relations when Queenie comes to knock at the door of Hortense and Gilbert's rented room. While it is 'politeness and good breeding' which compels Hortense to open the door, she quickly learns that these good manners are not returned:

> I opened the door wider for her before she thought me impolite. I merely meant for us to talk through a larger opening. But she walked straight through, even though I had not formally invited her in! […] She perused the place as if this was her home. Pushing her nose into corners, she walked the room as if inspecting some task she had asked of me. (226-7)

After a few more exchanges fraught with issues of 'translation', Hortense notes how Queenie sits down on a chair in the room and invites her to come and sit with her. Taken aback, Hortense resolves, 'But this was my home, it was for me to tell her when to sit, when to come in, when to warm her hands' (229). In this scene, the double-crossing of social boundaries between the two women gets mapped onto the physical space of the house. From Queenie's perspective, she is the master of her home and it is only through her 'kindness' that Hortense and Gilbert have come to live there, a reference to the racial prohibitions of most landlords at the time. However, as a paying tenant who perceives herself to be socially superior to her landlady, Hortense believes she reserves the right of privacy and power over her allocated space, however small it may be. The threshold then becomes the site of negotiation between these conflicting claims to interior space – while Hortense exercises 'politeness' by allowing Queenie limited access to what she sees as her home, Queenie does not even recognize the existence of a spatial boundary.

THE HOUSE AND THE NATION

As illustrated by the negotiations of interior space between Hortense and Queenie above, Levy's novel is preoccupied with complicating the seemingly straightforward question of who is at home and who is not at home in the fraught spaces inhabited by her characters. We can extend this question to exterior spaces as well, as the novel's

Caribbean characters differ greatly from its English ones on the question of who is at home in the space of the British nation. While Gilbert and Hortense understand their move to London in terms of a child returning to its mother(country), Queenie, Bernard and their neighbours can only conceive of the couple as strangers who do not belong. Although Gilbert insists that he joined the war effort to 'fight for *my* country' (138, emphasis added), his right to this possessive pronoun is repeatedly disputed by 'natives' throughout the text.

In *Small Island*, these two contested spaces (interior and exterior) are intimately related, as Levy makes use of an existing analogy between house and nation. The term 'home-country', as Rosemary Marangoly George articulates, 'expresses a complex yoking of ideological apparatuses considered necessary for the existence of subjects: the notion of belonging, of having a home, and a place of one's own' (1999: 2). Furthermore, Sarah Gibson explains that:

> the nation, like a house, is limited by its borders; those thresholds/frontiers that must be crossed in order to enter (or leave) the homely space. […] The door is a metaphorical gateway into the nation (airports, ports). The door is the link between inside and outside (2003: 375).

As mentioned earlier, these analogous qualities have resulted in a slippage between house and nation, which anti-immigration discourse has capitalised on. In this rhetoric, the qualities of the house (familiarity, safety, belonging) are transferred onto the nation in order to generate an emotive response to immigration. The semantic overlap between home as domestic space and home as national space (as in the construction home-country) allows the substitution of terms to go unnoticed so that we conceive of the nation as a private space where guests can be invited but where they can also overstay their welcome.[35] This parallelism generates a further conceit of hospitality on the part of

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[35] We can see an example of how the contiguity of house and nation gets produced in the speeches of notorious anti-immigration campaigner Enoch Powell. The use of anecdotes about elderly women who feel unsafe in their own homes due to the influx of 'negroes' in their neighborhoods is a recurring rhetorical device. See James Procter's discussion of this motif in Powell's speeches (2003, 378).

the indigenous 'hosts' and ingratitude on the part of those no longer wanted 'guests'. To return to an earlier scene in the novel, while Hortense's bell-ringing fantasy is about ownership and control over her own 'English' domestic space, this action is haunted by another, perhaps more fitting interpretation, that of requesting permission to enter an otherwise restricted zone.

In *Small Island*, Levy inverts the metaphor of the nation-as-house by using Queenie's lodging-house in Earls Court as a space to play out the racial and xenophobic anxieties of the nation. However, the national anxieties (and anxieties about nation) in the post-war period were not only related to the influx of immigrants from the colonial periphery, but were also greatly affected by uncertainties emanating from developments 'out there' in the empire. Having just returned from this contested space, Queenie's husband Bernard expresses the growing ambivalence among the British populace about the value of the colonial mission. His conclusion that 'The recipe for a quiet life is each to their own,' gestures at a post-war shift in attitudes: 'Look at India,' he says, 'The British knew fair play. Leave India to the Indians' (469). According to Wendy Webster, the demise of empire and its associations of male adventure and power over territory required a change of discursive tactics so that 'the symbols of Englishness in race discourse became the quiet street and privet hedge' (1998: xiv), signifying a retreat into an idealised English domesticity as the 'cure' for imperial ambivalence and the violence of war. In *Small Island*, this retreat into the domestic is most fully embodied in the character of Bernard's shell-shocked father, Arthur, who is consistently associated with an explicitly feminised domestic sphere, as he is reported to grow vegetables, cook and stand in the ration queue alongside 'lines and lines and lines of women' (289).

Instead of a glorified home-coming, however, Bernard returns to find that his house no longer provides the comforting support required to sustain his (masculine) subjectivity. Echoing the indigenous Britons cited in Powell's 'rivers of blood' speech who complain of being made strangers in their own country (Powell and Collings

1991), Bernard returns to his family home to find it irreparably changed. In addition to the racialised presence of 'unfamiliar objects' and an 'odd smell' (467), Bernard finds that, as Queenie now generates her own income by letting rooms, his role as the male breadwinner is no longer needed. In Bernard's words, 'I felt I'd stumbled into someone else's existence by mistake and was now busy trying to find my part' (507). This uncanny sensation which plagues Bernard's homecoming is emblematic of a generation of white male returnees who expect to resume their rightful place at the head of the post-war 'family' (with its connotations of domesticity, security and familiarity) but are greeted instead with a society engaged in contestations over race, class and gender.

Such contestations come to the fore in Bernard's encounters with Gilbert, who continually frustrates Bernard's attempts to reinstate his authority over the household by insisting that he only answers to Queenie (471). Not only does this thwart Bernard's efforts to return his home to the comfort of 'pure' English domesticity, but the fact that it is his own wife standing in the way of such a move destabilises his sense of home even more. Even more unsettling, Bernard finds out that Queenie has given birth to a child by another man, the black RAF pilot Michael. This represents the most heinous violation of the integrity of the English domestic space, as it places the racial other within the confines of the nuclear family itself. If we extend Levy's metaphor of the house-as-nation, then the birth of this baby is not only a violation of Bernard's marriage to Queenie and the home they shared, but throws the whole project of national identity into question. If, as Susan Fischer (2007) contends, Queenie represents the Mother Country, then it is particularly problematic that she is unable to produce 'pure' offspring with her lawful husband and can only reproduce the nation through an affair with a racial other.

'EACH TO THEIR OWN'?

As some have argued, Queenie's final decision to give up her child to Hortense and Gilbert could be read as a (re)solidifying of racial boundaries after a brief moment of

exchange and contact in the lodging house (Brophy 2010; McLeod 2006). Michael Jr.'s adoption also coincides with Hortense and Gilbert's move to a new house and, from Bernard's perspective at least, their departure could be said to signify a return to a comforting pre-war state, re-establishing home as a bounded territory of 'Englishness' where various 'others' are not admitted. Likewise, Bernard's plan to move to a house in the country could be interpreted as a further retreat into an idealized image of Englishness as rooted in a racially and culturally 'pure' countryside. However, this rupture is more than a simple matter of 'each to their own'. Despite the fact that the adoption 'contains' the problem of racial miscegenation in the eyes of society, the rupture is ultimately incomplete, as illustrated by Queenie's desire to maintain communication with the Jamaican couple and the picture of herself which she leaves among the baby's things, as Brophy (2010) also suggests. This preservation of a link between the two couples could be seen as an attempt to leave space for future generations to discover their own contested diasporic genealogies.

More than this, however, given Hortense's past encounters with 'Englishness', both in Jamaica and within the boundaries of Queenie's lodging-house, the move should also be read as a more positive re-imagining of 'Englishness' and its role in demarcating cultural superiority and social respectability. As I have been arguing throughout this chapter, in *Small Island* Levy mobilises contestations over English domesticity and the English domestic space as a metaphor for the contestations over the right to belong in the space of the British nation. Through her encounter with Queenie, Hortense is forced to confront the misplaced nature of her own ideals of home. When faced with a British nation that will never admit her into the conventional form of Englishness, no matter how accurate her reproduction of its norms and practices, Hortense begins to adopt a new identity as a member of the black diaspora in Britain. This new identity is reflected in the way she comes to embrace the new home Gilbert has found for them. By the end of the novel, Hortense no longer attempts to inhabit a mythic sense of Englishness

concocted out of images of ideal homes which, although they may offer temporary

lodging, will never admit her as a fully-fledged resident. In place of this mythologised

domesticity, Hortense and Gilbert begin to establish a black domestic space that

reverses the trajectory of the dilapidation and decay normally attributed to the influx of

blackness, framed instead as a project of restoration and beautification. This redeploys

black domesticity as an enabling space and creates possibilities for escaping the

discursive trap of the colonial politics of 'respectability' laid out above.

Therefore, it is through the painful process of trying to settle as a black

Caribbean immigrant within British (home)spaces that Hortense comes to embrace a

diasporic identity which is not dependent upon a restrictive notion of Englishness as the

only mark of one's place in society. However, this is more than a simple matter of

'taking her down a peg', as it is also about re-framing Englishness itself as a

consequence of the diasporic encounter. This establishment of a new diasporic or Black

British identity for Hortense, articulated through the domestic, can be said to adhere to

Levy's sense of her own Englishness:

> Saying that I'm English doesn't mean I want to be assimilated; to take on
> the majority white culture to the exclusion of all other. (I cannot live
> without rice and peas. I now dance like a lunatic when Jamaica wins
> anything. And I will always make a noise when moved by emotion.)
> (2000)

With Levy's statement here we are returned to food as a marker of belonging, but

instead of the young Angela's desire to eat steak and kidney pie and spam fritters, it is

Jamaican rice and peas that gets mobilised as a claim of Englishness, but one whose

frame has expanded to make room for plurality and difference.

To a certain extent, by using the space of the home to stage a conflict over

national identity and belonging, Levy is reinforcing the metaphorical relationship

between the house and nation, where the significance of the novel's domestic setting

could be said to be subordinate to its more 'public' concerns. However, because Levy

makes codes of domestic conduct central to articulations of Englishness in the novel, it

is not a mere substitution of the public for the private. Instead, Levy asks us to consider

the importance of such codes in *producing* contemporary attitudes towards immigrant

populations and the pull of a nostalgic return to an Englishness articulated through

particular 'comfort' foods and ways of organising domestic life. She also reminds us

that these markers of Englishness were largely formed in the colonial encounter and

therefore, that the legacy of British colonialism continues to permeate the discursive

relationship between 'natives' and postcolonial populations in the metropole. As

suggested, Levy's narrative form challenges the notion of migration as a narrative of

progress towards assimilation due to its entanglement of migrant and native characters,

asserting that both are shaped by the same domestic values and discourses. In the next

chapter, I look at a novel in which houses and household objects form an integral part of

the machinery of the migration narrative, such that form and content are closely

intertwined. Like Levy's novel, *By the Sea* challenges established tropes of migration

through its formal and rhetorical choices, in this case rejecting the conceptualisation of

migration as an unproblematic rejection of 'home' and resisting an over-valorisation of

the artistic figure of the exile/nomad.

7. HOMELESSNESS AND THE REFUGEE: ABDULRAZAK GURNAH'S *BY THE SEA*

Saleh Omar, the ageing protagonist of Abdulrazak Gurnah's novel *By the Sea*, declares at the opening of his migration narrative, 'I am a refugee, an asylum-seeker' (2002, 4). With this statement, Saleh declares a particular kind of migrant identity, one which appears to subsume any other identifications that may have existed prior to his migration. According to Edward Said in his essay 'Reflections of Exile', in contrast to the 'touch of solitude and spirituality' attached to the term 'exile', 'refugee' is a creation of the twentieth century state, a political word 'suggesting large herds of innocent and bewildered people requiring urgent international assistance' (2001, 181). In a critique of Said's reading, Caren Kaplan contends that, for Said, 'the refugee is a faceless political construct outside the sphere of literature and aesthetics', while the exile is 'a romantic figure that can be readily identified and positioned in an aestheticized world of creativity and loss' (1996, 120).[36] She goes on to argue that, '[c]riticism, Said seems to suggest, cannot follow this faint trail. […] Once moved, a mass of people become ghostlike, disappearing off the map of literature and culture' (121).[37] However, by building his novel *By the Sea* around the experiences of a protagonist who so explicitly announces this identification, Abdulrazak Gurnah invites his readers to ponder the

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[36] We can draw a parallel between Said's conceptualisation of the exile here and Salman Rushdie's vision of migration in 'Imaginary Homelands', discussed in Chapter 3. Both position the migrant/exile at the intersection of loss and creativity, where the sense of loss suffered through displacement is figured as necessary for producing an aesthetic impulse unencumbered by spatial attachments. Rushdie makes this point more explicit in another essay in *Imaginary Homelands*, where he refers to migrants as people who are 'free of the shackles of nationalism […], who root themselves in ideas rather than places' (1992, 124).

[37] This positioning of the refugee outside of cultural discourse is reflected in the scholarship that exists on refugees and asylum seekers. Despite the rapidly increasing body of literary and cultural criticism that makes reference to migration and diaspora, in order to find work that productively interrogates the figure of the refugee, one must still turn largely to the social sciences. An exception (in addition to Kaplan above) is Michael Jackson's *The Politics of Storytelling* (2002), which draws on cultural and narrative theory in its discussion of refugee narratives. Tellingly, it is in literary criticism on Gurnah's work that some of the more complex discursive analyses of the asylum process can be found (See Olaussen 2009; Farrier 2008; Farrier 2011; Helff 2009).

particularities of this specific kind of migration *within* the realm of the aesthetic and the literary. As distinct from the economic or aspirational backdrops of the other migration narratives discussed so far in this thesis, it is important to draw out what sets this form of migration apart from the others covered and, particularly, how house, home and the domestic are figured differently in Gurnah's fictional account.

As Kaplan has persuasively argued in *Questions of Travel* (1996), modernism's preoccupation with the figure of the exile has to a large extent been recycled in post-modern discourses, such that the figure of the 'nomad' has now become the favoured trope of creative displacement. As discussed earlier in this thesis, she is particularly critical of the use of this figure by poststructuralist critics Deleuze and Guattari, whose theory of *deterritorialisation* has been a favourite among literary critics of migrant/diasporic writing.[38] However, this new figure, while made to *stand for* the aesthetic experience of dislocation produced by postmodernity, is, in its real, historicised incarnation, excluded from the aesthetic realm. 'Homelessness' in such theorisations, is similarly positioned, such that it comes to represent a poetic, figurative displacement at the expense of those who are literally un-homed.

In an evaluation that appears to make a similar theoretical move, Rosemary Marangoly George argues that what she calls 'the immigrant genre' is characterised by 'a curiously detached reading of the experience of "homelessness"'. Referring to such works as Sam Selvon's *Lonely Londoners* and M. J. Vassanji's *The Gunny Sack*, she argues that this feature 'is compensated for by an excessive use of the metaphor of luggage, both spiritual and material', a trope which she has termed 'travelling light' (1999, 171). However, unlike the characters in the novels George covers, who 'determinedly leave their native lands without baggage', refugees are often not accorded this choice (1999, 173). For the refugee, 'travelling light' is not merely a trope but often a lived reality, the consequence of a hasty departure or a need to conceal one's identity.

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[38] See, for example, in Bromley (2000), Seyhan (2000), Nash (2007), and Hassan (2011).

In Gurnah's novel, Saleh Omar is literally 'travelling light', as he arrives at Gatwick airport with nothing other than:

> two shirts, one blue, one yellow, both faded, three white T-shirts, one pair of brown trousers, three pairs of underpants, two pairs of socks, one kanzu, two sarunis, a towel and a small wooden casket (8).

For Saleh, however, this lack of baggage is not intended as a shirking off of where he has come from, but is rather performed as an act of self-preservation. Through its traumatic stories of dispossession and the centrality of houses and household objects in driving the novel's interwoven narratives, *By the Sea* presents material homelessness as one of its central concerns. The representation of homelessness in Gurnah's migration novel is neither 'detached' nor valorised, but is instead presented as a material condition which must be appreciated and attended to.

As already discussed, embracing a state of 'homelessness' has been called upon by some feminist theorists as a form of resistance to exclusionary power-structures of race and gender (Martin and Mohanty 1986; Honig 1994). Furthermore, the modern 'bourgeois' attachment to home has been critiqued elsewhere as a symptom of modern capitalism and commodity consumption, in which the (implicitly Euro-American) subject 'fills its existential lack by seeing itself in objects, through owning, possessing and accumulating property' (Duncan 1981, qtd. in Young 1997, 141). This commodification of the domestic (or 'the cult of domesticity', to use Anne McClintock's language) takes on an even more problematic resonance when considered in the context of histories of colonialism, driven as it was by an appetite for 'exotic' domestic commodities, as well as the role of Victorian domestic norms in shoring up its 'civilizing' missions, as discussed in the previous chapter.

The above list of pitfalls has lead some to conclude that 'the dream of home is dangerous, particularly in a postcolonial setting' (Honig 1994, qtd. in Young 1997, 158). However, from Kaplan's critique, we can see how embracing metaphysical 'homelessness' at the expense of those who are materially homeless, such as refugees, is

also to make an exclusionary move. The important question, which has been circulating in the background of this thesis, is how one resists the exclusionary aspects of 'home' without de-valuing it for those who are already marginalized by the power-structures it implies. One feminist critic has navigated a path through the treacherous pitfalls of home and has opened up space for a reading of the human attachment to it and the objects it contains that is neither masculinist nor exclusionary. In her essay, 'House and Home, Feminist Variations on a Theme', Iris Marion Young asserts that, precisely because home is a privilege, its values 'should be democratised rather than rejected' (1997, 157). Her argument is particularly applicable to the case of refugees whose 'homelessness' is not an artistic choice but a fact of their circumstances, and her analysis can help us to further illuminate Gurnah's representation of this experience.

As laid out in Chapter 2, Young's defence of home turns on a deployment of Heidegger's notion of 'dwelling' as containing both 'building' and 'preservation'. In contrast to the masculinist and imperialist resonance of 'building', she argues that preservation 'makes and remakes home as a support for personal identity without accumulation, certainty, or fixity', and sets her feminist conceptualisation of home against others that read homemaking as 'immanent' (de Beauvoir) or racially exclusionary (Martin and Mohanty). For Young, homemaking as preservation (building on Edward Casey's notion of 'sedimentation') 'entails not only keeping the physical objects of a particular people intact, but renewing their meaning in their lives', asserting that 'the activities of preservation give some enclosing fabric to this ever-changing subject by knitting together today and yesterday, integrating the new events and relationships into the *narrative of a life*, the biography of a person, a family, a people' (153, emphasis added). It is this centrality of narrative in making home that I want to focus on in relation to refugee migration and Gurnah's novel in particular. For Young, personal objects are key for both making and transforming life narratives and that their arrangement in space, their presence and lack become 'layered through stories, and the

wordless memories of smells, rhythms and interactions' (151). In *By the Sea*, material homes and the personal objects they contain are invested with narrative meaning through their function as both the *subject* of the novel's layers of stories and the *means* by which they are told. Most significant of these, is the cask of *ud-al-qamari,* the only object from Saleh's previous life that he allows himself to take into his new existence as a refugee. The cask is an object invested with a complicated narrative history of its own, but it also serves as the memory-object through which Saleh is able to tell the traumatic story behind his flight from his home in Zanzibar.

Through the lens of Iris Marion Young's concept of homemaking as preservation, this chapter will unpack the significance of the motifs of houses and domestic objects in *By the Sea* as a way of getting at the particularities of refugee migration. Firstly, I will show how objects and material homes in *By the Sea* become invested with narrative meaning through their gift, exchange and theft. Secondly, I will look at the series of non-homes that Gurnah's refugee protagonist is subjected to on arrival and the function of the asylum process in effectively denying him access to the personal narratives (and narrative-objects) that would ordinarily aid the process of sedimentation in a new home, to use Young's language. The process of storytelling itself is of particular interest in my analysis, as Gurnah's narrator-protagonist Saleh Omar is himself a storyteller who frequently draws attention to the operations of his own narrative technique. While household objects in *By the Sea* are invested with narrative meaning, the process of storytelling itself becomes a way to enact a sense of home in a new space.

STORYTELLING AND HOME

In the opening pages of *By the Sea*, Saleh Omar muses, 'Sometimes I think it is my fate to live in the wreckage and confusion of crumbling houses' (2002, 1). In fact, we can infer that 'house' is the implied subject modified by the prepositional phrase, 'by the sea', referring to the location of Saleh's residence on the coast in both Zanzibar and

England, bridging the life he has left behind and the one he now lives as a refugee. This reading of Gurnah's title is directly evoked by the novel's second narrator, Latif Mahmud, who describes his own migration as a journey between these two spaces, saying 'it's as if I went on from Saleh Omar's house [in Zanzibar] and right out of the country, and through the years I have been finding my way to his other house by the sea' (104).

Houses are a recurring motif in Gurnah's fiction. In his Booker shortlisted novel *Paradise* (2004 [1994]), the mysterious Uncle Aziz's opulent house and garden is one manifestation of the paradise on earth sought by the novel's young protagonist. In Gurnah's most recent novel, *The Last Gift* (2011), the house motif appears as a recurring dream experienced by the dying Abbas's daughter Anna. In this dream, she finds herself inhabiting one part of a house, while 'the rest of it was derelict, with sagging roof beams and creaking, half-rotten wooden windows' (88), perhaps gesturing back at the 'wreckage and confusion of crumbling houses' invoked by the aging Saleh Omar. The tropes of house and home in *By the Sea* have been analysed elsewhere by positing Europe as the metaphorical 'house' to which Saleh must prove himself worthy to gain entry, casting asylum as a form of hospitality that those who are 'part of the family' are able to extend or deny (Gurnah 2002, 12).[39] This reading is substantiated in this scholarship with reference to the language of asylum legislation, which constructs asylum seekers as strangers that require 'accommodation' within the 'protective' space of the European nation-state, framing refugees within a discourse of hospitality (Gibson 2003). While making many important points about the legal and political discourse

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[39] Helff (2009) and Farrier (2008) both analyse Saleh Omar's arrival and subsequent petition for asylum status with reference to the immigration officer's portrayal of Europe as a 'family' and draw on Jacques Derrida's notion of hospitality in analysing this trope. This 'familial' notion of Europe is becoming increasingly codified with the growing importance of the European Union in regulating immigration of peoples from outside its perceived geographic and cultural 'borders'. Olaussen (2009) draws on a similar analogy of Europe as a protective domestic space, reading the figures of Rachel and Celia as emasculating 'helpers' who shield a feminised Saleh from the patriarchal power of the Western state.

surrounding asylum-seeking, this reading reduces (or elevates) the centrality of houses

in *By the Sea* to (mere) analogical significance. Furthermore, the substitution produced

by the metaphorical relationship between 'house' and 'Europe' in these readings of

Gurnah's novel serves to reinforce the tendency to conflate house and nation discussed

in the previous chapter, since Europe in this context is demarcated by a kind of

nationalist rhetoric. It also relies on a trope which places a feminised domestic space at

the service of 'the affairs of the nation' (George 1999, 13), while ignoring or

marginalising the ways that discursive deployments of 'home' engage with the

domestic, the private and the feminised as a source of meaning *in themselves*.

The importance of the various houses in *By the Sea* can be traced through the

separate but linked stories about the period leading up to and after the 1964 Zanzibari

Revolution. In fact, *By the Sea* is essentially a series of stories that are put together to

form what we now call a novel. Stories are important carriers of cultural meaning for

Gurnah. In one interview, he articulates the history of Indian Ocean connections, a

central concern of his fiction (Chambers 2011; Boswell 2008), in terms of the

dissemination of stories throughout the region. He recalls:

> I was surprised to read tales in a book of *The Arabian Nights*, because
> these stories were told by my mother and grandmother, and so on, and it
> felt as though they were our stories. It also never occurred to me to ask
> why we told each other stories about China, Persia, and Syria, but these
> places existed in our imaginary world, because the sea routes made us
> part of the wider world. (Chambers 2011, 129)

In addition to the many intertextual references to stories from *The Arabian Nights* in *By*

the Sea (84-85, 152, 170), the act of storytelling forms much of the novel's frame

narrative and also facilitates the resolution of the Mahmud-Omar family feud by the two

migrant protagonists. In contrast to written works, stories and tales, which tend to start

out in oral form, are not fixed entities. In her introduction to *The Virago Book of Fairy*

Tales, Angela Carter elaborates upon this distinction. She says:

> Ours is a highly individualized culture, with a great faith in the work of
> art as a unique one-off, and the artist as an original, a godlike and
> inspired creator of unique one-offs. But fairy tales are not like that, nor

are their makers. Who first invented meatballs? In what country? Is there
a definitive recipe for potato soup? Think in terms of the domestic arts.
'This is how *I* make potato soup'. (1991, x)

In feminist criticism, the centrality of 'authorship' (which Carter here is setting

fairytales against) in defining the value of literary texts has been scrutinised as

inherently masculinist. As Gilbert and Gubar (1984) articulate, 'the patriarchal notion

that the writer "fathers" his text just as God fathered the world is and has been all-

pervasive in Western literary civilization', such that 'Male sexuality, […] is not just

analogically but actually the essence of literary power' (4). They go on to draw attention

to the way that 'authorship' and its related term (literary) 'authority' have been founded

on the Enlightenment principle of the (implicitly male) individual who controls and

essentially 'owns' the works that he produces.[40]

Caren Kaplan extends this critique with reference to male migrant intellectuals,

specifically Theodor Adorno and Frank Aurbach, who each celebrate the transformative

power of authorship in the midst of physical displacement through their writings. She

notes that in such approaches:

> The redemptive power of writing [...] is assumed without investigating
> the conditions of production that often govern the craft. The absence of
> women writers from the discussion of exile as redemptive authorial
> practice and the crucial issue of class in exile and literary/artistic
> communities suggest that the question of writing a 'home' may be even
> more complex than Adorno's and Auerbach's exilic paradigms allow.
> (1996, 119)

Kaplan then goes on to criticise Edward Said's retention of this paradigm in

'Reflections on Exile'. She argues that, '[r]ather than elucidating the modes of

representation that arise in an age of refugees, immigrants and the homeless, Said

returns to a figure more closely associated with classical Western traditions as well as

modernist myths of authorship', such that Said's deployment of the figure of the refugee

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[40] Critiques of the concept of authorship have also been lodged from a postcolonial
perspective, particularly in an African context. Despite the proliferation of storytelling
traditions throughout the African continent, Europeans produced the 'popular myth' that
African peoples lacked a literary tradition by applying the same Enlightenment
principles, and this denial was mobilised as a way of justifying the 'civilising' mission
of colonialism (Finnegan 1970, 26).

serves to '*authorize*' his discourse on exile (*ibid*, 120, emphasis in original). As Carter rightly points out in the quotation above, the act of storytelling carries a very different resonance from the concept of authorship. The storyteller performs or recites the story, but he/she does not 'own' it in the way an author is perceived to 'own' his text. While constructions of stories and storytelling as both 'primitive' and feminized forms of creative production have led to the devaluation of storytelling as a legitimate literary form,[41] Carter's reference to the domestic arts above reframes storytelling's feminized genealogy as providing an element of fluidity and adaptability that is missing from written forms. Gurnah evokes this fluidity in his recollection of the tales he grew up with, which originate from an unspecified geographical source, at once 'ours' (East African) and 'theirs' (Chinese, Persian, Syrian). Furthermore, his attribution of such stories to 'mothers and grandmothers' also places women at the centre of the storytelling tradition and this is echoed in his fiction. In *By the Sea*, for example, Latif describes his mother's tales about 'merchants and poor men, and enchanted princesses and enraged djinns' as more 'exciting' than the real-life exploits of the mysterious Uncle Hussein, as told by his father (89).

Although there are two protagonist-narrators in *By the Sea*, the novel's primary storyteller is the refugee Saleh Omar. Saleh frequently calls attention to the subjective nature of his narratives by informing his reader/listener that he will 'tell it this way' (16) or accounting for alterations from the 'original'. In the first few pages of the novel, for example, Saleh describes 'leaving what we know and arriving in strange places carrying little bits of jumbled luggage and suppressing secret and garbled ambitions' as a

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[41] As Carter explains, a derisive label such as 'old wives' tale' 'allots the art of storytelling to women at the exact same time it takes all value from it', casting women and their storytelling traditions as mutually ineffectual (1991, xi). However, through the production of volumes such as Carter's, stories and folktales that had previously been decried as feminised, inferior forms of creative production, are now being recuperated as 'literature'. Resistance to such assumptions has also been a key concern of postcolonial African fiction, as writers often strive to infuse European literary forms with the qualities of African storytelling as a way of 'decolonising' language (Achebe 1994), and of African literary criticism, through the recuperation of African oral forms (Finnegan 1970) and attention to the oral qualities of written works (Irele 2001).

'familiar climax in our stories' (4), drawing our attention to the artifice that shapes what we are about to hear (or read).[42] It also leads us to wonder who the 'our' might encompass. Is it a reference to storytellers in general or, more specifically, to storytellers who tell narratives of migration, or could it be a reference to Gurnah himself, as one of the many writers of fiction who have migrated from elsewhere? By framing Saleh's narration in this way, Gurnah reveals a self-consciousness about the process of writing migration into fiction. By embracing a trope of storytelling over one of authorship, Gurnah appears to be inscribing his migration narrative in a more inclusive and feminised domain, which contrasts greatly with the masculinist figure of the exiled writer, as embodied by Edward Said.

By applying Iris Marion Young's emphasis on the narrative aspect of homemaking, the relationship between storytelling and the domestic can be further explored in the processes of storytelling in *By the Sea.* In the novel, houses do not serve as mere settings for such stories but form an integral part of their narrative machinery. Firstly, there is the house of Latif's father, Rajab Shaaban, which is used as a guarantee in a complicated loan arrangement between Saleh Omar, Latif's father and an opportunistic Persian trader named Hussein. After Hussein disappears, defaulting on his debt to Saleh Omar, Saleh is forced to recoup his losses by calling in the promissory note left to him by Hussein and seizing Latif's childhood home, an act which appears to mark the beginning of the feud between the families of the two protagonists. However, as we later learn, this feud actually began many years before this, involving another house which is also an 'object of contention' between the two families, that of Latif's aunt, Bi Maryam, also Saleh's late stepmother (183). These disputes over houses drive the novel's flashback plot, determining the series of misunderstandings and vengeful

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[42] If we compare *By the Sea* to a novel like *Brick Lane*, where the straight realist form opens the novel to debates about 'authenticity', through these moments Gurnah draws attention to the performative nature of the narrative, thereby resisting such interpretive frames.

acts that lead the novel's protagonists, Latif and Saleh, to confront one another and finally enact reconciliation in a different country in yet a third house 'by the sea'.

Before these stories of past injustices can be exchanged, however, Saleh Omar migrates to England as an asylum seeker and goes through the process of resettling as a refugee, and storytelling is also a key driver of this process. On arrival, the conditions of modern asylum seeking require that Saleh (travelling under the name Rajab Shaaban Mahmud) 'perform' a story of his life that conforms to the requirements of international asylum legislation. This process, as I will argue in the latter part of this chapter, produces a kind of lapse which prevents Saleh from telling the stories that need to be told. In the next section, I will focus on the way that houses and personal objects become invested with narrative meaning through the novel's flashback plot.

EXCHANGE AND THE PRODUCTION OF NARRATIVE OBJECTS

In the previous chapter, I discussed how the dissemination of domestic norms throughout Britain's colonial territories functioned as an extension of imperial power. With its detailed accounts of intercontinental trade routes, *By the Sea* calls attention to how the dissemination of domestic objects themselves was both a motivation of and a convenient justification for maintaining the unequal power dynamics of empire. Trade in domestic commodities was a major driving force of colonialism as consumer tastes for 'exotic' goods proliferated in European metropoles (McClintock 1995). At the same time, rhetoric that cast colonials as unaccustomed to the domestic norms of their colonisers served to shore up ideology about the 'civilising' forces of colonialism.

Saleh Omar's previous occupation as a colonially-educated furniture-seller who made his money by adorning the houses of European colonists with 'exotic' treasures and selling off what they had left behind in the wake of independence gestures at this darker side of the domestic. It also places him in an ambivalent position relative to the postcolonial nation that comes after, as he is neither a departing colonist nor is he perceived as a 'true' citizen of the new republic. The demonization of Saleh Omar in

Mahmud family mythology makes productive use of this ambivalence, framed as he is as a 'notorious licker of British arses for whom he rifled through other people's belongings to find trinkets for them to take home as booty of their conquests' (101). This characterization of Saleh as an ambiguous figure, benefitting from the colonial system but also a victim of the neo-colonial regime, is reminiscent of Shakespeare's Shylock, who is also at once a loathsome and sympathetic figure. Gurnah himself gestures at this intertextuality, drawing attention to Saleh's deployment of the phrase 'that this too solid flesh should melt' while he considers whether the immigration officer Kevin Edelman might have Jewish ancestry (12).[43] By evoking the figure of the usurer, Gurnah is perhaps alluding to Saleh's hidden guilt and need for 'absolution' (4), which finally comes to him at the end of the novel.[44] However, it also draws attention to the centrality of exchange in *By the Sea*. Like Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*, the plot of Saleh's flashback narrative turns on the exchange of commodities, but while Shylock deals in money and the famous 'pound of flesh', the primary units of exchange in *By the Sea* are houses and household goods.

As mentioned above, the feud between the families of Latif and Saleh Omar is escalated when Saleh seizes the Mahmud family home and all its contents. However, this dispossession is facilitated by a prior exchange between Saleh and the Persian trader Hussein, involving an ebony table and a consignment of *ud-al-qamari*, the

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[43] Although this is actually a line from *Hamlet*, the reference to flesh and the context in which it is said reinforces the link to *The Merchant of Venice* (Chambers 2011, 131). This intertextuality can be extended further if we consider Saleh's position in Tanzanian society, part of a mercantile class of Arabs and Asians in Africa who are framed as the middlemen between coloniser and colonised, a position that has been likened (though not unproblematically) to that of the Jews in Europe (Hamai 2011). Saleh's later life as a refugee who must seek hospitality at the doors of Europe further reinforces this likeness. In particular, Hamai refers to the use of this comparison in the British press at the time of the expulsion of Asians from Uganda by Idi Amin. Susheila Nasta makes a productive comparison between the figure of 'the Jew' and the South Asian migrant writer, in particular Salman Rushdie, saying that both have been mobilised as symbols of 'a universalized and aestheticized "state of homelessness that is the new gospel of postmodernity"' (2002, 137).

[44] While moneylending for profit has since become a mainstay of secular economies, it still remains a taboo practice in many Islamic societies and economic systems, as is evidenced by the hated character of Mrs Islam in Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*.

remainder of which eventually travels to Britain in the paltry luggage of the aging

Saleh:

> We agreed that Hussein would pay me half my asking price for the
> [ebony] table in cash, and for the rest he would give me a twenty-pound
> packet of ud-al-qamari. He was generous, or I was better at bargaining
> than I thought I was. He gave me the casket as a gift, the casket Kevin
> Edelman plundered from me, and with it the last of the ud-al-qamari
> Hussein and his father bought in Bangkok in the year before the war, the
> casket which I had brought with me as all the luggage from a life
> departed, the provisions of my after-life. (31)

This seemingly insignificant exchange of household commodities sets in motion the

sequence of events which lead to Saleh's downfall and eventual migration. The

importance of this trade for triggering the ill-fated events which are to follow is

reinforced by the mode in which Gurnah has his protagonist remember them. It is no

accident that the discovery of the cask of *ud-al-qamari* at Gatwick airport is what

prompts Saleh to begin the tale of his previous life. The chapter in which this episode is

found is entitled 'Relics', implying that the casket of *ud* functions as a kind of spiritual

object, full of significance beyond its mere economic or even sentimental value.

Furthermore, in the same way that religious relics were exchanged in Christendom

during the medieval period, it is through the cask's (and its counterpart, the ebony

table's) purchase, gift and theft that it acquires this significance.[45] As Patrick Geary

argues in reference to medieval relics, 'The value lay not in the [relics] themselves as

alienable objects, but rather in the relationships they could create as subjects' (1986,

183). Likewise, the various exchanges that these household objects undergo imbue them

with social meaning beyond their mere materiality. In the sale of the table above, for

example, the 'gift' of the casket transforms what would have been a purely economic

exchange of goods into a form of gift exchange. Such gift exchanges, as analysed in the

work of Pierre Bourdieu (1977), are important for creating and reinforcing social bonds

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[45] My analysis of the *ud* here bears resemblance to Brenda Cooper's reading of this
section of Gurnah's novel (2008). However, I argue for another layer of significance
that relates the narrative meaning of these objects to their function in the process of
making home, drawing on Young's theorisation.

by producing 'good faith' between exchanging parties. In this particular exchange, Hussein's apparent 'generosity' combined with the gift of the mahogany casket reinforces the trust between himself and Saleh, which is later used to Hussein's advantage when he goes to ask Saleh for a loan. This second exchange, orchestrated by Hussein, ultimately indebts Latif's family to a man they loathe (Saleh), setting up a third exchange (Latif's family home for the defaulted loan) that finally destroys relations between the two families. Meanwhile, the ebony table is given to Latif's brother Hassan as a token of affection (facilitating Hassan's ill-fated relationship with Hussein), and then returns to Saleh Omar as 'plunder' with the acquisition of the house (102). This 'theft' of the table, and Saleh's refusal to return it to Latif years later reinforces the shame that its gift originally brought upon the Mahmud family. This insult, in turn, infuriates Latif's mother, who uses her political influence to have Saleh arrested, tortured and imprisoned for more than ten years.

As in the circulation of religious relics, these household objects in *By the Sea* acquire meaning through their function in facilitating (or destroying) human relationships. The social relationships created and destroyed through the exchange of these objects, and the *ud* in particular, forms the narrative which makes up the novel's flashback plot. Furthermore, as Maya Jaggi points out, like Proust's madeleine, the *ud* acts as the *aide mémoire* (2001), which draws the storyteller (Saleh) back to a crucial point that serves as an appropriate narrative beginning. In this way, the cask actually *contains* the stories which issue from it and the value that it holds is therefore *narrative,* akin to the extensive provenance which accompanies any valuable religious relic. It becomes, so to speak, a *narrative-object*. As I will show in the next section, the 'theft' of this significant object by the immigration officer on Saleh's arrival to Britain begins a second chain of events in the frame story which disconnects Saleh from his (life) narrative and prevents him from re-creating a sense of home in a new place.

As a residue from his previous life as furniture-seller, the aging Saleh spends his days in England exploring furniture shops. He explains his enthusiasm for furniture by asserting that:

> it weighs us down and keeps us on the ground, and prevents us from clambering up trees and howling naked as the terror of our useless lives overcome us. It keeps us from wandering aimlessly in pathless wildernesses, plotting cannibalism in forest clearings and dripping caves (3)

One interpretation of this passage is that Saleh, as an erstwhile 'colonial stooge' (156), is parroting the rhetoric of colonialism as a 'civilising project' intended to 'domesticate' the natives so that they are no longer 'clambering up trees and howling naked…plotting cannibalism in forest clearings and dripping caves'. However, given Saleh's recent arrival to Britain as an asylum seeker, there is also another possible reading, in which 'wandering aimlessly in the pathless wilderness' is an allusion to the condition of the refugee. Read in this way, furniture's ability to 'weigh us down and keep us on the ground' can be taken literally, i.e. that having a space to put one's own furniture is the opposite of (and antidote to) a state of homelessness, or 'wandering'. Echoing Young's argument about the visceral quality of human attachment to household objects (recalling 'smells, rhythms and interactions'), Saleh ascribes a psychic function to these otherwise inert domestic commodities.

If, as Young argues, the preservation of such household artefacts becomes a way of 'knitting together today and yesterday' in the 'narrative of a life', for the refugee, such attachments can no longer be accommodated, as the trauma of departure and the process of seeking asylum produce a sense of rupture, breaking the narrative continuity between past and present. According to Michael Jackson, in the case of refugee migration:

> Not only is there a loss of the social context in which stories are told; the very unities of space, time and character on which narrative coherence depends are broken. […] One's life is reduced to a series of events that have no connection to the life one lived before…or to any life one may hope to live thereafter. (2002, 91)

For Saleh, this disunity is manifested in the circumstances of his arrival to Britain under a new identity.[46] In order to assume this identity, Saleh pretends that he cannot speak English and leaves behind all personal items which might contradict the narrative that he wishes the authorities to 'read' in what he refers to as 'a hermeneutics of baggage' (7). As the immigration officer Kevin Edelman spreads out his meagre luggage, Saleh confesses to the reader, 'It was not my life that lay spread there, just what I had selected as signals of a story I hoped to convey' (8). By collecting such articles and remaining silent in the face of the immigration officer's questions, Saleh performs a narrative of his life which becomes the replacement for all stories which may have come before, solidifying his new identity as a 'refugee'. As mentioned above, the only item he risks bringing from his past life is the mahogany casket of *ud*, which is most important for its narrative value. This object is promptly 'stolen' by Edelman (with the pretence of sending it for 'testing'), symbolising a final rift in narrative continuity.

While the discursive claims of other kinds of migrants and diasporic communities often mobilise 'identity' as something to be held onto that gives the displaced body/community strength in the face of a potentially hostile host environment, in the case of the asylum seeker, identity becomes a liability that must be scrupulously managed and kept in check. Rather than preserved (in Young's sense of the word) and celebrated, all markers of the personal or collective stories which make up the life and 'culture' of the migrated body/bodies must be 'sanitised' to produce the empty signifier 'refugee'. Like the military practice of 'sanitisation',[47] in which soldiers about to be deployed to the front line go through a process of divesting themselves of any personal items, such as photographs or letters from home, which might give the enemy an

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[46] I am using the terms 'identity' and 'story' somewhat interchangeably in this section because, as we know from the work of Stuart Hall (1994) and others, identities are also kinds of stories, discursive constructions that 'narrate' a particular person or people.

[47] While this is likely to be a common practice among any military personnel who could potentially be captured and interrogated, as far as I am aware, the term 'sanitisation' has only been used in reference to British troops at the start of the Iraq War in 2003. See, for instance, as explained in Judd (2003) and Gillan (2003).

advantage in interrogation should they be captured, the asylum seeker must do the same so as not to betray any information that could be used against them in the asylum process. As one article describing this practice asserts, 'Any personal trinket might offer a piece to the puzzle of their lives, a chink in their armour' (Judd 2003), rendering the process of sanitisation as one of *depersonalisation*, where all vestiges of the private sphere are squared away as potential 'chinks' in the armour of an identity that reads as nothing other than 'soldier' or, in Saleh's case, 'refugee'.

Others have argued that Saleh's self-imposed silence on arrival should be understood as a form of resistance to structures of power which ordinarily 'silence' refugees in other ways (Olaussen 2009; Farrier 2011). However, the fact remains that his 'refusal' to speak English is part of a larger performance through which Saleh attempts to conform to the state's (here represented by Edelman) idea of what a 'legitimate' refugee should look (and sound) like. While any sign of wealth may imply that Saleh had benefitted in some way from the society he is now claiming is endangering his life, knowledge of English might signal a worldliness that cannot be accommodated within the figure 'refugee'. As Latif articulates later in the novel, 'Without English you are even more of a stranger, a refugee, […] more convincing. […] You're just a condition, without even a story' (143). Therefore, in order for Saleh's claim for asylum to be read as 'authentic', Saleh must assume a guise of complete victimhood. Although this performance is an active attempt at self-preservation, Saleh is still acting through power structures against which he has no other recourse. As a result of such a system, 'asylum-seeker' and 'refugee' become self-fulfilling labels, emptied of any prior personal content. As Liz Schuster explains, 'The 1951 Convention [on Refugees] creates a gateway for those who are persecuted […]. But, in revenge, the state penalizes those who exercise this right by stripping them of all other identities save that of "asylum-seeker", someone without rights, someone to be excluded' (2003, 246). Symbolised by the theft of the cask of incense on his arrival, Saleh undergoes a process

of depersonalisation, which is consistently linked to an increasing sense of homelessness through a separation from objects that have any narrative meaning. This homelessness is constituted by his movement through a series of what I am calling 'non-homes' before finally settling once again in a home 'by the sea'.

Drawing on the work of Marc Augé in their book *Migrants of Identity*, Rapport and Dawson declare that it is 'non-places which have become the real measure of our time', describing these as 'transit points and temporary abodes: wastelands, building sites, waiting-rooms, refugee camps, stations, malls, hotels, where travellers break step and thousands of individual itineraries momentarily converge' (1998, 6). Young argues that we should consider places that are *not* home to understand the meaning of home and, for Young, it is precisely the work of preservation, of surrounding oneself with personal objects that make up the narrative of a life, which sets homes apart from such non-homes. As a bridge between these two theoretical formulations, I use the term 'non-home' in my analysis here to stand for places that carry the formal qualities of a home – i.e. they are a places of refuge and accommodation, but are not homes in that they do not provide the kind of psychic support that Young deems necessary for a sense of *homeliness*.

According to Sarah Gibson, the series of acts passed since the late 20th century which established a 'holistic asylum process' in the UK, including systems of induction, accommodation and removal centres, have contributed to what she has called the 'politicisation of hospitality' (2003, 370, 371). She goes on to assert that in the language of such a politicised discourse, 'accommodation', has become haunted by its other meaning, 'that of "adaptation" (assimilation) and "containment"' (*ibid*, 373). From the airport Saleh is shepherded to the non-home of a refugee detention centre, a key stage in the 'accommodation' of asylum seekers in this new system. He describes the centre as follows:

> The sheds that accommodated us could once just as easily have
> contained sacks of cereal or bags of cement or some other valuable

> commodity that needed to be kept secure and out of the rain. Now they
> contained us, a casual and valueless nuisance that had to be kept in
> restraint. (43)

Here, Saleh's likening of the 'accommodation' of himself and his fellow asylum seekers

to the sheltering of inanimate objects reinforces the figure of the refugee as non-person

and the detention centre as non-home. Furthermore, the temporal shift from 'valuable

commodity' to 'valueless nuisance' and the semantic shift from 'accommodation' to

'containment' and then 'restraint' can be read as gesturing at the historical shift from

post-war economic migration from the commonwealth to EU-era asylum migration.

While commonwealth migrants were perceived as valued commodities who could

contribute to an economy in need of labour (at least for a time), the new language of

asylum-seeking situates such new migrants as inherently 'valueless'.

However, despite the starkness of his surroundings, the existence of at least

some camaraderie with other asylum-seekers renders the detention centre a more

congenial space than the boarding house which Saleh is moved to next. Although

formally possessing more homely qualities, Saleh experiences it as an even more

demoralising non-home. This is due in large part to the haunting presence of the

landlady Celia's personal effects, which are represented as potentially corruptive, both

physically and psychically:

> The rug on the bed puffed up in a thin cloud of dust when I pulled it
> back. The bed-sheets looked and smelled as if they had been slept in
> before. There were spots of blood on the pillowcase. The bed had the
> same smell as the upholstery downstairs: old vomit and semen and spilt
> tea. I daren't even sit on it out of an irrational fear of contamination, not
> just fear of disease but of some inner pollution. (56)

Although Celia asserts that the objects in the room 'all have meaning for me, every one

of them' (55), for Saleh they can only represent horror and degradation. To amuse

himself, he spends the evening 'going through Celia's valuable memories […], pricing

and assessing them as if they were part of a house-lot I had acquired at auction' (56).

Saleh emphasises that he 'had felt no interest in these objects, even in my own mind,

that I did not even speculate on how they were precious to Celia, never even thought to

imagine her life with them' (56). This commodification of Celia's 'memories' becomes

a way for Saleh to resist their corruptive power by reducing them to their mere

economic value.

Saleh's detached reading of Celia's belongings puts them in stark contrast to the

trajectory of the ebony table and the cask of *ud*, which *acquire* narrative value far

beyond their material value as domestic objects. Furthermore, Celia's assertion of her

narrative connection to such objects sets the lack of homeliness experienced by Saleh

into relief. The cask's only substitute is a towel given to him by an Angolan refugee

named Alfonso and the 'invisible place' provided by this towel is Saleh's refuge from

the polluted surroundings (59). The sacred space of cleanliness created by the towel

becomes Saleh's only anchoring point in this unfamiliar and corruptive space. This casts

the towel as a kind of new relic, but one that is born of the transience and

depersonalisation of refugee life. Its story is that of Rajab Shaaban the asylum-seeker,

rather than Saleh Omar the furniture-seller. Both of these non-homes, the detention

centre and the boarding house, represent a kind of permanence in impermanence.

Although, for many refugees, the time spent in such liminal spaces can extend for years

as the slow wheels of the asylum process turn, they always remain, to a large extent,

'dwellings-in-travel', to appropriate James Clifford's now famous phrase (1997).

Eventually, however, Saleh is moved to his own home 'by the sea' and, as noted

above, it is here that continuity begins to be restored through the process of storytelling.

Michael Jackson asserts that, especially for those who experience the trauma of violence

and displacement, storytelling is:

> a vital human strategy for sustaining a sense of agency in the face of
> disempowering circumstances. […] To reconstitute events in a story is
> no longer to live those events in passivity, but to actively rework them,
> both in dialogue with others and within one's own imagination. […]
> Storytelling gives us a sense that though we do not exactly determine the
> course of our lives, we at least have a hand in defining their meaning
> (2002, 15, 16).

Due to the depersonalising operations of the asylum system, however, Saleh's agency as a storyteller has been disrupted as he becomes what he describes as 'an involuntary instrument of another's design, a figure in a story told by someone else' (68-9). In this moment of deconstructionist contemplation, Saleh laments his sense of defeat by 'the overbearing weight of the nuances that place and describe everything I say, as if a place already exists for them before I utter them' (68). In having to speak the (non-)language of the asylum-seeker, Saleh's stories become instruments in the state-apparatus, while he becomes a mere object of the stories told by the representatives of the state – immigration officials and caseworkers. It is only through his encounter with the novel's second protagonist, Latif, that Saleh's agency as storyteller can be restored and, through this process, a sense of home (re)created.

While the personal objects themselves are no longer present, the new stories exchanged by the two protagonists serve to renew their meanings in their lives. Although the precious ebony table is gone, its significance in the story of their lives is heightened as Latif discovers the great price Saleh has paid for not returning it. This process of storytelling is interspersed with moments of hospitality, extended by Saleh to Latif in the form of cups of coffee and tea, and eventually food. These interjections of domesticity serve to punctuate the narrative and defer its most painful moments, sedimenting the stories of their past lives in a new space. The cask, too is recalled, as Saleh burns 'lavender and fragrant gum' before Latif's arrival, symbolising the filling up of this new space with the narrative presence of the lost *ud-al-qamari* (143).

For Latif, Saleh's stories take on an explicitly restorative function, 'to make complete the absences and to utter the silences in his life' (146), such that his family's dispossession at the hands of Saleh is given another layer of meaning which alleviates his anger and resentment. However, for Saleh, the act of telling is framed as an end itself. Despite the pain and 'weariness' associated with recounting such stories, he says:

> I needed to be shriven. Not to be forgiven or to be cleansed of my sins
> […]. I needed to be shriven of the burden of events and stories which I

have never been able to tell, and which by telling would fulfil the craving
I feel to be listened to with understanding. (171)

Throughout the narration of such events, Saleh makes explicit reference to his role as storyteller. Prefacing his account of the events surrounding Hussein's pursuit of Latif's brother, Saleh declares, 'This is the story, repeated in convivial exchanges over cups of coffee, and retailed with righteousness and relish', implying that it is not his story, but that it had been told many times before by many others (160), gesturing at the difference between the role of the author and that of the storyteller. He also calls attention to the narrative distance between the 'original' told to Latif and the version recounted in the pages of the novel itself, at one point admitting, 'I did not tell him everything I have described here, but nearly, very nearly. More or less' (168). While the stories Saleh must tell in order to gain asylum signal a loss of agency to narrate of his life, here the process of storytelling becomes a way to make new meaning out of painful events which occurred long ago, in a different place. Through this difficult process of telling the stories of the past, the feud between the two families which had gone back generations is finally laid to rest and a new friendship is forged between Latif and Saleh.

Restored to his proper role as storyteller through his interaction with Latif in these domestic scenes, Saleh is no longer depersonalised into the empty signifier 'refugee', as he is finally able to divulge the private narratives that would previously have been dangerous to betray. Like the sense of continuity produced by the physical location of Saleh's new home 'by the sea', the process of telling these stories out loud functions as a replacement for filling the house with the objects that hold them. Rather, it is the stories themselves, in the absence of their representation in material form, that function to 'knit together today and yesterday' as a continuation of the narrative of Saleh's life, despite the trauma and displacement which had threatened to pull them apart.

In Young's analysis, 'preservation' is not simply about maintaining the physical integrity of houses and personal objects, but about renewing their meaning in our lives. She makes the further point that '[w]hen things and works are maintained against destruction, but not in the context of life activity, they become museum pieces' (1997, 153). Upon entering Saleh's house in Zanzibar many years before their reconciliation, Latif appears to illustrate this point. Confronted with the opulence of Saleh's furnishings, he remarks that 'all of them were objects which had beauty and purpose, but which stood like refugees in that room, standing still because pride and dignity demanded it but none the less as if they had a fuller life elsewhere' (102). The metaphoric relationship between these static 'museum' objects and 'refugees' in this passage is indicative of the argument I have been tracing in this chapter. The process of seeking asylum and the loss of Saleh's narrative-object on arrival to Britain signifies his own reduction to near object-status under the label of 'refugee'. The absence of the *ud* and the narratives it contains disrupts Saleh's agency as storyteller as he is required to speak through the narrative structures of the asylum-granting state, within which he becomes a mere object of other people's stories. It is only in the action of narrating the stories engendered by the houses and household objects lost in the process of seeking asylum, that Saleh is restored to his rightful position as meaning-maker and is able to imbue a sense of homeliness to his new home-space 'by the sea.'

As discussed above, while the figure of the refugee has been mobilised in theory to represent the (aesthetic) sense of displacement experienced in postmodernity, actual, historicised refugees are often positioned outside of culture and the aesthetic realm, even outside of narrative itself. Drawing on my analysis above, I argue that the depersonalisation experienced by the refugee as they attempt to make themselves intelligible to the asylum system is precisely what produces this unaestheticised image. Because of the structure of this system, 'refugee' is a self-fulfilling figure, another kind

of 'known quantity', to borrow Monica Ali's phrase once again, that has no narrative except the one provided by the label itself. Given this problem, Gurnah's deployment of the trope of storytelling in a narrative about asylum migration is particularly significant. As mentioned above, there is a sense of self-consciousness in the novel about writing displacement into fiction, as Gurnah's storyteller-narrator speaks of leaving home as a 'familiar climax in our stories', without ever clarifying who 'our' might refer to. As outlined above, there is a recurring theoretical figure that celebrates exile/migration as productive of writing, but, as has been pointed out, this figure is marred by the masculinist and imperialist undertones of Enlightenment notions of authorship. In positing storytelling rather than writing as the redemptive strategy for his refugee protagonist, Gurnah appears to be promoting a different kind of migrant aesthetic practice. Perhaps we can interpret the 'our' of Gurnah's migration narrative as a key figure in moving beyond the exclusionary tropes of 'exile' and a privileged investment in the abstracted figure of the 'nomad' or 'refugee'. It can be understood as an acknowledgement of the inherent shared quality of migration narratives, such that Gurnah is merely drawing together the strands of stories that have been told many times before rather than necessarily creating something unique that he 'owns' as its author. This may go some way to creating an aesthetic of migration that can encompass those that normally fall outside its artistic remit, such as the collective movement of refugees. This aesthetic, as I have tried to show through my analysis in this chapter, is one rooted in the narrative meaning found in the domestic sphere. By resisting the image of the unencumbered exile who 'travels light' as a way of rejecting the need for home altogether, and through this process finds self-actualisation through authorship, Gurnah asserts the value of homely places for those who have been denied them, as spaces where the depersonalising work of displacement and the asylum system can be resisted by the restorative work of storytelling.

In the next chapter, I look at how Leila Aboulela, like Gurnah, mobilises the space of the domestic across both form and content. In a cross-cultural appropriation of the domestic novel, *The Translator* transforms the migration story into a marriage plot which further challenges the narrative of assimilation and emancipation that so often frames the trajectories of 'Eastern' women, as discussed in relation to *Brick Lane*. In so doing, Aboulela makes an important intervention into dominant perceptions of Muslim women in the West, while also carving out a space for a modern female Islamic voice within the British literary tradition.

8. DOMESTIC FICTION AND THE ISLAMIC FEMALE SUBJECT: LEILA ABOULELA'S *THE TRANSLATOR*

Although published in a pre-9/11 world, Leila Aboulela's 1999 novel *The Translator* shares some of the same contextual concerns as Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* (discussed in Chapter 5), namely the East/West cultural encounter and its related issues of rising Islamophobia and Islamic fundamentalism. Both novels play out amidst a backdrop of an increasingly secular and individualistic Europe, which is set against the divine providence which drives their female protagonists. However, unlike Nazneen, who eventually realises that personal desires must sometimes intervene in the path of fate, Aboulela's protagonist Sammar gets what she desires precisely by letting go of her own self-interest. Though both novels arise from an Islamic cultural milieu (Bangladesh in the case of *Brick Lane* and Sudan in the case of *The Translator*), they present very different solutions to the so-called 'clash of civilizations' between East and West, Islamic and secular.

In a fairly straightforward plot structure, Sammar, a young translator from Sudan, falls in love with her boss Rae, a notable Islamic scholar. Despite their mutual affection, they are unable to be together because of religious difference. Unlike other romance plots of this kind, it is not the pressure of in-laws or community which must be overcome in order for the couple to re-unite but rather, it is personal religious enlightenment in the form of Rae's conversion to Islam which brings the novel to its happy ending. This shifting of novelistic convention from a conflict between the individual and society to one of the individual and the divine has created an interpretive problem for literary critics who are unused to dealing with contemporary works of fiction which are driven by a non-secular world-view (Abbas 2011; Christina Phillips 2012). The fact that this world-view is Islamic adds another layer of complexity to any analysis of this text which is written in English, set mainly in Scotland and intended for a primarily secular reading community.

In his recent book, *Writing Muslim Identity*, Geoffrey Nash (2012) outlines a large body of work, ranging from Salman Rushdie and Hanif Kureishi to Leila Aboulela and Monica Ali, which he terms 'British Migrant Muslim Fiction'. Within this large and diverse category, he sets up a contrast between what he describes as writing by 'native informants', a term borrowed from Gayatri Spivak, and those that write from within a Muslim mind-set. He defines these 'native-informant' writers as those who 'possess connections – usually through race – with peoples of Muslim culture, but they construct Islam and Muslims [...] by employing recycled Orientalist tropes cast in the insider's voice' (26). For Nash, included in this category are novels such as Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses*, Hanif Kureishi's *The Black Album* and Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* (although I would disagree with Ali's full inclusion in this category). Partly due to the Western educations of their authors and partly due to the tastes of a largely secular English-speaking readership, he argues that these works of fiction ultimately endorse 'a Western secular agenda' (12), even if their authors occupy a more ambiguous location relative to that agenda.

Nash sets these works of fiction against what he calls 'neo-Muslim' writing, which includes writers such as Leila Aboulela, whose work he describes as a 'foil' to other Arab/Muslim migrant writers because she has become successful while writing fiction with 'a sympathetic insiders' voice (44). As Aboulela herself explains, her fiction reflects an 'Islamic logic […] where cause and effect are governed by a Muslim rationale' (British Council 2011), despite being set largely in the non-Muslim world and employing characters who grapple with multiple cultural allegiances. This explicitly religious aspect of Aboulela's work has led her to be approvingly described as a 'halal novelist' by the *Muslim News* (Chambers 2010; Abbas 2011).

While some critics have been surprised by the critical and commercial success of such ideology-laden writing within Britain's highly secularised publishing market (Christina Phillips 2012), others point to the fact that Muslims are expected to be the

fastest-growing sector of the book-buying public in the coming years (Chambers 2010),

implying that shifting demographics may, to a certain extent, be opening up space for

different fictional worldviews. Although Hassan (2011) acknowledges that Anglophone

Arab fiction is a relatively recent phenomenon in Britain when compared to the United

States, there is certainly a growing interest in Arab/Muslim British fiction as a distinct

body of literary work and it is perhaps on its way to being considered on par with more

established categorizations such as 'Black British writing'. Indeed, if scholarly

publications are anything to go by, the last few years alone have seen two monographs

covering the subject of Arab/Muslim British fiction (Hassan 2011; Nash 2012), a

collection of interviews with contemporary 'British Muslim' writers (Chambers 2011)

and an edited collection on Muslim writing in the diaspora, with a largely British focus

(R. Ahmed, Morey, and Yaqin 2012).

     While Claire Chambers notes that some commentators are uncomfortable with

the idea of using religious identity to categorize literature (2010, 389), one could argue

that it is no less problematic a signifier than race for mapping a literary field. What they

have in common, as Chambers argues, is that both are political categories formulated in

response to a term 'that has largely been foisted on [its members] from outside' (390).

In the words of British-Syrian writer Robin Yassin-Kassab, 'as Muslims in Britain,

many fictions are being written about us. Many are presented as fact. [...] So we should

write back' (Chambers 2010, 390). Geoffrey Nash, on the other hand, has linked the

application of the term to the rise of what has been referred to as 'universal' or

'deterritorialised' Islam (2012, 18). This new form of Islam has been explained as a

symptom of globalisation in which Islam is 'delinked from the specificities of local

cultures' and 'universalised for all' (Olivier Roy qtd. in Nash 2012, 19), rendering

categories such as 'Asian' or 'Black' less relevant in contemporary debates involving

British Muslims.[48] Leila Aboulela is the author whom Nash associates most closely with this new Islam because, he argues (as others have done), in her fiction, 'Islamic identity takes precedence over, and in fact renders irrelevant, cultural, ethnic, and national identities' (Hassan 2008; qtd. in Nash 2012, 44). Indeed, as is often cited as evidence of the universalist stance of Abouela's writing, Rae, the Scottish character in *The Translator* who converts to Islam at the end of the novel, states that 'Ours isn't a religion of suffering, […] nor is it tied to a particular place' (Aboulela 2005, 198).

Despite the sense of openness implied by these words, like other claims of 'universality' (including those of secular human rights discourses), 'universal Islam' has its caveats. There is a well-documented history of criticism against what are perceived as Islam's 'patriarchal' qualities and its policies regarding women's rights in particular national and cultural contexts, though even the kind of universal Islam demonstrated in Aboulela's works of fiction has been criticized for its portrayal of gender relations. According to Waïl S. Hassan, 'The version of Islam propagated in Aboulela's fiction […] involves a complete disavowal of personal liberty as incompatible with Islam, of feminism as a secular and godless ideology, of individual agency in favour of an all-encompassing notion of predetermination and of political agency as well' (2008, 313). Hassan's appraisal of Aboulela's 'anti-feminist' stance is mainly due to the tendency of her female characters to strive for what he describes as 'traditional patriarchal gender roles' (314), calling her work 'reactive and in some ways regressive' (316). He goes on to conclude that 'while Muslim writers and activists have developed various forms of feminism, Aboulela's version of Islam reinscribes male supremacy' (314).

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[48] Nash himself moves from using the formulation 'Anglo-Arab' literature in his 2007 book to that of 'Muslim' literature in his 2012 book. Such shifts in classification can be read as signals of a larger societal and/or interpretive shift, where national/ethnic affiliations are moving to the background of modes of identification in the wake of the new boundaries being drawn along religions lines (itself a symptom of contemporary geo-political developments and Western foreign policy discourse, especially the 'war on terror').

As is evident from the series of articles in the broad-ranging collection *Gender, Politics and Islam* (Saliba, Allen, and Howard 2002),[49] feminism as it relates to Islam is a contested terrain (as is the term 'feminism' itself). It ranges from those who interpret it as a form of 'bargaining with patriarchy' in which women negotiate a path to political representation by sacrificing some social freedoms (Nayereh Tohidi) to those who see it as a 'revisionist' project and emphasise the need for women to intervene in male interpretations of religious texts in order to present a more balanced picture of gender relations in Islamic scripture (Leila Ahmed), while there are others still who see 'Islamic feminism' as an inherent contradiction due to an 'epistemological' incompatibility between the two terms (Mahnaz Afkhami). Common to each of these interpretations, however, is the sense that Islamic feminism involves some form of critique of liberal feminism as the solution for all women. It therefore participates in what has been termed 'global feminism(s)' or indeed postcolonial feminism (as I have been referring to it in this thesis) in that it is about opening up space for 'difference' and a broader definition of feminism itself (Saliba, Allen, and Howard 2002, 44). In many cases this means challenging 'liberal feminism's focus on individualism and individual freedom by emphasizing women's negotiations of selfhood in relation to religious or national communities' (Saliba, Allen, and Howard 2002, 4). In this way, 'Islamic feminism' should be understood not as a 'thing' but as a way of declaring a subject position, located at the intersection of gender and religious identity, from which a number of different courses of action can be initiated.

Although Hassan insists the article from which I cite 'is not the place to tackle the complex and often simplistically treated question of women's rights in Islam, or for that matter the subject of Islamic feminism' (314), he clearly has an idea of what he means by feminism, and indeed 'Islamic feminism', in order to assert that Aboulela's

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[49] The essays gathered in this collection were all previously published in the leading feminist journal *Signs*, giving some indication of their relative importance in the broader field of women's/gender studies.

work is at odds with such discourses or movements. In an accompanying footnote, Hassan cites Leila Ahmed, Fatima Mernissi, Asma Barlas and others as examples of writers who *do* contribute to Islamic feminism. Importantly, all of those he cites are scholars (anthropologists, sociologists, literary critics) rather than other novelists. This is a somewhat problematic comparison from the start, as it implies that Aboulela's fiction should be doing the same kind of critical work as that of academic scholarship.[50] This is not to say that fiction does not engage in political or social critique, but rather that its discursive mechanisms are different from those of non-fiction.

Interestingly, other critics take a very different view of gender relations in Aboulela's fiction, and *The Translator* in particular. According to Christina Phillips (2012), the novel is actually about undermining imperialist-feminist assumptions about women in Islam. Speaking of the novel's female protagonist, she says:

> Sammar's spiritual strength, self-control and uncompromising position challenge the notion of Muslim women as oppressed or submissive. In particular, her energy next to Rae's physical weakness, and the fact that it is Sammar who forces the issue of marriage and therefore drives the plot, represents a reversal of traditional gender roles which see women as the weaker party. (70)

Phillips's appraisal here draws on a similar argument made by John Stotesbury (2004), in which he notes that Sammar deviates significantly from the (Orientalist) stereotype of the Muslim widow and 'assumes the role of the active wooer' in the love-plot between Sammar and Rae (76). He comes to this conclusion as part of a larger analysis of recent 'romantic fiction' by Muslim women. This is significant in that Stotesbury (as well as Phillips in a different way) is analysing Aboulela's representation of gender within a literary frame of reference, i.e. the sub-genre of romance, rather than against a body of non-fictional scholarly work. In addition, both Phillips's and Stotesbury's analyses

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[50] One could possibly draw a comparison between Aboulela's fiction and the memoirs of Leila Ahmed or Fatima Mernissi. However, memoir as a genre typically allows more space for critical reflection than does the novel. Azar Nafisi gestures at this difference in her memoir *Reading Lolita in Tehran* in which she admits that, despite having the desire to write fiction, she is 'too much of an academic', saying, 'I have written too many papers and articles to be able to turn my experiences and ideas into narratives without pontificating' (2003, 266).

show an awareness of the way in which Muslim women have been 'read' within the non-Muslim world and take this into account in their readings of Aboulela's works. Nevertheless, the discrepancy between these very different interpretations of gender in Aboulela's fiction (Hassan's versus Phillips's and Stotesbury's) is meaningful and is the problem around which my discussion of domesticity in Aboulela's novel hinges. On one hand, the fact that Aboulela's female protagonist so explicitly embraces 'traditional' female roles of (house)wife and mother, while also subordinating her own desires to religious edict (and that of a religion commonly deemed to be inherently regressive when it comes to women's rights) seems to support Hassan's conclusion that Aboulela's fiction is essentially anti-feminist. On the other, the fact that most readers (myself included) are reading across ideological worlds, trying to interpret the novel through our own secular, liberal signification systems casts a shadow of doubt over such a conclusion, especially from a postcolonial feminist perspective. Reconciling these two positions is the task of this chapter and, as I will go on to argue, is precisely the goal of *The Translator*, which is accomplished through rhetorical machinery only available within the novel form.

As stated above, it is important to distinguish between the different mechanisms of cultural critique used in fictional works when compared to non-fiction scholarship. Like Stotesbury, I aim to discuss Aboulela's fiction, in particular her migration narrative *The Translator*, within a frame of women's literary production rather than non-fiction discourse. Specifically, I place her work in a novelistic tradition which Nancy Armstrong has termed 'domestic fiction'. In her influential work *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (1987), Armstrong surveys eighteenth and nineteenth century novels and domestic conduct manuals, arguing that a fictional tradition revolving around a feminised domestic sphere not only represented, but actually brought about, specifically female forms of subjectivity and authorship that did not exist before. Her argument hinges on what she refers to as the 'sexual contract,'

a rhetorical operation which genders social difference (in this case, class conflict) and contains it within a feminised discourse, namely the domestic novel. It is through these domestic novels – 'narratives which seem to be concerned solely with matters of courtship and marriage' – that, she argues, women 'seized authority to say what was female' (Armstrong 1987, 5). However, as I will later show (and which Armstrong glosses over in her analysis), 'what was female' itself needs to be understood as a highly contested terrain.

Throughout the rest of this chapter, I will use Armstrong's reading of domestic fiction, and Charlotte Brontë's novel *Jane Eyre* in particular, as a frame for understanding Leila Aboulela's mobilization of the domestic in *The Translator.* Using Armstrong's reasoning, I argue that Aboulela intentionally employs a plotline that appears to be wholly embedded in 'the private' as a way of discussing the politics of the East-West encounter in a challenging publishing market with a particular 'horizon of expectations' for fiction by Muslim writers, and Muslim women in particular. I am not, however, implying that Aboulela is somehow advocating a regression to Victorian gender norms, but rather that she is employing the same rhetorical operation found in the nineteenth century domestic novel in order to exert a new form of discursive power in the face of a complex matrix of readerly expectations within contemporary Britain. In order to avoid any straightforward equivalence between Brontë's nineteenth century English heroine Jane Eyre and Aboulela's Sudanese protagonist Sammar, which would be problematic, I draw on the work of Interpal Grewal in her book *Home and Harem* (1996). Grewal's account of the discursive deployment of home in eighteenth and nineteenth century British literature and travel-writing, which I read as a counter-narrative to Armstrong's, helps us to further appreciate the complexity of what Aboulela is doing with *The Translator*.

As is recalled in Stotesbury's article on Muslim women's romantic fiction, romantic novels have occupied a troubled position within literary history. As much as many eighteenth and nineteenth century women writers of this genre have now entered the British literary canon (Elizabeth Gaskell, Jane Austen, the Brontës), 'romance' as a genre (at least in its contemporary formulation), especially when it is written by women, is likely to be written off as 'merely' popular fiction. This kind of women's fiction is typically viewed as superficial and/or escapist, while the centrality of love and marriage places it within the realm of 'emotions' and the private sphere, codifying the genre as ultimately apolitical in orientation.

Nancy Armstrong's account of the emergence of this particular genre, however, tells a very different story, linking it to the rise of the middle class in Britain. The primary thesis of Armstrong's *Desire and Domestic Fiction* is that representations of 'middle-class' norms, particularly those associated with the administration of the household, found in conduct manuals and novels produced beginning around the middle of the eighteenth century, actually *preceded* the advent of the middle-class itself. Moreover, it is actually due to their representation in (primarily female-authored fictional) discourse, Armstrong argues, that these norms became solidified into fact, thereby ushering in a new social group with a clear sense of its own character.

Essential to this development is something which Armstrong terms 'the sexual contract'.[51] She draws a parallel with Rousseau's *The Social Contract,* which, she argues, is also inherently fictional because the resulting power exerted by the contract itself is ultimately discursive (rather than physical). It is through education (enlightenment) that the desires of Rousseau's individual are directed towards the rule of law and the common good and, because this manipulation of desire is so subtle, it

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[51] Carole Pateman's *The Sexual Contract* (1988) discusses this concept in similar terms to Armstrong, however there is no evidence to suggest that they were aware of one another's work.

appears natural so that the 'contract' is understood as a mutually-beneficial exchange. As a result, Armstrong argues, Rousseau 'ushered in an age dominated by the power of discourse rather than force, by cultural hegemony rather than political revolution' (1987, 33). Emphasising the fact that it is not necessarily from the contract itself that the consent of the people is derived but rather from their *belief* that such consent had already been given long ago, Armstrong concludes that 'the power of the social contract was nothing other than the power of fiction' (34).

Armstrong then contends that the rhetorical operation of Rousseau's social contract passed into the British domestic novel in the form of the sexual contract, translating it into sexual exchange by representing social and political conflict as personal histories and middle-class love (39). Specifically, the sexual contract refers to a form of exchange whereby a woman relinquishes political control to the man (her husband) in return for 'exclusive authority over domestic life, emotions, taste and morality' (41). As in the case of the social contract, Armstrong argues, this exchange was also represented in discourse before it actually existed in fact. Citing contemporaneous writings by John Stuart Mill ('The Subjection of Women') and Charles Darwin (*The Descent of Man*), Armstrong points out moments where this exchange appears as common-sense and natural, a *fait accompli*.

Although she admits that women have been handicapped by its 'social application' (40), Armstrong argues that the idea of separate gendered domains (above put forward in the writings of male intellectuals) actually *authorized* female forms of writing. She emphasises that previous works of women's writing, mainly novels and romances published before the end of the eighteenth century, were considered 'a rather unsavoury lot' and in most cases were not even counted as literature (37, f.n. 9), while female-authored fiction produced *after* this period began to be understood as respectable literary works. This respectability, Armstrong suggests, stems from their complete disavowal of politics in favour of a discourse 'rooted in the values of the heart and the

home' (41). This kind of discourse, though not necessarily linked to the gender of the author, was seen as distinctly *feminine* in character. Armstrong calls attention to Frederic Rowton's preface to his 1848 anthology of women's poetry, *The Female Poets of Great Britain* as a case in point. In the passage she cites, Rowton describes man's 'faculties' as of an 'authoritative, evident, external commanding order' while woman is celebrated for bearing 'invisible sway over the hidden mechanism of the heart' and her 'endowments' described as of a 'meek, persuasive, quiet, and subjective kind' (qtd. in Armstrong, 40). What is emphasised in the excerpt Armstrong quotes here is a conceptualisation of gender difference which is not inferiority but *complementarity*: 'Man rules the mind of the world; woman its heart' (*ibid*). Accordingly, Rowton then identifies feminine discourse as that which is 'personal and subjective' in comparison to men's which is 'political or philosophical in character', such that genres became rooted in gender (Armstrong, 41).

Of course, in a discursive-social context where the mind is prioritised over the heart, this 'complementarity' still exists as a kind of hierarchy. Nevertheless, the discursive turn remains a powerful construct, as Armstrong acknowledges. She identifies Rowton's words as evidence of 'the cultural sleight of hand that granted women the authority to write and denied them the power to make political statements' (40). Importantly, however, she asserts that this form of writing actually exerted discursive power precisely because it appeared to be completely divorced from politics and the 'contentious ways' of the market (41): 'A critique of the state could prove all that more effective when the political nature of that critique was concealed' (39). In this way, she concludes (somewhat controversially) that the sexual contract, despite its resulting social limitations for women, produced the necessary discursive space for the female voice to be heard in a way that was not possible before due to the constraints of a politics of reception which had silenced women's attempts at authorship.

The central figure which emerges from this new 'respectable' female-authored (or at least discursively female) novel is the female heroine who serves as the plot's moral and emotional force. For Armstrong, the paradigmatic figure is that of Samuel Richardson's Pamela, the servant girl whose moral fortitude is so great that it ultimately convinces her unscrupulous master to preserve her honour, transforming his baser desires into love and a proposition of marriage. In this conduct book-cum-novel, Pamela exerts a uniquely female kind of power, a moral authority which rouses the emotions of her aristocratic male aggressor and acts as a civilizing force. However, a more useful comparison to Aboulela's novel from those that Armstrong includes in the genre of domestic fiction is Charlotte Brontë's canonical novel *Jane Eyre*, which Aboulela herself has invoked as an intertext. In an excerpt from a private correspondence, Aboulela defends her choice to make religious difference the central problem of her narrative:

> I was often asked 'Why should Rae convert, why should religion be an obstacle etc., etc.?' In my answer I would then fall back on *Jane Eyre* and say 'From an Islamic point of view, why can't Mr Rochester be married to both Bertha and Jane?' In the same way that I, as a Muslim reader, respect and empathise with Jane's very Christian dilemma, I want Western/Christian readers to respect and empathize with Sammar's very Muslim dilemma. (qtd. in Stotesbury 2004, 81)

Aboulela's reference to Brontë's novel here is a way to point out the Christian ideology implicit in such beloved works of the British canon, thus minimizing the potential contentiousness of her own 'ideology-laden' fiction for a Western/secular readership. However, the comparison to *Jane Eyre* resonates beyond this seemingly isolated comment, especially when considered alongside Armstrong's analysis.

On a basic level, the plot structures are relatively similar between the two novels, leading one critic to declare *The Translator* 'an updated Jane Eyre scenario' (Nash 2002, 30). They both revolve around female protagonists whose object of affection is unobtainable, not because of unrequited affection, but because obtaining what they desire (Rochester in the case of Jane, Rae in the case of Sammar) would

violate religious/moral principles (as Aboulela rightly draws attention to above). Both protagonists go through a period of separation from their respective love-objects, during which the central problem gets resolved through a *deus ex machina* which makes possible the hitherto unlikely resolution of a happy marriage. In *Jane Eyre,* this comes in the form of the sudden death of Rochester's first wife, Bertha Mason, and Jane's unexpected inheritance, while in *The Translator*, it comes about through Rae's narratively abrupt conversion to Islam. In both novels, the seemingly improbable development which hastens the narrative's happy ending is justified with reference to divine providence. At the end of *Jane Eyre*, Rochester acknowledges the 'hand of God' in the events which resulted in his first wife's death and his physical disfigurement because they enabled Jane to return to him and become his lawful wife:

> […] my heart swells with gratitude to the beneficent God of this earth just now. He sees not as a man sees, but far clearer: judges not as man judges, but far more wisely. I did wrong […]. Divine justice pursued its course. (Brontë 1992, 395)

In a similar acknowledgement at the conclusion of *The Translator*, Rae recognizes that his conversion 'didn't have anything to do with how much I've read or how many facts I've learned about Islam. Knowledge is necessary, that's true. But faith, it comes from direct from Allah', while Sammar describes it as 'a miracle' (198).

Significantly, both novels also require their protagonists to cross lines of social difference as part of their narrative development. While Brontë's novel is preoccupied with traversing class boundaries, Aboulela's is concerned with movement between cultures. This is achieved through Sammar's multiple migrations between Scotland and Sudan, which in turn get encoded as the crossing between 'West' and 'East', secular and Islamic. This sense of crossing also applies to their respective audiences. While Brontë must compel her middle-class readership to identify with the trials faced by an orphan with no money and no connections, Aboulela's primarily secular British audience is challenging ground for a narrative driven by Islamic religious values.

In both novels, this crossing of boundaries both inside and outside the text is at least partly accomplished by shoring up the moral qualities of their female protagonists. As a result, both works have a pedagogical quality, transmitted through the virtuous choices of their female heroines. The slippage between the conduct book and the novel, as evidenced by Richardson's re-casting of *Pamela* as 'a new species of writing' (Richardson qtd. in Armstrong, f.n 12), gave the form a purpose beyond mere entertainment value; it became a guide to middle-class manners and morality. As evidence of this pedagogical function, Armstrong notes the coincidence of the rise of the domestic novel with the construction of a specifically female curriculum towards the end of the eighteenth century, and the inclusion of these newly-sanctioned female-authored novels as part of this education (whereas before they were seen as morally corruptive).

This development created a new set of institutionalised readerly expectations for novels, generating criticism for anything that was perceived not to be reinforcing moral codes, especially those relating to women and girls. In her preface to the second edition of *Jane Eyre*, Charlotte Brontë lays out a defence of her novel in the face of what she describes as

> the timorous and carping few [...] who doubt the tendency of such books as *Jane Eyre*: in whose eyes whatever is unusual is wrong; whose ears detect in each protest against bigotry [...] an insult to piety, that regent of God on earth. (Brontë 1992, xxvii)

In arguing that 'conventionality is not morality' and that 'self-righteousness is not religion', Brontë calls upon her critics to see that her attempts to 'scrutinize and expose' actually exhibits a truer form of morality than other writings of the time, lest her work be cast into literary obscurity for failing to live up to its moral duty (*ibid*, xxvii-xxviii).

Leila Aboulela, it seems, has not had to provide an equivalent defence, at least not among the readership most able to scrutinize its moral-religious credentials. In fact, *The Translator* has been celebrated in the British Muslim press as 'the first halal novel written in English' (Ghazoul 2001). One prominent Muslim commentator writing for

the *Sunday Times* implies that this 'halal' quality of the novel is specifically down to the virtues of its female protagonist, calling Sammar 'the heroine of this reviewer's dreams […] a personification of Islam that is as genuine as it is complex' (qtd. in Abbas 2011). Within this particular 'interpretive community', *The Translator* gets positioned as a novel that is morally instructive rather than corruptive (something which non-halal novels presumably have the potential to be for a Muslim readership). The description of its female protagonist as a 'personification of Islam' is also reminiscent of the way in which the 'domestic woman', as modelled in the nineteenth century novel, came to embody the values of an emergent British middle class. Like the novels sanctioned to become part of female education in this earlier era, there is a sense that Aboulela's 'halal fiction' would be considered appropriate reading for young Muslim girls living in the West, a kind of modern-day conduct book. There is also some evidence to suggest that Aboulela's writing is already being used in this way. For example, in an article about the pedagogical possibilities of Aboulela's fiction, Mabura (2012) discusses how her work can be used as 'a tool for religious and cultural competency in an increasingly polarized post 9/11 world', describing it as 'a literary portrayal of the challenges facing Muslim immigrant students in the West' (1, 2).

Nevertheless, despite Chambers's assertion that Muslim readers are a fast-growing sector of the reading public in the UK, the reality is that Aboulela's audience is a predominately white and largely secular middle-class readership. Although this audience may be sympathetic to the cultural and religious values that structure Aboulela's fiction, it still stands firmly outside the novel's world-view. Furthermore, this readership, as well as the publishing industry that markets to it, contribute to a politics of reception which is still laden with Orientalist stereotypes. In the next section, I will tackle the terms of this receptive terrain, suggesting some ways that Aboulela negotiates its politics without losing the discursive power of her project.

It is impossible to speak about the rise of the virtuous middle-class domestic woman in Europe without accounting for her opposite – the amoral and sometimes monstrous 'other', a figure which has also been produced and reinforced in discourse. In *Jane Eyre* she is embodied in the character of Rochester's first wife Bertha, a woman of the tropical colonies, overlaid with imperialist tropes of madness and hyper-sexualisation. In her book *Home and Harem* (1996), Inderpal Grewal explains how in the nineteenth century European imagination these qualities were projected onto 'the Oriental woman', a figure that recurs in a variety of cultural production from the time. In Grewal's account, which I read as a corrective to the imperialist blindspots of Armstrong's analysis, she charts the progression of this particular trope as the alter-ego to the virtuous and moral middle-class woman who appears at the same discursive moment.

Through her analysis of European travel literature, Grewal draws out the binaries implicit in the construction of these female figures and their respective domains. Where the bourgeois Englishwoman is associated with morality, transparency and openness, the Oriental woman is cast as immoral, sexually promiscuous and opaque in nature (Grewal 1996, 27). By extension, the domestic spaces they each occupy are also understood through this binary logic – the middle-class English 'home' set against the Oriental 'harem'. While the first is a space of familiarity and comfort, where women exert moral power through the institution of companionate marriage, the second is 'despotism in the domestic space', associated with secrecy, opacity and subjugation, a place where women have no power at all (Grewal 1996, 45). It is through the dissemination of these writings, Grewal argues, that the harem, along with its complement the veil (hijab), came to be symbols of the oppression and incarceration of women in 'Eastern' culture (50).

As Grewal goes on to explain, the recurrence of these images and their implicit meaning functioned to give (female) English readers of travel writing a false sense of

their own unopressed state (50). Although Grewal does not state it explicitly, the persistence of these tropes also reinforced the sexual contract by exhibiting its opposite – the horrors of an arranged, polygamous marriage. Furthermore, by constructing for English readers the binary opposite of the bourgeois English home as something associated with 'the East', travel discourse mobilized the 'proper' ordering of domestic space as a boundary-marker between value-systems. While Armstrong argues that representations of the household were central to constructing a sense of 'middle-classness', Grewal demonstrates how the domestic space was also essential for political constructions of Englishness (and 'Westernness', more broadly) (33).

It is this discursive backdrop which provides the difficult receptive terrain for a novelist like Aboulela. On one hand, she attempts to inscribe her protagonist within a lineage of female domestic heroines who instil moral values in their male counterparts and, by extension, their readers. On the other, Sammar's characterisation as a racial and religious other in a Western geographical setting disrupts any complete reading of her as the Jane Eyre character. Although she possesses the appropriate qualities of virtue and self-sacrifice, the fact that Sammar is brown-skinned and wears hijab puts her in danger of being read through the well-worn European trope of 'the Oriental woman'.[52] This not only complicates Sammar's ability to successfully adopt the pedagogical guise of protagonists like Jane, but also her appropriation of the domestic domain through the sexual contract. She is at once the modern domestic woman – exerting control over the moral and emotional realm – and the Oriental woman, cast in European discourse as

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[52] We see the persistence of these Orientalist tropes in the way that *The Translator* has been marketed in the UK. As Claire Chambers (2010) points out, the image of a headscarfed Leila Aboulela in the biographer's note on the back cover of the 1999 Heinemann African Writers Series edition resonates with the illustrated image of a headscarfed woman (presumably meant to represent Sammar) on the front cover. These parallel images then serve as the badge of 'authenticity' for the novel inside, while rendering Aboulela as comfortably 'other' through the visual references to the 'alluring, mysterious, veiled Muslim woman' (*ibid*, 402).

entirely constrained by her 'culture', with no power and no voice whatsoever. Sammar's migration from Sudan to Scotland has the potential to further reinforce this image, setting the stage for yet another emancipation plot in which a subjugated 'Eastern' woman is liberated through her contact with the West, a narrative which has been neatly summed up by Gayatri Spivak as 'White men […] saving brown women from brown men' (1999, 284).

As Anglo-Egyptian writer Ahdaf Soueif quickly came to realise, these tropes are not necessarily produced in the authorship of a literary text but in its reception. Although Soueif believed herself to be writing in one tradition (modern Arabic fiction), by composing her works in English, she was being *read* within another, namely Orientalist literature (Hassan 2011, 161). As Hassan articulates, under the 'regime of Orientalism' Arab immigrant writers, especially women, find it hard to negotiate the tensions of editorial pressures, conditions of reception, the politics of location, ideology, etc., without inviting criticism on ideological or aesthetic grounds (a more subtle way of dismissing or marginalizing a work) (*ibid*, 170).

In order to navigate a path through this treacherous literary landscape, like her contemporary Soueif, Aboulela must actively problematize Orientalist representations in her work, anticipating the receptive field it will be placed into. In order to achieve this in *The Translator*, Aboulela employs a discursive operation that is reminiscent of the strategy used by Indian nationalists to combat the Orientalist mythology surrounding the 'Eastern' domestic space. Using Partha Chatterjee's essay 'The Nationalist Resolution of the Women's Question' (1989) as a basis for her analysis, Grewal argues that the rhetoric of Indian nationalism re-branded the Indian domestic space by essentially reversing the same binaries produced by colonialist and Orientalist discourse. In a similar vein to the separate spheres model produced in the domestic novel described above, through this rhetoric, Indian women became associated with the home in opposition to the male world of the marketplace. However, this 'new' Indian

home was not the darkened spaces of the harem but a moral and spiritual realm, over which the middle-class Indian woman was granted guardianship. The 'Indian woman' also became the 'moral and spiritual opposite' of the British memsahib, who was cast as 'idle, useless and too free in her associations with men' (Grewal 1996, 25). By extension, as Grewal articulates, 'what colonial discourses termed *harem*, a space of opacity, became *home*, a reconstituted Victorian space that was transparent in its clear manifestation of moral virtues as symbolized by Indian middle-class women' (*ibid*). This spiritual space and the woman inside it then became the symbol of an 'authentic' Indian culture, the antithesis of and the antidote to the scourge of Western materialism. Importantly, as Chatterjee points out, employing this rhetorical move in the service of decolonisation had problematic political consequences in that it hierarchized the relationship between gender and nation(alism), such that the question of women's rights in the new nation became subservient to their role in maintaining this nationalist narrative of middle-class Indian domesticity.

Although the cultural, historical and political context is very different, and I do not wish to imply that there is an easy equivalence, I argue that Aboulela brings about an *analogous* discursive reversal in Sammar's relationship with Rae. Her feminine morality is framed as a particularly non-Western spiritual variety and, by complement, her Islamic identity is represented as distinctively 'female'. In contrast to Rae's 'objective and detached' relationship with Islam (93-4) and the political variety promoted by the Islamist militants whose writings Sammar translates, Sammar's Islam is one rooted in the emotions, a deeply personal and subjective connection with God. Sammar's Islam introduces a feminine form of religious knowledge which is about personal engagement with sacred texts, as opposed to an implicitly masculine scholarly/theological engagement, often with political ends. Rae is often chided by his friend Fareed for not accepting Islam fully because he will not be able to plead ignorance 'when the time comes' (8), but it is Sammar who puts the call for conversion

into personal, spiritual terms, musing that 'She could have said things about truth, or about distinguishing faith from cultural traditions. Instead, she had said something personal, 'it will make you stronger' […] (90). However, to Sammar's dismay, when she finally approaches Rae to convert so that they can be married, Rae reaffirms that his interest in Islam is purely academic, saying 'It's not in me to be religious […] I studied Islam for the politics of the Middle East, I did not study it for myself. I was not searching for something spiritual' (126). By the novel's resolution, however, Rae appears to have found his sense of spirituality, echoing the sentiment of Sammar's earlier words:

> What I regret most […] is that I used to write things like 'Islam gives dignity to those who otherwise would not have dignity in their lives', as if I didn't need dignity myself. […] I didn't think of myself as someone who would turn spiritual […] it was one step I took, of *wanting it for myself* separate from the work (199, emphasis added).

What this shift shows us is that, despite the apparent intervention of divine providence, it is clear that Sammar's influence goes some way to introducing Rae to the possibility of forming a personal bond with the religion he already knows so well. In this way, Sammar exerts a form of moral power that is not only implicitly female but one that is also inscribed in a non-Western (if not anti-Western) value-system.

Through a series of subtle rhetorical turns over the course of the novel, Aboulela establishes Sammar's spiritual brand of morality as the only 'true' and 'right' way of being in the world so that by the time we arrive at Rae's conversion, we as readers (even Western, non-religious readers) come to regard it as a happy ending. In order to bring about this response, it is important that we understand that Rae is better off as a result of his conversion. Through our identification with Sammar as the novel's protagonist-narrator, we are invited to feel sorry for Rae in his 'unaware' state (94). It is when Sammar realises the selfishness of her desires – 'wanting to drive with him to Stirling, to cook for him, to be settled, to be someone's wife – and decides to pray for him to convert 'for his own good' that Sammar's desire for Rae's conversion is

confirmed as evidence of her true love for him (175). Within this logic, it is in fact the 'Oriental woman' who 'saves' the Western man from his own culture of secular materialism by showing him the path to spirituality in a direct reversal of the Orientalist emancipation plot. Nancy Armstrong points out that Jane's return to Rochester is only triumphant because it is driven by purely emotional rather than economic need (owing to Jane's recent inheritance) – she must have some economic power to relinquish in order for the sexual contract to be enacted (1987, 47). In the same way, Sammar's true triumph in *The Translator* is that her need for Rae has nothing to do with his location in the West but is rather in spite of it. As Nash articulates:

> Sammar's eventual victory, like Jane's, is on her own terms. Rae's
> eventual return, his having learned to pray like herself, is a statement that
> he has passed across the terrains of post-colonial polemics and settled in
> Sammar's own territory […]. (2002, 30)

Although Aboulela disrupts Orientalist logic by positing Rae's conversion as the only 'true' path, this has the potential to alienate her secular readers. Aboulela avoids this by enclosing the narrative of conversion within a recognizable Western domestic plot. Like Jane and Rochester's union, Sammar and Rae's is driven by what Armstrong terms 'middle-class love' and ultimately leads to a companionate marriage. To drive home this point, Aboulela reminds us that other (Islamic) forms of marriage exist by introducing the possibility of a pseudo-arranged polygamous marriage for her protagonist. Although Sammar desires such a marriage at the time, we are still led to compare it less favourably against the love-match which provides the novel's resolution. In this way, Aboulela defers to the familiar (for the majority of her readers) emotional reasoning of the Western/Christian romance narrative, despite her novel's over-arching 'Islamic logic'. By sticking to a seemingly benign literary form, Aboulela diverts attention away from her ideological project, which is perhaps one interpretation of the 'restraint' J.M. Coetzee speaks of in his blurb on the cover of the 2005 edition of the novel. Aboulela distances her protagonist from the contentious realm of the 'political' and instead inscribes her in the domestic domain. While this is not the purely

secular space of the British middle-class home, it still maintains the 'companionate' aspects of the sexual contract, which prevents it from sliding into the oppressive space of the Orientalist harem. Rather, it becomes a spiritual space where women exert a uniquely Islamic form of moral/emotional power.

In *The Translator,* we see the characteristics of the companionate marriage even before an actual marriage occurs. In a moment reminiscent of Jane attending to an infirm Rochester at the end of *Jane Eyre*, Sammar goes to visit Rae when he is sick in the hospital. She not only cooks for him, but the soup that she makes is from a Sudanese recipe, requiring ingredients that initially appear untranslatable. 'Her feelings were in the soup' (97), she says, suggesting a form of domesticity which is rooted in a particularly 'Eastern' kind of emotional power. Furthermore, all of Sammar's images of the life she will share with Rae are articulated in terms of the ways that she will 'look after him' and their family (123):

> She wanted to cook for him different things, and then stand in the kitchen and think, I should change my clothes, wash, for her hair and clothes would be smelling of food. Mhairi could come and live with them, she would not need to go to boarding school anymore, and he would like that, seeing his daughter everyday, not having to drive to Edinburgh. And Mhairi would like Amir, girls her age like young children. She would be kind to Mhairi, she would do everything for her, clean her room, sort her school clothes. She would treat her like a princess. When they went out shopping together she would buy her pretty things, soap that smelt of raspberries and ribbons of different widths for her hair. (118)

This projection of the life they could have together signifies a shift from Sammar's Spartan existence in the 'hospital room' in which 'the part of her that did the mothering had disappeared' to reclaiming a 'real home' with Rae (7, 15): 'Once there was a time when she could do nothing. […] Yet Allah had rewarded her […]. She would make him happy, she could do so much for him (118). It is due to Sammar's increasing closeness with Rae that she is able to come out of her depression and rediscover her purpose as a wife and mother. This completes the sexual contract in that both parties benefit from the union that forms the novel's resolution – while Rae is 'saved' by being introduced to a

spiritual existence through Islam, Sammar is 'saved' by being restored to her rightful position as keeper of an Islamic domestic realm.

ABOULELA AND THE ISLAMIC FEMALE SUBJECT

Through the above series of rhetorical operations, Aboulela manages to create a narrative driven by an Islamic logic without ringing alarm bells in the minds of her secular European readers. While producing a cross-cultural encounter that resists Orientalist readings, she softens the ideological message of her novel by containing it in the safety of the romantic plot, with its recognizable attributes of sexual exchange and seemingly apolitical message. However, like her nineteenth century precursors, this is primarily a strategy to achieve authorship without giving in to the politics of reception which plagues Arab/Muslim writers who are read in the West. By mobilizing the narrative structure of the domestic novel, Aboulela finds a way to write about Islam in the West without her work succumbing to the position of the native-informant or marginalized as unaesthetic proselytism.

However, like the female authors of Armstrong's domestic novels, in claiming the domestic space for her female protagonist as a route to authorship, she sacrifices something on a social level. Although she undercuts the Orientalist terms by which 'Eastern' domestic spaces get constructed, her adoption of the sexual contract suffers from some of the problems exhibited by post/anti-colonial nationalist narratives in a world where gender is continually used (by non-Western and Western alike) to draw borders – both physical and cultural. As Chatterjee gestures at in relation to the Indian model, Aboulela's enclosure of the clash between 'East' and 'West' into companionate marriage not only serves to reify these as clearly differentiated value-systems, but codifies them in gendered terms. Women are portrayed as the (Eastern) spiritual force, and men as the (Western) materialistic, secular force. In other words, gender is still the ground onto which social difference gets mapped. Interestingly though, this problem

does not stem from Aboulela's use of Islamic cultural modes, but is due to the fact that she structures her narrative around a popular Western literary form.

As a result of these rhetorical gymnastics, it is difficult to discern exactly where Aboulela might stand on the subject of women's rights in Islam or indeed in relation to something we might term 'Islamic feminism'. However, it is too presumptuous to assume that she is completely 'anti-feminist' and that her writing is ultimately about advocating 'traditional patriarchal gender roles', as Hassan concludes (2008, 313). In particular, I would argue against the assertion that Aboulela's version of Islam 'reinscribes male supremacy' (*ibid*). If anything, the form of Islam that Aboulela advocates in her writing is a specifically feminine kind of religiosity. As she herself articulates:

> Islam isn't just part of the culture in my fiction; it's not a social norm or something like that, but has to do with *the individual and their faith, beliefs, and aspirations*. This has been central to my writing, and maybe this is what makes my writing different from that of other writers, who see the *sharia* solely as part of society and part of culture, rather than belonging to the individual *herself*' (qtd. in Chambers 2011, 111, emphasis added).

Her use of the feminine reflexive pronoun in this statement does not seem to be an accident. In a development reminiscent of the rise of female authorship in the nineteenth century British canon, Aboulela's fiction produces a new kind of discourse that makes space for a female-authored anti-Orientalist Islam in the contemporary British/Western literary landscape. It may even be possible to say that, through her fiction, Aboulela has produced a modern Islamic female subject. In this way, I would argue, Aboulela should be understood as one of the diverse voices that make up Islamic feminism, rather than as antagonistic to its project, as some have argued. Although her deployment of the separate spheres model may make feminist readers raise an eyebrow, as Nancy Armstrong reminds us in the epilogue of her book, it is too simplistic to assume that speaking from and through the domestic renders women powerless. While she acknowledges that it should not be the only position from which to speak, we should not

deny the political force that this voice has exerted throughout history and still has the potential to exert in the face of new discursive challenges.

At the same time, we should read Aboulela as part of a larger trajectory within the British Muslim literary and cultural space that seeks to articulate a Muslim identity that is born out of its encounter with and investment in Western cultural modes and artefacts. Although *The Translator* contains many intertextual references to Arabic writers, because its form echoes so closely canonical texts of English fiction, the novel also places the emerging authorial voice of the modern Islamic woman firmly inside British literary tradition. Like the hybrid domestic form that emerges from Sammar and Rae's union, the novel is a literary expression of the cultural and ideological entanglements happening on the ground in the diaspora space of the contemporary West. Through its formal and thematic deployments of the domestic, *The Translator* produces an alternative geography within the 'house' of British fiction, literally in that it presents a cross-cultural home as the novel's final resolution, and figuratively in that the novel is not driven by the secular values that we have come to expect in mainstream fiction. In this way, Aboulela's novel is a particularly 'unhomely' text, to return to Bhabha's use of the term, as it not only challenges the secular core of Western mainstream culture through the rhetorical turns of its plot, but it does so by inhabiting a familiar literary mode.

The Translator does not completely succeed in deconstructing hierarchies of gender and culture, as it still mobilises the first in order to critique the second. However, in presenting the values of the Muslim woman as emancipating the Western man, instead of other way around, Aboulela's novel makes a strong intervention into prevailing narratives of cross-cultural contact. In a reversal of the dominant image of migrant women as barriers to integration, *The Translator* positions the female migrant as the central mediator between cultures. Importantly, as in the other novels covered in this thesis, it is through an attentiveness to the domestic and seemingly apolitical aspects of

this work that it is possible to hold in tension the subtlety of its political critique, which

lies at the intersection of feminist and postcolonial concerns.

9. CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I set out to challenge the dominant way of reading literature of migration, which has been to emphasise its aesthetic engagement with displacement and dispersal over those of placement and (re)rooting. The primary purpose and central tension throughout has been to foreground processes of settling, of staying put, in literary narratives which are so explicitly about movement and journeying. My aim was to show how issues arising from making a home are as central to the aesthetic and rhetorical occupations of such narratives as those associated with leaving it behind. Furthermore, I wanted to ground my deployment of home in the concerns of the domestic, private and everyday, resisting any easy substitution of the domestic space for the space of the nation, as others have done. However, at the same time, to point to the ways that representations of seemingly insignificant activities in the private sphere, positioned as it has been as an apolitical space, are indeed engaged with the more explicitly 'political' discourses circulating about (im)migration in the contemporary moment.

A key feature of my analysis throughout has been to approach home in a way that is conscious of the pitfalls of any uncritical deployment of it as a unifying principle. This introduced a challenge, which was to find a way of maintaining the tension between the implicit value I was placing on home in using it as a theoretical concept and the gendered and ethnocentric resonances it has carried over the years and in many different contexts. Given this tension, it was impossible to analyse homemaking without a deep interrogation of its gendered genealogy across disciplines and the critiques lodged at that genealogy from postcolonial and anti-racist standpoints. My application of a postcolonial feminist methodology to the analysis of my chosen texts has pointed to the ways in which certain uncritical valuations of home, particularly in nationalist and anti-immigration discourses, have remained exclusionary for black and other minoritised groups. At the same time, however, my analysis has shown that postcolonial

feminist critiques can also alert us to the fact that an uncritical *de*valuation of home can be equally problematic.

I began this thesis by posing the question of what it means to 'make' a home when that home is in a foreign country/culture, especially when it is that of an erstwhile coloniser. The novels I have analysed each respond to this question in different ways, deploying a number of thematic concerns and a range of formal techniques in order to dramatize the complex set of negotiations that are an intrinsic part of this process. All the novels I have looked at challenge through different means the idea that the home-spaces of (im)migrants are merely replications of those left behind in the home-country, standing in opposition to the British culture beyond their walls. These texts represent homes in the metropole not as culturally homogeneous fortresses against an encroaching cultural 'mainstream' outside, but rather, homemaking in this context is shown to be a process of cultural synthesis and recombination. Some go on to challenge the very notion that Britain can even be construed as a 'foreign' culture, pointing to the ways that, 'Britishness' (or 'Englishness') is already a central mode of identification for their migrating characters or the formal choices of their authors, as a result of colonial and diasporic encounters.

In Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*, for example, we get a picture of a hybrid form of domesticity, where Bangladeshi and British cultural signifiers are combined to suit the needs of the characters in their daily lives. In spite of the mythological power of the 'Going Home Syndrome' and the constraining tropes foisted on the community from outside, Ali presents a home-space that is rife with improvisatory mechanisms. First, we see how Nazneen's performative techniques serve to resist the 'authentic' identities she is called upon to perform for the men in her life. Then, we see her refusal to perform the role of 'the oppressed Muslim woman', a key figure in media and political rhetoric about segregationist 'ethnic enclaves'. In exposing the performative aspects of these identities (and, by extension, all identities), Ali's novel resists its own readings, both as

an 'authentic' representation of the domestic lives of the Bangladeshi community in London and as the uncomplicated narrative of an 'oppressed Muslim woman' who rejects her culture and finds freedom and emancipation (only) through her encounter with the West.

Leila Aboulela's *The Translator* deals with the same set of restrictive binaries of East/West, Muslim/secular. However, through the novel's rhetorical twists and turns, it produces an image of a hybrid domesticity that functions as a space where the Muslim woman can exert moral/spiritual power, not only within her own 'culture', but within an otherwise secularised Western (home)space. In this way, Sammar and Rae's marriage, on Sammar's terms, and their projected home life becomes a symbol for Aboulela's literary negotiation with her readers. In presenting a narrative directed by an Islamic logic but employing the familiar plot-markers of the domestic novel, Aboulela is able to bring even secular readers to identify with the moral dilemma of her Muslim protagonist, thus negotiating a path for her novel through the Orientalist stereotypes that would otherwise distort its message.

Another question I posed at the beginning of this thesis was about the positioning of homemaking as a 'merely' reproductive activity and whether it is possible to reconceive it as something productive, or even creative, especially given that (im)migrants are often charged with cultural conservatism and a failure to properly 'assimilate' to dominant values and ways of life. Moreover, the fact that it is women, in the guise of wives and mothers, who are most often accused of cultural backwardness and stasis further reinforces the reading of homemaking as a purely reproductive endeavour. Through my exploration of the different interpretations of home and the domestic put forward by theorists like Simone de Beauvoir, Gillian Rose and Iris Marion Young against literary migration narratives which dramatize the process of homemaking, I have attempted to synthesise a reconceptualization of homemaking as a practice which offers both productive and creative possibilities, *especially* for those who

lack a sense of homeliness due to feelings of displacement brought about by the migratory process or the discrimination faced on arrival.

In Buchi Emecheta's *Second-Class Citizen*, for example, the home becomes a creative and resistant space for Adah in the face of both gender and racial discrimination. While the influence of second-wave feminism has produced a conceptualisation of the domestic sphere and the mothering practices which occur within it as constraints on women's subjective development, Emecheta presents us with an alternative view, where motherhood and domesticity are catalysts of women's creative production rather than barriers to its fruition. The importance of this creative/domestic space for the novel's protagonist is brought into relief by its inscription within a narrative about the racism and sexism Adah experiences as part of settling in Britain. Importantly, it is the *intersection* of Adah's 'second-class citizenship' as a woman and as a racial other that establishes this creativity in domesticity as truly resistant, owing to her simultaneous positioning within restrictive nationalist and diasporic metanarratives that value black women only for their productive wage-labour outside the home.

Abdulrazak Gurnah's *By the Sea* also challenges the idea that homemaking is unproductive and uncreative by placing it within a story about refugee migration. In contrast to critics who read migration fiction in terms of the way it favours a shirking off of the need for attachments to 'home', in both its national and domestic guises, I draw attention to the importance of homemaking for those who are forced to flee. In Gurnah's novel, homemaking entwines with the process of storytelling, as different ways of expressing the narrative of a life. For Gurnah's refugee storyteller-protagonist, the attachment to homes and homely objects becomes a form of resistance against state apparatuses (both the one he is fleeing and the one where he seeks refuge) that try to un-home him, reducing his life to a single figure – refugee. In *By the Sea*, homemaking takes on a productive/creative resonance as it acts as a way of creating narrative

continuity between the life left behind and the one lived as a refugee, a form of agency in the midst of the sense of displacement produced by the trauma of departure and the sense of depersonalisation engendered by the mechanisms of asylum system.

Thirdly, I asked in what contexts can processes of 'making home' become subversive, and when do they play into existing structures of power, in particular those of gender and race/ethnicity, but also class. As set out in my exploration of the different critical positions on the idea of home, there is already a problematic lineage to content with in any theoretical deployment of the term. While feminist geographers like Gillian Rose have generated suspicion around any attempt to universalise a humanistic attachment to home, given that it is through women's (frequently unacknowledged) work that such attachments have been formed, postcolonial and critical race studies scholars like Biddy Martin and Chandra Mohanty have pointed to the exclusionary mechanisms implicit in any attempt to 'make' a home. Therefore, it has been important to consider throughout the ways in which the novels covered present alternative visions of homemaking that destabilise the power-structures which these theorists have argued are an intrinsic feature of 'home'. What I have tried to foreground throughout my analysis is that, while (over)valuing home can be both masculinist and racially exclusionary, *not* valuing it altogether is subject to the same set of problems. On one hand, it has the potential to play into imperialist-feminist assumptions that universalise women's relationship to the domestic sphere. On the other, it turns a blind eye to the importance of a sense of home for those who are most in need of its positive attributes, such those who are forcibly displaced or facing racial/ethnic discrimination.

Andrea Levy's *Small Island* explores both the hegemonic and subversive possibilities of homemaking and domesticity. On one hand, presenting a character like Hortense who is in many ways more domestically 'cultured' than her British counterpart serves to challenge racist discourses that associate black domesticity with physical dilapidation and moral degradation, such as those analysed by James Procter

and Wendy Webster. However, on the other hand, Hortense is in many ways the embodiment of the 'young lady' figure, a recurring trope in Caribbean women's writing, associated with imperialist discourses of 'respectability' used to 'contain' the threatening sexuality of the black female body. Through Hortense's attempts to perfectly appropriate 'English' domestic values in the hope of being accepted as a full subject of the British crown, she reinforces imperial power-structures that rely on the idea that 'English' ways are superior. It is only through facing the reality that the domestic ideals she was taught are not only unavailable to her as a black Caribbean immigrant, but that they are to a certain extent fictions in themselves, that the possibility of a fully resistant form of black domesticity can be established.

Finally, I asked how the processes of homemaking that take place in the domestic sphere are entangled with the processes and discourses of integration, assimilation, segregation and multiculturalism that are more readily associated with the 'public' spaces of city and nation. Put another way, I wanted to investigate how my chosen novels dramatized the 'political' stakes involved in 'making' a home in the metropole. However, accomplishing this without resorting to any easy metaphorical substitution of the public for the private required a particular kind of reading practice. Drawing on Susan Andrade's analysis of African women's writing in the context of pressures to explicitly participate in the project of postcolonial nation-building, I employed her practice of 'reading across the threshold' in order to make meaning out of the relationship between the domestic, private concerns of the works I analysed and the public discourses about immigration that they also engage with. In addition to challenging the separation between the two 'spheres', such a reading practice also allowed for an evaluation of the relative success of each of these works in holding in tension their public and private concerns. Given the themes of the migration narratives analysed in this thesis, writing, like reading, 'across the threshold' also entails a mediation between feminist and postcolonial/anti-racist critique. In tracing the different

deployments of the domestic through each of the novels selected, I have moved from those that engage with this space as primarily a setting or thematic concern to those that employ it as an integral part of the novel's formal structure, such that the homespace and its associated objects and practices are agents in driving the mechanics of the narrative itself. The novels that were more successful in holding in tension their different critiques were at the latter end of this spectrum, as they most fully exhibited the *interdependence* of the two narrative 'spheres'.

Despite its importance as an alternative vision of the post-war immigration years, Emecheta's *Second-Class Citizen* is the least successful in this regard. For Emecheta, it is not only the nationalist rhetoric of the British nation that she is contending with, but also that of the home-country, translated into its diasporic incarnation and confronted in the receptive terrain of her work. In *Second-Class Citizen*, particular mothering practices come to stand for the 'proper' way of being a Nigerian woman in Britain, mediating between the male-only ambitions of the newly liberated African nation and a racially exclusionary post-war English nationalism. However, despite the possibilities of such a nuanced critique, the text frequently lapses into the essentialist categories found in the same 'public' nationalist and sociological discourse that the novel as a whole is trying to critique. The tension between gender and race/nation is often lost, as one category is hardened in order to critique the other.

Monica Ali is somewhat more successful in this regard, as her novel critiques both the essentialising discourses circulating inside the 'home away from home' of the Bangladeshi community in London and those foisted on it from outside, presenting both as constraining to women. She engages with more localised rhetoric condemning the 'segregation' found within major British cities and dominant perceptions of those who dwell in ethnic enclaves that are viewed as off-limits to outsiders. Fears about what goes on in these 'hidden' worlds in our midst, especially with regard to certain 'traditional' practices seen as oppressive to women, play into claims about the 'failure' of

multiculturalism in Britain. By exposing the performative processes involved in 'making home' in such areas, either in the private, domestic space or in the more public-facing 'home' of the ethnically or culturally-bounded neighbourhood, Ali's novel presents multiculturalism's 'failure' not as a problem of excessive cultural difference, but as a result of the tendency to rely on essentialised images of the other when attempting to 'read' across the boundary between cultures. However, the extent to which Ali's critique can be appreciated by her readers is let down by the linearity of the narrative form. This encourages an interpretation of *Brick Lane* as a clear narrative of progress towards female emancipation, which, within the limited terms currently available, becomes another word for assimilation into Western cultural modes.

Andrea Levy, on the other hand, undercuts rhetoric that reduces the problem of immigration to a failure to 'assimilate' on the part of the new arrivals, challenging the idea that Englishness is something faced only when post-colonial immigrants arrive at the shores of the mother-country. Through her use of multiple entangled narrators and a non-linear narrative, she complicates any easy reading of migration as a one-way narrative of progress towards 'mainstream' culture. Domesticity is used as a way to mediate between the novel's two central female characters, allowing their separate but linked narratives to intervene in the rhetoric of English nationalism. In dramatizing the role of middle-class Victorian ideals of domesticity in shoring up a mythological sense of Englishness across classes at home and across races in the colonial space, she shows how both 'native' and 'migrant' characters are shaped by the same gendered mythology.

The final two works covered engage with discourses that go beyond the national, such as those associated with the protection of 'fortress Europe' in the case of Gurnah's novel, or the purported 'clash of civilisations' dividing up the world into 'East' and 'West' in Aboulela's. By deploying a series stories that are ostensibly made out of houses and household objects in a novel about migration, Gurnah challenges the masculinist resonances of mobilising the experience of migration as a route to

authorship. In presenting a mode of (im)migrant storytelling rooted in the domestic space, *By the Sea* gestures at a different kind of migrant aesthetic practice. Here, telling migration stories is likened to the transfer of familiar objects and, I would add, cultural practices, to a new space. This transfer is not about replication, but rather a way of 'knitting together' today and yesterday, here and there. Contained within this critique of the gendered genealogy of migration writing is a challenge to the imperialist undercurrents in valorising a shirking off of home (itself a rejection of the private and feminised). *By the Sea* dramatizes the role of state apparatuses in reducing the refugee to a depersonalised trope, simultaneously challenging theoretical constructions that make the same rhetorical move. Homemaking as a process of narrating a life is then presented as a form of resistance against the un-homing mechanisms of the state and of universalising theory.

With regard to Aboulela's novel *The Translator*, 'reading across the threshold' allows for a more nuanced appreciation of its engagement with gender politics and discourses about the 'conflict' between East and West, Islamic and secular. Despite the novel's seemingly straightforward plot structure and positioning within the 'apolitical' genre of romantic/domestic fiction, the novel makes a complicated set of rhetorical moves which enables it to hold in tension its different and, some would say, contradictory investments in both Islam and female subjectivity. By virtue of its deployment of Islamic moral codes within a novel written in English and primarily aimed at a secular readership, *The Translator* is already inscribed within an East/West dialectic. Importantly, rather than positioned, as Nazneen is in *Brick Lane,* as the 'line' between cultures, the Muslim woman is here mobilised as the mediating force between East and West. Through her contemporary reworking of the domestic space and the domestic novel, Aboulela carves out a space for a modern Muslim female subject in the diaspora space of the contemporary West.

As should be implicit from the different theoretical and disciplinary contexts within which I have situated this thesis, there are several fields of scholarship that I hope this research will speak back to and pose new questions for future exploration. Firstly, there is the field of diasporic literary studies, which is the one within which this work sits most fully in terms of its disciplinary as well as thematic concerns. As I have been arguing, it is important when reading literary works that deal with migration that we take placement into account as much as we do displacement. This is accompanied by a call to move beyond over-aesthetised or abstracted notions of states of 'homelessness' without any material considerations of what that might mean. Nevertheless, how does one 'place' the writers and the works in this genre I am calling migration fiction without resorting to essentialist categories of nationality, culture or race or without entering into debates about the 'authenticity' of the work at hand? One solution that this research attempts to pose is to focus on the domestic, the private and the everyday – those aspects of a work of fiction which do not immediately appear to speak to particular political aims or identifications – as offering the potential for more complex readings of gender and race/culture/religion, as well as their various intersections. It is by attending to this aspect, and its interrelation with the public/political, I argue, that we can move beyond the exclusionary articulations of migrant home-making that are currently in circulation, such as those provided by the political models of multiculturalism or assimilation. I would argue that this point can also be extended to more empirical investigations of migration, given that the operations of daily life offer the space for a more nuanced attention to the cultural negotiations, conflicts and creative practice involved in making a home in a new place.

The other broad field that has been central to the development of the ideas in this thesis and to which I hope to contribute is that of postcolonial feminist theory, both in its literary application and more generally. Early on, I described a challenge that has faced many scholars of postcolonial and feminist studies alike, which is how to

foreground a critique of one axis of power without allowing the other to become subordinate to its cause. While this is likely to be an on-going debate within both of these fields, one way that this research has attempted to hold these two concerns in tension has been by making the domestic and everyday central to its methodological approach. The domestic, I argue, is an intersectional space that can and should be read as a resource for resisting multiple power hierarchies, as long as its gendered and racially exclusionary genealogies are properly acknowledged. From my analysis of the works in this thesis, I have shown how the private sphere can be *constitutive* of the political, rather than merely symbolic of it. Firstly, beginning from such a position has the potential to move feminist scholarship beyond the imperialist undertones that sometimes mar its investigations by forcing an acknowledgement that even women who may appear to be wholly embedded in domestic life are political subjects who can make political claims through their daily lives. Secondly, using this idea as a starting point for postcolonial approaches similarly has the potential to encourage more attention to the ways in which women engage in anti/post-colonial resistance. Like the reading practice applied to the novels covered in this thesis, postcolonial scholarship must develop more tools to 'read across the threshold' in order to access those areas of life that may not immediately appear to be 'political', but which are often central to the way women participate in decolonising and anti-racist discourses.

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