

# **The New Power Generation**

## Hybridity in Gautam Malkani's *Londonstani*

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## Chapter One: Introduction

In this thesis I will explore how hybrid cultures develop in urban spaces, and my focus is on the South-Asian diaspora in London. This is precisely what *Londonstani*<sup>1</sup> by Gautam Malkani is describing, a group of young men in Hounslow who “pick and mix” their identities. Second generation immigrants often find themselves placed between two very different cultures, and they have a unique way of adapting and forming new types of identities. Some of these subcultures subsequently become part of British mainstream society, and new ways of being British emerge. As I live in a part of Oslo where the population is a mix of people from all kinds of ethnic background, I experience the same process taking place here: hybrid culture emerges and eventually becomes part of the conventional way of life. In a time where international and transnational trade and politics, migration and electronic communication make the world more and more globalised, our identity becomes more individualistic, we choose who we are to a much larger extent than in the past, and we can select from a wider variety of possible identities than we could earlier.

My theoretical focal point is post-colonial theory, and the concept of hybridity is my main topic. Homi K. Bhabha is a central academic within this field, and hybridity is a key concept in his works. Rather than the more traditional use of the term, where hybridity simply means the combination of two different entities, Bhabha’s hybridity is ambivalent and contradictory, with an emphasis on cultural difference as a substitute for multiculturalism and cultural diversity. My methodological approach is close reading.

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<sup>1</sup> (London: Harper Perennial, 2007). All further references are to this edition and are placed parenthetically in the text. There is one exception to this rule, where details will be given. *Londonstani* was first published by Fourth Estate in 2006. The American edition of the novel has a glossary included at the end.

I believe the issue of hybridity is highly relevant because of the globalisation of the world. More and more, we have to deal with and accept other people's different customs, traditions and beliefs. Our society is no longer homogenous, but consists of people from many different cultural backgrounds, and we have to learn to live side by side. This demands more of us, because it is ultimately more difficult to understand and accept something which is unfamiliar to us, but I believe that this is far outweighed by all the positive sides of a multifaceted society.

Post-colonial literary theory caught my interest when I studied colonial and post-colonial literature at undergraduate level, and this thesis builds on work I did when I took the course "Between Two Cultures: Indian Authors Who Write in English" as part of my MA degree. My initial interest in the notion of living a life between two or more different "worlds" was awakened when I read novels such as *Brick Lane* by Monica Ali, *White Teeth* by Zadie Smith and *The Buddha of Suburbia* by Hanif Kureishi, and saw films such as *East is East* (1999) and *Bend it Like Beckham* (2002). These novels and films all explore the theme of being "in-between" and the challenges cultural difference creates in people's lives. Based on the initial interest, I wanted to explore the concept of hybridity in the metropole and how young people influenced by both their parents' original culture and British contemporary culture form new identities in the twenty-first century. It was my teacher and supervisor Tone Sundt Urstad who suggested that I read Gautam Malkani's *Londonstani*.

Gautam Malkani was born in London in 1976. His mother was of Indian descent and came to England from Uganda. She worked as a radiographer while raising Malkani and his brother. Malkani grew up in Hounslow in London and got his degree in Social and Political Sciences at Christ's College at the University of Cambridge. *Londonstani* is a result of Malkani's research on gender identities for his own undergraduate thesis at Cambridge University on British South Asian identity. His initial interest was to explore why Asian

youths were alienating themselves from their parents and forming new identities based on different cultural influences (Malkani, “Mixing and Matching” 1).

He currently works as a journalist for *The Financial Times* where he is the head of the Creative Business section (Malkani “About the Author”). *Londonstani* is his first novel. I am informed by Michael Mitchell that Gautam Malkani is currently in the process of working on a second novel (Mitchell, “Re: *Londonstani*”).

*Londonstani* (2006) is the story of teenager Jas, who, together with Amit and Ravi, is part of hard hitting Hardjit’s gang or “crew.” Set in Hounslow, London, about a year or two after September 11,<sup>2</sup> these rudeboy “desis” are attempting to remove themselves from mainstream culture and are instead creating their own “cut-and-paste identities” (Malkani, “About *Londonstani*”) where they mix and match from various cultural influences, from American hip-hop culture to Bollywood movies and Bhangra music.

The protagonist and narrator is 19 year old Jas who in the final year of A-levels changes his identity completely, and goes from being a stuttering hard working “geek” with a great academic future to becoming a tough bad-boy who failed his finals and has to retake his A-levels at a community college. This transformation from “geek” to “cool” is a direct result of his new friendship with Hardjit, Amit and Ravi, the “baddest” crew in Hounslow. The boys act like they are big time gangsters, with expensive designer gear and flashy cars, but in reality they are all still living at home with their parents in a comfortable middle class area. Ravi’s slick BMW M3 with all the extra trimmings is a major part of their gangster image, but really belongs to his mother.

The novel starts in the late summer, and the boys are all retaking their A-levels. Instead of going to class they spend most of their time cruising the streets of Hounslow in

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<sup>2</sup> The novel does not state the exact year, but the protagonist at one point analyses a Bollywood movie *Devdas* to impress a girl and this film was released in 2002.

Ravi's BMW acting "cool," or looking after their small time business. At first the novel deals with quite trivial things, and follows the boys in their daily routines.

Their source of income is reprogramming and unblocking mobile phones, so that the phone can operate on any network. If a mobile phone gets stolen or lost, the phone company can block it by using a 14-17 digit code. When the boys reprogram a phone, they change this code which means that it cannot be locked. It also means that the phone cannot be traced by the police. The boys do not steal or sell any mobile phones, but by providing a service for others, they profit from what Jas calls "a gap in the market" (41). They help family and friends unblock their phones, but their biggest customer is Davinder, who obviously steals them and sells them after the boys have them reprogrammed.

Jas is the 1<sup>st</sup> person narrator, and throughout the novel he reports what everybody is saying. He does his very best, with varying results, to sound authentically desi, and to hide his intelligence and academic past. Instead he plays the part of a rudeboy, a "tough style conscious male" (Glossary at the back of Malkani *Londonstani* Penguin 240). He is not completely reliable as a narrator, and the end also reveals this. The language used by Jas and his friends is a unique vernacular with different linguistic influences which Jas works hard to master. His biggest idol is Hardjit, and he strives to copy everything he does.

The boys' old school teacher, Mr. Ashwood, saves them from getting arrested by the local police for fighting. Ravi returns the favour by stealing Mr. Ashwood's mobile phone, but the teacher notices straight away and persuades the boys back into his office. Mr. Ashwood wants to help the boys, and asks them to meet up with one of his previous pupils, Sanjay, who got straight As and studied economics at Cambridge, and has an impressive job as an investment banker in the City of London. The teacher hopes that Sanjay will inspire the boys and steer them back to the straight and narrow.

Instead Sanjay turns out to be a white collar criminal who got tired of the hard work in the financial world, and instead uses his talents and education to run an international VAT fraud. He turns the boys' small time mobile phone scam into a major business by asking them to sell stolen mobile phones to him, without unblocking them first. He wants 200 phones a week, and he pays 180 pounds per phone, which makes the four boys earn a lot of money. Jas and his friends are headed towards dangerous grounds; they are slowly ruining any chances of a successful future outside of crime.

Later it is revealed that Sanjay uses the stolen mobile phones as a cover up to hide his VAT carousel fraud. (310-312).

Sanjay also becomes Jas' mentor. Jas admires how Sanjay can use difficult words without sounding "poncey," and how he makes intelligence and education look "cool." Instead of trying to be like Hardjit, Jas starts to copy Sanjay instead. Sanjay gives Jas lessons in how to treat women, he books tables and puts Jas' name on the guest list of London's best nightclubs, and he lends Jas his Porsche to impress Samira, Jas' dream girl. With Sanjay's help Jas finally plucks up the courage to ask her out on a date. The relationship between Samira and Jas has to be kept a secret from everyone because she is a Muslim, and both her three brothers and Jas' friends (who are Sikh and Hindu) would disapprove.

Amit's older brother, Arun, is caught between two different cultures. His forthcoming wedding is causing a lot of tension between the two families involved, and between Arun and his parents because of differences in opinion with regard to tradition and custom, and conflict between the new and old generations. In the end, Arun kills himself, and we never find out exactly why, but Jas gets some of the blame because he interfered in Amit and Arun's family matters. Amit stops talking to him, and Hardjit and Ravi do the same, not just because of Arun, but because someone spots Jas and Samira together and tells his friends about it. Samira



ends up dumping Jas, because he turns into a jealous and obsessive boyfriend and becomes “just another possessive desi guy” as she puts it (294).

At the end of the novel, Jas is left with no girlfriend, no friends, in fact his three former friends are just waiting for the right opportunity to beat him up. Samira’s three brothers are also threatening to give him a good kicking for going out with their sister. Furthermore Sanjay’s three companions are out to get him, because Arun’s death has disrupted the boys’ weekly deliveries of mobile phones, and Sanjay holds Jas responsible. He gives Jas one last chance to redeem himself, by breaking into his father’s mobile warehouse and stealing phones from him. During the break-in, Jas gets attacked by three unidentified strangers and beaten so badly that he gets admitted to hospital. At the very end of the novel Jas’ parents visit him at the hospital, his father decides he will tell the police he asked Jas to break in for insurance reasons, and on the last few pages a huge twist is revealed, which I will return to in chapter three.

As well as being an account of their subculture, *Londonstani* is a kind of bildungsroman, it is the story of Jas’ development. Although the end is slightly ambiguous, Jas is developing throughout; he is approaching adulthood, and learning valuable lessons about life. He has left his old safe life behind, and is trying to find his own identity. The last few lines leave us wondering whether he actually learns his lesson, or if he continues pretending to be something he is not. When he flirts with the Asian nurse, he tries to impress her with his knowledge of Panjabi and puts on his rudeboy front:

I wanna show her my good manners by sayin Thank you. But Jassy Jas Man can do better than fuckin Thank you. I shoot her a look an give it, – Shukria (342).

*Londonstani* is set in Hounslow, a post town in the London borough of Hounslow. Hounslow is situated in the south west of London and borders Heathrow Airport. Because of its close proximity to Heathrow, several railway stations and major roads like the A4 and the M4, Hounslow's location is a real asset, and has often been called "London's international gateway" (*Hounslow.gov.uk*). In *Londonstani* Jas calls it "The gateway to India" (51). Several international companies have their head office here. Out of the 210.000 people living in Hounslow borough, 36% are from different ethnic minority communities. More than 140 languages are spoken in the borough (*Hounslow.gov.uk*).

*Londonstani* has a serious theme: young boys' aggression and disengagement from society and particularly one young man's search for his identity. At the same time, the novel has some wonderful comic parts, particularly in its description of the young Asians' relationship to their mothers. These young men act like they rule the whole world, nothing scares them, and no one dares to mess with them. But their mothers are allowed to boss them about and treat them like children. Tariq is late for his big fight with Hardjit because he has to help his mother with the shopping, and this ranks as a completely legitimate reason with everybody. When they speak to their mothers their language changes, they use fewer swear words:

Amit takes his Nokia 6610 back an starts makin a call beside me . he's being all polite an in't using no swear word or nothing so is clearly chattin to his mum (16).

In the middle of their testosterone-filled, gangster-like goings-on, the boys receive phone calls from their mothers asking them to do grocery shopping and other favours (16). On

their way to the fight with Tariq Amit's mum phones and asks him to pick up a few items from the chemist's:

Amit's mum wants some shit called lavender oil an these pills called At Ease to help her sleep. She also wants some rimmel 007 rose lipstick, the greeny-blue pack a Bodyform (with wings) an some pink Andrex bog roll as they've run out. Amit's, like, dancin around the shop tryin to find everything, too fuckin embarrassed to ask no one (92-93).

As Amit approaches the till he realizes that the girl who works there is Sonia Guha, the girlfriend of another rudeboy, and someone Amit has secretly admired for years. He panics about her seeing the embarrassing items he is buying for his mother, and desperately tries to "dilute" the shopping-basket with more "manly" things, to make it less awkward:

So in it all goes: Dolce & Gabbana cologne; Gillette Mach3 shaving blades; a sexy-lookin chrome shaving brush; FCUK deodorant; Givenchy Rouge aftershave; muscle rub for sporting injuries; bodybuilding protein shakes; some designer hair wax; Boot's own-brand dental floss. But from Amit's face you can tell that somehow it in't enough. So he heads straight for the condoms an grabs a box a 24 Durex avanti (95).

Amit's trick seems to work, Jas is certain that Sonia is so impressed by the condoms and the other items that she overlooks the sanitary pads, pink toilet paper and laxative pills for his mother. However, as he is getting ready to leave, one of his mother's friends, surprises him as he is packing his shopping. She immediately spots the condoms and threatens to tell his mother, so he ends up showing her all the things he was so embarrassed about, just to

prove to her that the shopping is for his mother, and that the condoms are for his parents. He would in other words rather be embarrassed in front of a girl than have his mother find out that he buys condoms.

This episode in the chemist's is one of the funniest parts of the novel, and it reminds us that the boys are only 19, and although they are acting all gangster-like and tough, they are still treated like children by their mothers. It is a great example of the comedy this novel has to offer, the author is playing with stereotypes, the domineering and interfering Asian mother. The conjunction of two elements that do not go together, the mummy's boy and the gangster, creates the comedy of the novel, making certain parts extremely humorous and very enjoyable.

Because of the recent publication of the novel, next to nothing has been written about it yet. The book got a lot of attention when it was released, partly because of a large advance payment (Paxton), and got many reviews in various papers, magazines and online periodicals.

Michael Mitchell has written an article in *Multi-Ethnic Britain 2000+: New Perspectives in Literature, Film and the Arts* (2008) where he discusses what the main elements of the novel are and how identity in the novel is "marked less by authenticity than impersonation and imposture" (Mitchell, "Escaping the Matrix" 329). Mitchell explores how Jas performs his chosen identity and how the language is both a "fabric worn by it's narrator like a costume as a conscious part of his performance" but also becomes a rigid code for their group identity, with added pressures and limitations and subsequently restricting the protagonist's behaviour to a certain set of rules (Mitchell, "Escaping the Matrix" 332-334). He also identifies the boys' adolescent assertiveness as a reaction to domineering mothers and discusses the conflicting differences in the two generations. The article finishes with an

account of the novel's references to the film *The Matrix* (1999) and how it relates to "Gnostic antecedents in the task of freeing the imagination" (Mitchell, "Escaping the Matrix" 329).

Michael Mitchell informed me by email that he has also included extracts from *Londonstani* in *Ethnic Diversity in the UK*, a textbook for German school students with a supplementary teacher's resource book with essays on how to teach the text. Accompanying it is also a recording of Gautam Malkani reading the opening paragraphs, something he also often does when he visits schools (Mitchell, "Re: *Londonstani*").

### ***Thesis Outline***

The second chapter explores how the term hybridity is defined and applied in post-colonial theory, and looks at differences in use between hybridity in colonial settings contra hybridity in post-independence settings, particularly in the metropolitan immigrant setting. The focus is particularly on the work of Indian theorist Homi K. Bhabha (1949- ), both because of his prominent position in post-colonial theory, and, above all, because hybridity is at the basis of his theorization. He has inspired many others with his ideas about hybridity as a complex matter of interdependence and mutual cross-influencing. Several examples of hybridity drawn from literature are included at the end of this chapter.

The third chapter examines the hybrid culture of *Londonstani*, and looks at some of the challenges immigrants have faced in Britain, and how these have changed over the last decades. The argument is that there is a major difference between how first generation immigrants and subsequent generations relate to their ethnic identity, and this will be investigated further. In the novel, the boys are attempting to move away from mainstream society, a very different strategy from the stereotypical second generation immigrant, who would be working hard at fitting in by assimilating to the mainstream culture and typically

getting a degree in law, medicine or finance. The focus is on research on racism and ethnicity in Britain done by sociologist Tariq Modood. The twist at the end of the novel is intriguing, and therefore the chapter ends with an account about how Gautam Malkani is playing with the reader's idea of a stereotypical Asian.

Chapter four examines the hybrid language in *Londonstani*. The novel is written in the "desi" jargon, and the author has put a lot of effort into making it recognizable and seem authentic. Special emphasis will be placed on analysis of the dialogue to discover where the different influences are from, and also examine the reasons for writing in a hybrid form of English.

The use of the term race in this thesis is as a "social and political construct, not a biological or genetic fact," as defined by the Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain who also highlight the fact that there are "more genetic variations within any so-called race than there are between 'races'" (*The Parekh Report* 63). Although the term 'race' is no longer considered to be relevant in a biological sense, it is still widely used in post-colonial theory, because it is so central to both the colonial past, and for today's society where race is often used as a basis for prejudice and discrimination (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back* 207).

## Chapter Two: Post-Colonial Theory and Hybridity

First we was rudeboys, then we be Indian niggas, then rajamuffins, then raggastanis, Britasians, fuckin Indobrits (Londonstani 5).

Cultural theorist and sociologist Stuart Hall once said that cultural identity is always hybrid, although it will manifest itself in different ways depending on differences in history and cultural influences (Papastergiadis 273). In today's increasingly globalised world, people with different, and sometimes conflicting, cultures live side by side. As a result, new hybrid cultures emerge.

This chapter will begin with a brief introduction to post-colonialism, followed by a discussion on hybridity, first with reference to its original and historical use, and then with an account of how hybridity is being interpreted and used at present. Next, an explanation will be given of some terms that are closely linked to hybridity, particularly mimicry, another key term in Bhabha's writing, followed by a description of Bhabha's views on hybridity. The chapter ends with an example from *Londonstani*.

### ***A Brief Introduction to Post-Colonialism***

Post-colonialism is concerned with the impact of imperialism and colonization on cultures and societies. Literary critics have used the term since the late 1970s to discuss the social, cultural, political and linguistic experience of people from former colonies (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies* 168). Franz Fanon, Edward Said, Homi K. Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak have all had an important impact on this field of study. Said's seminal

work *Orientalism* (1978) is by many viewed as the starting point of post-colonial criticism. The book explores the way the Orient was (and still is) a product of western thinking and it encourages a re-thinking of the relationship between the Orient and the Occident (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies* 153). Post-colonial theory became an increasingly central field in literary criticism in the late twentieth century, and still is an essential area of criticism today.

Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin begin the introduction to *The Empire Writes Back* by pointing out that more than three quarters of the world's population today have had their lives shaped by the experience of colonialism (1). Post-colonial theory offers an alternative view of the world, revisiting the past with a “new set of eyes,” the eyes of a decolonised world. European theory was unable to deal with the effect of colonization on former colonies' culture, language, and politics (*The Empire Writes back* 11). At the same time post-colonial theory has given a new voice to the literature of the former colonies. Other disciplines, such as sociology and geography, have also adopted the term.

*The Empire Writes Back* was the first major work to attempt to look at “theory and practice in post-colonial literatures.” The book brings together a variety of different post-colonial texts and relates them to the larger question of society and culture (Childs and Williams 2). The authors define their use of the term post-colonial “... to cover all the cultures affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day” (*The Empire Writes Back* 2). I have chosen to use the term in the same way in this thesis.

There has been an ongoing discussion about the definition and use of post-colonialism. Some critics argue that it is necessary to limit the term to certain periods (such as after independence), or that some groups affected by the colonizing process should not be considered post-colonial (for instance the settlers), and that some societies, such as indigenous



peoples in settler societies, are not yet post-colonial (*The Empire Writes Back* 194). Some scholars maintain that it is vital to limit the post-colonial to the study of the direct effects of the historical moment of colonization; otherwise it will “lose focus.” Others disagree, and believe that post-colonial theory can be used as a “reading-strategy,” and is a helpful tool in understanding the impact that colonization has had on the shaping of modern societies and cultures (*The Empire Writes Back* 200-201). I consider that the all-inclusive approach that *The Empire Writes Back* takes is a useful one, because of the significant effects colonization has had on societies both during and after colonization, and, like the authors of *The Empire Writes Back*, I believe that the consequence of colonization can still be traced in the complexity of modern societies and cultures today.

Post-colonial criticism at present can be divided into two major branches: one approach is by reading particular post-colonial texts and then determining how the texts are affected by their social and historical contexts, and another approach is by re-reading and re-interpreting canonical texts, looking for different aspects and occurrences of, for instance, allegory, irony and metaphor to shed a new, “post-colonial light” on traditional readings of the literary canon (*Empire Writes Back* 191). Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin affirm that one of the strongest points of post-colonial theory is its “... inherently comparative methodology and the hybridized and syncretic view of the modern world which this implies” (*The Empire Writes Back* 35).

Hybridity, along with ambivalence, is one of the most controversial terms in post-colonial theory today. These concepts challenge the binary definitions in traditional criticism, and are relevant in the world of post-independence, including significantly the metropolitan centres where people from different cultural backgrounds live alongside each other. The controversy over these two terms relates to the claim from some critics that they both fail to take into account the difference in power-relations, and gloss over the fact of colonial

violence (*The Empire Writes Back* 205-206). Despite this criticism, Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin write that ambivalence and hybridity are useful terms because they take the focus away from us-and-them distinctions, and provide a more nuanced description of post-colonial relationships (*The Empire Writes Back* 206). I believe it is possible to use the term hybridity without ignoring the imperial history of violence, injustice and difference in power.

### ***Hybridity: Origin and Historical Use***

Historically, hybridity has been used in racial discourse, as a term for the off-spring of two different human races (Fludernik, Introduction 9). In recent times the term has come to be used in a more figurative manner for “anything derived from heterogeneous sources, or composed of different or incongruous elements” (Fludernik, Introduction 10). Liselotte Glage has located the first occurrence of the term in post-colonial theory to 1980, but the general notion of hybridity has been discussed within the field even earlier than this, although referred to as creolization by Brathwaite in 1971. Jan Mohamed uses the term Syncretism (Fludernik, Introduction 10).

Even though syncretism is often treated as synonymous with hybridity, this is only true with regard to the traditional way of defining hybridity, where a mixture of cultures (cultures that could be thought of as contradictory and incompatible) are more or less harmoniously balanced. Syncretism gives the impression of a peaceful coexistence, and hence the term is better compared to multiculturalism than the more antagonistic model of hybridity proposed by Homi K. Bhabha (Fludernik, “The Constitution of Hybridity” 19). I will discuss Bhabha’s views on hybridity in detail below.

Creolization is described by Edward Kamau Brathwaite as a cultural action or a social process. The term originated in the description of the situation in Jamaica where the culture

was affected by both the African slaves and the white English settlers. Neither culture was residential, so a third, creolised residential culture emerged (Brathwaite 154).

Hybridity occurs in all post-colonial societies, both before and after independence, as a result of the superimposing of the colonizer's culture through economic, political and cultural control, or if settler-invaders force indigenous peoples to assimilate to their culture. Hybridity may also occur in later periods, as a result of migration and globalization, in the metropolitan communities, where complex cultural patterns form (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, Introduction 137). A positive feature of hybridity is its ability to recognize that identities are "constructed through a negotiation of difference, and that the presence of fissures, gaps and contradictions is not necessarily a sign of failure" (Papastergiadis 258). Hybridity can be seen as the opposite of essentialism.

The concept of hybridity today emphasizes relations within a field of study, as opposed to the earlier definition, where the focus was on an object or specific events. This follows the general pattern of structuralism and post-structuralism: instead of studying an object or an event, it is more relevant to look at how the processes or different structures of society and culture work (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies* 111).

### ***Hybridity, Different Interpretations***

Robert Young has defined hybridity at its simplest as "a disruption and forcing together," making "difference into sameness," and "making one of two distinct things," as well as "the forcing of a single entity into two or more parts," and "a severing of a single object in two turning sameness into difference" (Young, "The Cultural Politics" 158). Hybridity works in opposing directions, turning "difference into sameness, and sameness into difference, but in a way that makes the same no longer the same, the different no longer

simply different” (Young, “The Cultural Politics” 158). Young connects hybridity with Derrida’s “brisure,” where a breaking and a joining occur at the same time, where difference and sameness happen in a somewhat impossible simultaneity (Young, “The Cultural Politics” 158). The essentialism of past cultural categories of identity has become increasingly difficult to apply to modern societies, where influences of many different cultures emerge. Young argues that “there is no single, or correct concept of hybridity, it changes as it repeats, but also repeats as it changes” (Young, “The Cultural Politics” 159). Hybridity advocates the impossibility of essentialism. Instead of assuming that identities are drawn from essentialist categories, where certain defining features are shared, hybridity opens up the possibility of a more individualised identity, a personal construct.

Monica Fludernik divides recent discussions of hybridity into two categories based on two very different sets of definitions and conceptualisations. One definition is the more traditional one, where hybridity is seen as the combination and cross-fertilization of two different entities, whether it be culture, language or race. The newer post-colonial and post-structuralist approach emphasizes “the processuality of identificational moves,” and “the refunctionalization of cultural parameters from one cultural paradigm within the frame of the other,” and “the interdependence and mutual cross-influencing ... between the colonial and native traditions, particularly as affecting the hybridization of the coloniser’s discourse through contact with the native other’s mimicry of Western mores” (Fludernik, “Colonial vs. Cosmopolitan Hybridity” 261).

The latter definition can be credited to Homi K. Bhabha’s work on hybridity. This interdependence and mutual influence between colonizer and colonized has been questioned by several critics (as mentioned above) because they believe it fails to recognize the imbalance and inequalities of the power-relations in the coloniser/native relationship. Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin argue that there is nothing in the idea of hybridity that involves

an equal exchange or rules out the hierarchy of the cultural exchange between the colonizers and the colonized (*Post-Colonial Studies* 109).

Hybridity in the present can also be described as a “spatial plurality” that replaces the “temporal linearity” of the past. Earlier cultures valued the ‘pure’ over the threatening hybrid (*The Empire Writes Back* 34-35). However, Young questions whether the old essential categories of race and cultural identity really were that fixed, or if they have been reconstructed in retrospect as more fixed than they really were (“The Cultural Politics” 159). I agree with Young that the categories of the past probably never were that essentialized, but on the other hand, in the past, society still operated with much stricter codes and social norms, and in that respect, today’s ideological network of a culture could be considered to contain much more of the dissimilar and therefore to be more accepting of the hybrid. I believe that the move from temporal linearity to a spatial plurality is suitable in that respect.

### ***Related Terms***

In addition to creolization and syncretism there are a few other terms that are closely related to hybridity, and I will therefore spend a little time going through them in this section.

**Multiculturalism** has already been mentioned in relation to syncretism. Salman Rushdie rejects the notion of multiculturalism and argues that it is merely a “new catchword” that does not mean much more than the schools “...teaching the kids a few bongo rhythms, how to tie a sari and so forth,” while the cadets in the police force were taught that black people were so “culturally different” that they were just unable to stay out of trouble. Rushdie adds this term to a number of patronising expressions describing the inter-racial relationships of Britain, from “integration” (which normally would mean the assimilation of the black population into the mainstream British culture) to “racial harmony” where the black

population is supposed to live in peace with the whites, despite the prejudice and discrimination they experience every day (Childs and Williams 77).

Homi K. Bhabha also argues against multiculturalism; he believes it is impossible to merge “harmoniously any number of cultures in a pretty mosaic,” and he points out that what is apparent in modern society is cultural difference at the point of conflict or crisis, not at a pleasant level of diversity (Huddart 124).

**Ambivalence** has an exact definition in psychoanalysis, where it refers to “the contradictory emotions (love and hate), and it becomes a major symptom in case histories of schizophrenia” (Childs and Williams 39). Homi K. Bhabha uses the term when he discusses Edward Said’s distinction between a manifest and a latent orientalism in *Orientalism*. Here Said distinguishes between a “conscious body of knowledge” and an “unconscious positivity of fantasy and desire” (Young, *White Mythologies* 141). Bhabha’s critique is that Said is refusing to deal with the ambivalence and alterity of this polarity. He believes that Said is oversimplifying “the binary opposition between power and powerlessness” and leaves no room for “negotiation and resistance” (Young, *White Mythologies* 141-142).

**Mimicry** can be defined as “a strategy of colonial power/knowledge emblematic of a desire for an approved, revised Other” (Childs and Williams 130). At the same time, mimicry can be viewed as a strategy for separating the “good native” from the “bad native” and creating a separate, and hybrid, class of natives. Because of its contradictory similarity to and difference from the ruling colonizers, mimicry is also ambivalent, “a difference that is almost the same, but not quite.” Although the colonized became similar to the colonizers, they would also always remain different. The strategy of creating mimicry was a major part of the British colonization of India, for instance in their implementation of Indian Education. In Thomas Macaulay’s famous 1835 “Minutes on Indian Education,” this becomes evident: “We must at

present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, in intellect” (Childs and Williams 130).

Mimicry is a key term in Homi K. Bhabha’s writings. His view on mimicry is that it is “an exaggerated copying of the colonizers’ language, culture, manners, and ideas.” Mimicry is “repetition with difference” and Bhabha believes that this exaggeration also can be seen as a form of mockery. The comedy of mimicry is a response to the colonial stereotypes, and a form of resistance to colonial discourse (Huddart 57-58). In his essay “Of Mimicry and Men,” Bhabha defines mimicry as “... the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, *as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite*. Which is to say, that the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an *ambivalence*; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference” (*The Location of Culture* 122). In other words, without the ambivalence, mimicry becomes a threat to the authority of the colonial discourse. Bhabha refers to this as the “hidden threat” and the “returning gaze” of mimicry (*The Location of Culture* 127).

It is vital for the colonizing power that there remains a difference between colonizer and colonized, otherwise the justification of their colonial rule would disappear. This justification lies in the assumption that there is a hierarchical difference, where the superior colonizer can rule the inferior colonized. By continuing this slippage, the colonizers can keep their power and at the same time have a class of “in-between” or “go-between” natives that will assist them in running the colony (Huddart 59-61).

A classic description of the so-called mimic man is Sir Mohan Lal in Khushwant Singh’s short story “Karma.” His role is exactly that of an “in-between” native, and he probably would have been precisely what Macaulay would want from his “class of

interpreters.” Sir Mohan Lal’s taste, opinions, morals and intellect have been properly bred by the English into an approved, revised Other. He is a “good native.” Educated at Oxford, he works as a barrister. He has even been knighted. His opinion of native Indians is coloured by the English stereotypical view of the “bad native,” they are “inefficient,” “dirty” and “indifferent” (Singh 260). The Savile Row suit, the Balliol tie, *The Times* rolled up under his arm, the carnation in his buttonhole, his eau de cologne and scented soap are all a reproduction of English taste. He is dressing up for the part of a true English gentleman.

At the same time, Homi K. Bhabha’s idea of mimicry as a form of mockery can also be found in “Karma,” particularly in Mohan Lal’s language. He rarely speaks any Hindustani, and when he does it is “...like an Englishman’s – only the very necessary words and properly anglicised” (Singh 262). He takes pride in speaking the proper King’s English, and he believes himself to be very good at it. But although we are told that he is often complemented on his English, he is conceived as exaggerated in his attempt by the readers. He uses words like “old chap,” “a bit of all right,” not to mention the “preposterous, preposterous” he shouts out when he is thrown off the train by the English soldiers at the end of the story. His “repetition with difference,” to use the words of Bhabha, becomes mockery. His Englishness is exaggerated; he is almost the same but not quite. This ambivalence is the visibility of Mohan Lal’s mimicry, and to the soldiers at least, he is, again in Bhabha’s words: “almost the same, but *not white*” (*The Location of Culture* 128 my emphasis). Because of their own position in the social hierarchy, they fail to see all of Sir Lal’s “social codes,” they fail to notice the expensive suit and college tie, the English newspaper, and most importantly, they miss the King’s English. All they see is his colour, and by that, he is reduced to his “real” position, a native.

As readers we laugh at Mohan Lal’s mimicry, and we might scorn his attempts to become something he clearly is not. At the same time we also laugh at his portrayal of an



Englishman, and “Karma” becomes a mockery of Englishness, but if we follow Bhabha’s line of argument above, Mohan Lal’s exaggeration could also be interpreted as a response to the colonial stereotype. Singh’s description of the cliché English gentleman which is behind Mohan Lal’s imitation could be seen as a reply to the stereotypical exotic “oriental” Other.

### ***Homi Bhabha’s Hybridity***

Bhabha’s definition of hybridity is a shift from a simpler combination of two entities to a complex interdependence and mutual cross-influencing in post-colonial scenarios (before and after independence). He believes that “all cultural statements and systems are constructed in a space that he calls the ‘Third Space of Enunciation.’ Cultural identity always emerges in this contradictory and ambivalent space, which for Bhabha makes the claim to a hierarchical ‘purity’ of cultures untenable” (Ashcroft, Griffith, and Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies* 108). If we can come to terms with this ambivalence, we may be able to see past what Bhabha calls “the exoticism of cultural diversity” and instead recognize the empowering hybridity and the “in-between space” that identifies the “inscription and articulation of hybridity” (Ashcroft, Griffith, and Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies* 108). Cultural diversity, he claims, is “an epistemological object,” a “category of comparative ethics, aesthetics, or ethnology,” and the term nurtures the idea of pre-existing cultural forms, whereas the contradictory cultural difference is “the process of enunciation of culture as knowledgeable, authoritative, adequate to the construction of systems of cultural identification” (Bhabha, “Cultural Diversity and Cultural Differences” 156). Bhabha rejects the term cultural diversity and instead advocates the concept of cultural difference because it embodies the contradictory and mutual nature of the formation of culture. Cultural difference is “a form of social contradiction and antagonism” (Childs and Williams 142).

Bhabha challenges us “to rethink our perspectives on the identity of culture” (Bhabha, “Cultural Diversity and Cultural Differences” 156). Cultures are always constructed retrospectively; they are a result of an historical process. Bhabha believes that it is not possible to trace hybridity from two (or more) “pure” cultures through history, but rather that the hybrid emerges through “the third space” (Huddart 126). Like traditions, cultures are invented; they are not fixed but are forever changing. Bhabha’s idea of hybridity suggests that cultures are *a result* of hybridity, rather than hybridity being produced by mixing two unchanging cultures (like the traditional meaning of hybridity). He insists that hybridity is an ongoing process (Huddart 7).

### ***Hybridity in the Metropole***

A major shift in post-colonial theory has come about in recent years, “from a colonial scenario to a metropolitan one, from the former colonies to the imperial centre” (Fludernik, “The Constitution of Hybridity” 20). The idea of colonialism in reverse might be a tempting suggestion, but the hybridity of the colonial scenario does not necessarily transfer directly to the metropolitan one. The power structures of a post-colonial society, both before and after independence, where “an allegedly ‘superior’ colonial power confronts an ‘inferior’ native civilization” are very different to the power structures of the metropole (Fludernik, “Colonial vs. Cosmopolitan Hybridity” 261). However, the imperial power and the Western host country (often the same country) hold the power in both the colonial and metropolitan scenarios.

The migrant situation in post-colonial literature usually involves immigrants in Western societies, where their roles have changed from being a part of a majority (in the former colony) to a minority in the Western culture (Fludernik, “Colonial vs. Cosmopolitan

Hybridity” 262). Migrant hybridity therefore often develops in the countries of former Western colonizers or other Western societies. The immigrants find themselves in a situation where they are experiencing different cultural norms, from the host culture, their home country, and a marginalized expatriate community. This in-between situation is ideal for studying hybridization, although Fludernik questions how obvious the link to colonialism is (“Colonial vs. Cosmopolitan Hybridity” 274).

In the next section I will follow Monica Fludernik’s attempts to apply Bhabha’s basic scheme of cross-hybridization to the metropolitan immigrant (migrant) situation. She defines the colonial pattern of hybridization as “the confrontation between colonizer and colonized with the subsequent hybridisation both of the status of the native through mimicry and of the coloniser’s discourse as a result of the exchange of glances (the encounter with mimicry) between coloniser and colonised subject” (“Colonial vs. Cosmopolitan Hybridity” 286). She argues that according to Bhabha, the host country, which is “the symbolic successor of the colonial power,” has to be considered hostile towards the expatriate community of immigrants. This is often the case: most immigrants routinely face racism, prejudice and discrimination. Fludernik then goes on to claim that because of their relatively small numbers, groups of immigrants do not pose a threat of hybridising the majority culture, and unless they join forces with all other immigrant groups, the hybridization of the host culture will not occur (Fludernik, “Colonial vs. Cosmopolitan Hybridity” 274). She goes on to stress the difference in interaction between British people and Indians in the colonial scenario vs. the migrant scenario. In the colony, there was only (real) contact between the British and the Indian elite. Nevertheless, the contact between Englishmen and Indian immigrants is even less extensive. In India, the sexual relationships between British men and Indian women were quite common, and the result was “a particular despised being, the Anglo-Indians (who were, literally considered to be racial hybrids)” (Fludernik, “Colonial vs. Cosmopolitan Hybridity”

275). Fludernik claims that today, sexual contact between Indian immigrants and Englishmen rarely occurs, and only amongst the higher class of Indian immigrants. The immigrant population lives in a “ghettoized situation,” and the Englishmen are not likely to meet a large number of Indians in their day to day routine. Although I agree with Fludernik that immigrant populations tend to settle in the same areas, I strongly disagree with her that the interaction between English and Indian cultures is only restricted to “Indian news-stands and Indian restaurants” (Fludernik, “Colonial vs. Cosmopolitan Hybridity” 275). I believe that in today’s modern Britain, particularly in the metropolitan areas, the interaction of different cultural influences is much more extensive than that. People from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds interact through places like, for example, schools, universities, the workplace, and also through literature, film, and TV. Also, as pointed out earlier, Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin argue that there is nothing in the idea of hybridity that involves an equal exchange (*Post-Colonial Studies* 109), and, based on this, I disagree with Fludernik’s view that the only way groups of immigrants can cause hybridization of the host culture is by joining forces with other immigrant groups.

The transference from the colonial pattern of hybridity to migrant hybridity can be viewed in the shift from colonial master/subject to the privileged/unprivileged. Fludernik believes that the exotic aspect of the colonial paradigm does not apply to the context of immigration because of the “racist conception of (Western) nationhood” (“Colonial vs. Cosmopolitan Hybridity” 287). The coloniser’s desire for the exotic Other does not occur in the migrant setting, at least not in the same form. In smaller places, when asylum-seekers or immigrants from different parts of the world first arrive, their appearance and customs might still be perceived as exotic to some people, especially the older generation.

Fludernik draws some parallels between on the one hand the ambivalence of mimicry in the colony and on the other hand the issue of assimilation combined with Indian

immigrants' inability to become "genuine" English because of their colour. This similarity is only superficial and she warns against projecting a real relation of seeming equivalence. The motivation behind assimilating is totally different from the natives in colonies: The immigrants do not idealize Western man. "Their attempts at assimilation are not mimicry in the strict (Bhabhian) sense of the term" (Fludernik, "Colonial vs. Cosmopolitan Hybridity" 287). Their change has to do with necessity due to being a minority in a majority culture, not with making a conscious choice to copy Western culture.

### *Hybridity in Londonstani*

In *Londonstani* Jas and his friends are moving away from conventional immigrant identities and instead they pick and mix their own identities, influenced by for instance American hip-hop, Bollywood and Afro-Caribbean and Asian street gangs. This hybridity is reflected in their language, their appearance and their behaviour. Hardjit has the Sikh Khanda symbol tattooed on his arm and he wears a Khara bracelet. This bracelet is one of the five physical symbols that a Khalsa Sikh must wear. It symbolizes the restraint and remembrance of God (*sikhs.org*). However, he uses the bracelet as a weapon in fights, which is hardly the intended use. The boys use the term "izzat," which is originally a Muslim expression, when they talk about a family's honour, and Hardjit has taken it upon himself to be the defender of izzat for those Sikh and Hindu families who have been shamed, for instance by their daughters going out with Muslims.

The boys despise the British Asians that assimilate to the mainstream culture (known as coconuts – brown on the outside, but white on the inside). In the beginning of the novel there is an episode where the boys spot a "coconut" in the car in the lane next to them at the traffic lights:

You could tell from his long hair, grungy clothes, the poncey novel an newspaper on his dashboard an Coldplay album playing in his car that he was a muthafuckin coconut. So white he was inside his brown skin, he probably talked like those gorafied desis who read the news on TV. Probably even more poncier than the way how I used to talk. An think. Probly (21).

They follow the young Asian's car, and at the next traffic light they get him to roll down his window by pretending he has his belt caught and then Hardjit and Amit give him their honest opinion of his ways:

U 2 embarrass'd to b a desi? Embarrass'd a your own culture, huh? Thing is, u is actually an embarrassment to desis. Bet'chyu can't even speak yo mother tongue, innit (22).

Ain't your own culture good enuf for you, you fuckin gora lover? (22)

Wat's wrong wid your own bredren, brown boy? Look at us. We's b havin a nice car, nice tunes, nuff designer gear, nyff bling mobile. But no, you wanna b some gora-lovin, dirty hippie wid fuckin Radiohead playin in your car. Look at ma man Jas here. Learn some lessons from him (22-23).

As the unfortunate boy drives off, Amit reflects on how things used to be in the past:

–I remember back in da day when most desis round here were like dat gimp, goes Amit. –skinny saps pretendin like they were gora<sup>3</sup> so no one treat'd dem like dey'd just got off da boat from Bombay, innit. But all da gora fuck'd wid dem anyway (23).

It could be argued that these boys' behaviour is a result of previous experiences of racism, and this new, more aggressive self-asserting model of British Asianness is less vulnerable to racism from the dominant culture. “In't no desi needin to kiss the white man's butt these days an you definitely don't need to actually act like a gora” (Jas 23).

The boys' in-between position is a study in hybridity, and it is not the syncretic harmonious fusion of two pure cultures, but a contradictory and ambivalent hybridity. Their hybridity and experiences of cultural difference are not without difficulty, particularly for Amit's older brother Arun, who finds himself caught between the customs and traditions of his parents on the one hand and the modern mainstream British culture on the other. His forthcoming wedding to Reena, who is also Hindu, is causing Arun a lot of problems, mainly because his mother is constantly getting upset because she believes Reena's family, “the girl's side,” are not showing her family, “the boy's side,” enough respect. The issues of dowry and caste are insignificant to Arun and Reena, who are a modern couple who both work and want to take equal responsibility for their future children. Arun's parents have a very different view, and his mother accuses him of not having any self-respect and dignity. In the final argument at their house, when Jas also is present, Arun starts to question the traditions altogether. “You're all so stuck in some Indian village...” he says to his parents who, on the other hand, believe he has become “too westernised” (264).

The term desi deserves a further explanation. Gautam Malkani defines it in the following way: “The word ‘desi’ literally means countrymen and refers specifically to the

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<sup>3</sup> Gora or (feminine) gori – white person (Mahal 45).

diaspora. It is broader than terms such as Indian, Pakistani, Hindu, Sikh or Muslim, and yet narrower than the term Asian or even South Asian” (Malkani, “Mixing and Matching” 1). Malkani compares the embracing of and enthusiasm for the term by British Asians, to black youths’ attempt at turning the negative offensive word “nigger” into a positive word. The British desi-subculture of music and dance is a good example of how Homi K. Bhabha sees culture as a result of hybridity, not the other way around. The “desi-beats” of music are a fusion of Bhangra, RnB, Bollywood, UK garage and US hip-hop and has become more resident in Britain than in India. It is “difference into sameness and sameness into difference.”



### **Chapter Three: Hybrid Culture and Multiple Identities**

In 2001 Robin Cook, the former Foreign Secretary of Britain, declared in a famous speech to the Social Market Foundation in London, that chicken tikka masala has become the national dish of Britain. The reason for this is not just because of the popularity of the dish, but also because it illustrates the way Britain adapts to external influences. Robin Cook was using the dish to exemplify how Britain is a multicultural nation and has been so for many centuries. One of his main points was that the pluralism of Britain is an asset, not a threat to British identity, and that the history of Britain shows a long tradition of adapting and welcoming different cultural influences (Cook 3).

This chapter looks at what it means to be British, and how the modern national identity is based on shared values rather than on race and ethnicity. I also want to look at the concept of culture, and how hybrid cultural forms develop. Subsequently, the recent history of immigration and racism in Britain will be reviewed, followed by a look at Multi-Ethnic Britain, and how the younger generation have become “cross cultural navigators” (*Parekh Report* 29) with hybrid identities. A comparison between two examples of a conflict between generations in literature, one from Hanif Kureishi’s “My Son the fanatic,” and one from *Londonstani* will be provided. The chapter will end with an account of the twist at the end, showing how the author tricks the reader into making the wrong assumptions about the protagonist’s ethnicity.

#### ***Modern British Identity***

The idea of a pure Anglo-Saxon society up until the arrival of immigrants from the Caribbean, Asia and Africa is, according to Robin Cook, a false one, and the British are not,

and have not been for a long time, a nation based on race. The strength of British society is that their modern national identity is based on shared values and aspirations rather than race (Cook 3). The Labour Foreign Secretary's speech was an answer to a continuous debate about the concern for British identity, and the claim from some that Britishness is "under siege," threatened by the arrival of immigrants with different cultures (Cook 2). In his speech, Robin Cook encouraged everybody to take a look at two of the most prosperous countries of our time, USA and Canada, which are both immigrant nations, and have built their national identities by basing them on shared values of equal citizenship, rather than on a joint racial and cultural heritage (Cook 3).

The story behind the origin of chicken tikka masala is not clear, but a quick search online<sup>4</sup> gives a couple of options: In a restaurant in Glasgow in the 1960s, a British man thought the original dish, chicken tikka, was too dry and demanded gravy. The chef improvised and added a tin of tomato soup, yoghurt and spices to please the customer. Another explanation is that the dish originated in British India where it was created to satisfy the British palate. No matter which version is true, the fusion of two different cultures and acquired tastes is apparent in the dish, and the story of its origin is a great example of the hybrid nature of culture.

Culture can be defined as the "system of knowledge variably shared by members of a society" (Keesing and Strathern 504). It changes alongside changes in members of a society, and is a reflection of everyone at a certain point in time. Culture adapts to, forms and includes the traditions, customs and knowledge of all the people in a society. The hybridity of culture is apparent in its way of shaping and shifting, and the inclusion and joining of different cultural influences.

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<sup>4</sup> See, for example, [http://www.absoluteastronomy.com/topics/Chicken\\_Tikka\\_Masala](http://www.absoluteastronomy.com/topics/Chicken_Tikka_Masala) and <http://www.rasamalaysia.com/chicken-tikka-masala-recipe/>.

In his book *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*, Paul Gilroy describes culture as something that does not “occur along ethnically absolute lines but in complex, dynamic patterns of syncretism” (13). Culture is not fixed, but develops and changes with the shifting of the individuals living in a society, whether it is a small town in India, or a large city in the United Kingdom. In his book Paul Gilroy discusses the history of race and culture of the black population of Britain. The changing nature of culture is developing along with history, and Gilroy believes that the syncretic culture of Black Britain exemplifies this: “They have been able to detach cultural practices from their origins and use them to found and extend the new patterns of metacommunication which give their community substance and collective identity” (Gilroy 217).

Paul Gilroy's ideas about culture are fascinating and have inspired many contemporary scholars (See, for instance, Rampton 6). Although Gilroy focused his studies mainly on the Afro-Caribbean black communities, his ideas about culture can easily be extended to the Asian diaspora. He discusses how different subcultures will gradually crumble and new forms of cultural practices will emerge with

...even more complex genealogy (...), created in the synthesis and transcendence of previous styles. The effects of this can be seen not only where the cultural resources of the Afro-Caribbean communities provide a space in which whites are able to discover meaning in black histories, style and language, but also where a shared culture, overdetermined by its context of the urban crisis, mediates the relationship between the different ethnic groups that together comprise black Britain. The explosion of interest in hip-hop culture which occurred in West London's Asian areas during 1985 is an important example of this. For these young people, the language, symbols and artistic repertoires produced in the confluence of Afro-American, Hispanic and Caribbean cultures in the Bronx have yielded powerful sources of solidarity and pleasure as well as a means to organize themselves (Gilroy 217).

The hybrid urban subcultures of London, are a great mix of influences from different continents, and racial and ethnic origins.

In *Londonstani* an example of this hybrid urban subculture is expressed in the culinary fusion that restaurants in London have to offer. Sanjay is looking into investing in a restaurant which “fuses Japanese, Lebanese and traditional kosher food” (161), and when he takes Jas and his friends out for a night on the town, they first eat oriental fusion at a fancy restaurant before having a midnight bite to eat at a Lebanese halal snack bar (212).

Another example of the novel’s hybrid urban subculture is the popular music, which reflects influences from all corners of the world, such as Bhangra, hip-hop, Arabic, R&B and Funk. When Jas takes Samira to a posh night club in London, the music played is a combination of popular music like hip-hop and R&B, mixed up with Arabic music (205).

A particular hybrid sound mentioned in the novel is Asian Underground, a form of music usually associated with British Asian artists who blend influences from traditional Asian music with underground dance music. Underground music is the opposite of conventional music, it is often released on independent record labels and performed in smaller venues. Amit’s brother Arun enjoys listening to Asian Underground, but Jas disapproves of it because he believes it has become too mainstream:

I ask him how comes so much a that stuff they call the Asian Underground, desis don’t even listen to? I mean, look at Talvin Singh an Nitin Sawhney, it’s mostly goras who download it, innit? (232)

Jas thinks that the only way of staying true to his identity is by listening to “hardcore Bhangra,” while Arun is telling him to open up and break free, to broaden his mind (232-233). I believe Arun realizes that the fusion of different influences is what culture is all about, while Jas defines culture in a much more strict way, wanting it to be authentic and pure, clearly an impossible task.

Arun and Jas represent opposing views in the characterization of what culture is. As mentioned in chapter two, Robert Young argues that hybridity advocates the impossibility of essentialism, and where Jas assumes that identity is drawn from essentialist categories, Arun understands that hybridity opens up for the possibility of a more individualized identity (Young, *The Cultural Politics* 159). Just like Homi Bhabha challenges us “to rethink our perspectives on the identity of culture” (“Cultural Diversity and Cultural Difference” 156), Arun challenges Jas to think in different ways. His idea about culture corresponds with Bhabha’s ideas; that cultures are *a result* of hybridity, rather than hybridity being produced by mixing two unchanging cultures. To Arun hybridity is a positive thing, while Jas sees it as negative (in this situation), he believes Arun is a “semi-coconut” because he does not follow the strict desi codes of dressing, behaviour and taste, but rather follows his own taste:

–You only think it’s poncey gorafied stuff cos you never make the effort to listen to it. Nitin Sawhney’s one of the country’s biggest musical geniuses, but you never give culture a chance.

–Arun, you can hardly talk bout not giving culture a chance. You’re, like, anti-bhangra with your coconut ways. I mean, look at the skintight Levi’s you’re wearin right now. Even a skinhead wouldn’t think you’re a desi looking like that.

–All I’m saying is you boys should broaden your tastes a bit, Jas, listen to some proper desi beats (232-233).

Arun is probably the character in the novel who best personifies the hybrid nature of modern society, and illustrates Bhabha's "third space of enunciation." He chooses his identity in a space where contradicting and ambivalent influences take place (Ashcroft, Griffith, and Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies* 108). In contrast to the boys, he did really well at school, and he does not live his life on the edge of society like his younger brother and friends have chosen to do. His tragic suicide is a testimony to how difficult it can sometimes be to be in-between, that navigating between different contexts and life situations does not always work out for the best.

Arun and his fiancé Reena's marriage is a "love marriage" so their parents did not participate in the choosing of a spouse. He keeps arguing with his parents, and when he asks for reasons for some of the things his mother is unhappy about (things that seem unimportant and trivial to him, such as Reena's parents not phoning or visiting enough times), the answer is always the same: "It's the way things are done, it's the way things are done" (91). This becomes increasingly difficult for Arun as the novel progresses, and finally Jas gets involved by advising Arun to stand up to his parents. Arun's mother finds out and summons Jas to their house where he gets stuck in the middle of a huge family argument between Arun and his mother. Arun finally loses his temper and ends up shouting a lot of abuse against his parents, accusing them of being more concerned with custom and tradition than their own son's happiness. His mother promises that she would rather kill herself than let Reena's family carry on making a mockery of her (270). Arun gets stuck in the middle, trying to please his parents, fiancé, and in-laws, and in the end the pressure of it all heartbreakingly becomes too much for him to handle.

Despite the tragic end to Arun's story, his way of life is an example of how many Asians in the real world have found their modern national British identity. Samira is another example of this. Unlike Jas and his friends, she is interested in politics. She uses her abilities, her Asian background, and opportunities as a young British person to speak up against injustice. She is a member of Amnesty International where she is fighting for women's rights in Pakistan, she is protesting about cruelty to animals, and she is concerned about the diamond conflicts in Angola (64). She does well at school, and has a promising future.

Even though Jas is critical of Arun's hybridity, he breaks the rules himself by seeing Samira, who is a Muslim. Instead of following Arun's example, and fighting for what he wants in a mature and responsible manner, he chooses the easy path, and sneaks behind everyone's back instead, knowing very well how his friends will disapprove of the relationship: "You in't allowed to fantasise outside your own race" (53). It is a paradox that Jas is so critical of Arun, while he himself is, oddly enough, just as hybrid. His disapproval of Arun is ironic because he not only breaks the "desi rules", but also chooses his identity from a variety of influences. But to him, the "desi" identity is more pure than Arun's Britishness.

### ***Immigration and Racism in Britain***

One of my intentions for this chapter is to look at what sorts of challenges immigrants have faced in the past and up until the present, and how these have changed over the last decades.

The British Nationality Act of 1948 gave people from former colonies the right to settle permanently in Britain. According to Andrew Thompson, the government's "open door policy" was a way to solve the shortage of labour at the time, and immigrants were welcomed as part of the work force. A second reason for the Act was to create an image of a "liberal and

progressive” country, a country that welcomed all immigrants and put their resources to good use for the well being of the economy and the overall prosperity of the modern British nation (Thompson 216).

When dictator Idi Amin expelled Indian Asians from Uganda in 1968, 25 000 refugees with British passports were relocated in Britain. The affair did not go unnoticed in the rest of the world, and has often been described as “one of the more successful immigration operations” ([news.bbc.co.uk](http://news.bbc.co.uk)). However, in 2003 documents made public because of the 30 year rule that determines the release of official governmental documents show that several ministers were worried about the effect the arrival of the Indian Asians would have on Britain, and were trying to convince other nations such as Japan, India and Australia to take in the refugees. They even looked into the possibility of setting up an island territory and send all the refugees there, the Solomon Islands and the Falkland Islands where both suggested for this purpose. The news that Britain had been searching for alternatives angered the former refugees. Yasmin Alibhai Brown said to the BBC: “how dare Britain try to palm off its own citizens to these countries who were not prepared to do anything.” She remembers people at the airport with posters saying “get back to where you came from” when they first arrived from Uganda ([news.bbc.co.uk](http://news.bbc.co.uk)).

In the 1950s and 1960s, the majority of immigrants were people from the West Indies and South Asia (Thompson 216). A common idea amongst the first generation of Asian immigrants was that they would return to the homeland after a certain period of working abroad, and after accumulating enough funds. One result of this “myth of return” was a sense of temporary settlement for the immigrant workers, who were mainly unmarried men or men with families back in the homeland. This temporary mode gradually changed during the 1970s, when more and more immigrants started to bring their wives and children over. Thompson identifies “a possible turning point” as the immigrants realized that their children



had no intention of going back to their parents' homeland. Second generation immigrants often saw themselves as permanent, not temporary, residents of Britain. Because of this the link to the home country has gradually faded since then (Thompson 220).

Despite their permanent residency, and their largely British identity, many Asians have regrettably experienced a great deal of racism such as verbal abuse (being called names like "paki"), racial attacks (acts of violence, and on a few occasions even murder), and discrimination by police and other government officials, such as the Stephen Lawrence investigation. This racism has left many feeling unsafe and like second class citizens, not fully accepted as British subjects (*Parekh Report* 58-59).

The tragic murder of Stephen Lawrence is perhaps the most famous racial attack to have taken place in Great Britain. In 1993, the black teenager was stabbed to death by a group of white boys while waiting for a bus in East London. The following murder investigation resulted in the acquittal of all five suspects, despite several eye witnesses including Lawrence's friend Duwayne Brooks who was with him when he got stabbed and whose testimony was dismissed as unreliable. Lawrence's parents made a complaint against the Metropolitan Police, with accusations of institutional racism. Their struggle, along with a public uproar against the acquittal, led to a public inquiry in 1999, where a judicial report concluded that institutional racism indeed influenced the investigation: "Mere incompetence cannot of itself account for the whole catalogue of failures, mistakes, misjudgements, and lack of direction and control which bedevilled the Stephen Lawrence investigation" (Macpherson §6.44). The Stephen Lawrence case raised the public debate about racism in the United Kingdom during the 1990s. The open racism of the 1970s and 1980s was perhaps a lot more visible, but many still experienced a great deal of racism in the 1990s, but mostly in less obvious forms that were harder to detect.

Andrew Thompson discusses whether racism in Britain has an imperial origin, because of a racial divide created in the colonies between black and white, or whether it is due to local and economic struggles for jobs, scarce resources like education, social services and housing (Thompson 221-222). I would argue that both are contributing factors, and the artificial divide between *us* and *them* that Edward Said discusses in *Orientalism* becomes more noticeable during hard times of unemployment and a shortage of resources. The recent financial crisis that is now causing major difficulties worldwide will also most likely lead to a bigger trench between *us* and *them* (Hylland-Eriksen quoted in *Dagsavisen*).

It is sometimes useful to make a distinction between biological and cultural racism. The first “uses physical or biologically derived signs as a way of recognizing difference – skin colour, hair, features, body type” (*Parekh Report* 62) while the latter focuses on cultural characteristics such as language, way of life, religion and dress. Although different, the two often operate together, sometimes with one more prominent than the other, depending on different contexts (*Parekh Report* 62).

Professor of sociology at the University of Bristol Tariq Modood writes in his book *Multicultural Politics: Racism, Ethnicity and Muslims in Britain* that London is a city of the world, both because of Britain’s history as a colonizing nation, and as a maritime country, and for both these reasons Britons have been in contact with many different cultures throughout the centuries. Modood describes Britain as a more open nation than continental European nations, and in comparison to France, which has a similar history of imperialism, Britain has been more accepting of immigrant cultures (193). In France, the acceptance of citizenship is synonymous with assimilating to French culture, and if the immigrants wish to maintain some of the customs of their pre-French identity, perhaps because of discrimination or stigmatization, they automatically become less equal. The decision to ban religious symbols in state schools is a good example of how the French prefer to keep religion as part of the

private sphere. This is particularly difficult for the Muslim population, because Islam regulates both public and private life (Modood 191). Being unable to wear a hijab in school means the conservative part of the female Muslim population has to leave part of their identity and culture behind when they enter the public arena. Understandably, this makes them feel like second class citizens in France. The British government has chosen a different strategy and has, for example, allowed religious head wear in the police force. In *Londonstani*, Jas mentions the Metropolitan Police's special gang taskforce, where some of the officers wear a turban helmet, like "the Jedi Knights a the Met" (84).

*The Parekh Report*, already referred to several times, is an account by the Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain issued by the Runnymede Trust. The commission's task was to analyse the current diverse ethnic situation of Britain and the results of their work was published in 2000. Tariq Modood was an advisor for the commission. The report recognises that there is "a process of reciprocal influence between migrant and host culture that changes them both" (28). This description of how culture emerges is similar to the process described by Bhabha's third space of enunciation.

### ***Multi-Ethnic Britain and Hybrid Identities***

*The Parekh Report* states that Asians are not a single group. The difference can be seen in religion, language, caste and class, as well as different national backgrounds. There is also a noticeable difference between rural and urban backgrounds. A sense of joint community is important for Asians in Britain, but the differences in cultural practices are still widely varied (*Parekh Report* 30). In *Londonstani* Malkani uses this difference in his description of Hardjit's crew and that of Tariq. Hardjit and his friends are Hindu and Sikh, while Tariq and his friends are all Muslim. There is a strict code for how the two groups

behave towards each other, and the fight between Hardjit and Tariq happens because Tariq has taken a Sikh girl out and apparently tried to convert her to Islam. This practice is referred to as “sistering,” but Jas suspects that it often is just a girl’s excuse and he describes it as the desi version of waking up the morning after and thinking: “Oh fuck, I best say he raped me. It’s not my fault, he brainwashed me into his religion. I said no, please no, but he forced it into me” (80). Hardjit challenges Tariq to a fight to defend the girl’s izzat. At the same time the protagonist talks about how the two groups of youths have joined together in the celebration of their respective religious holidays: “respect to the way Diwali gigs are getting blended with Muslim kids’ Eid events these past couple a years” (173).

One of the chapters in Tariq Modood’s book is based on the work undertaken at the Policy Studies Institute on the *Fourth National Survey of Ethnic Minorities* (1993-1994), where Modood was one of the principal investigators. The project was funded by the Departments of Health, Environment, Education and Employment, and the Economic and Social Research Council (Modood 212). One of the conclusions of the report is that there are significant disparities between different ethnic groups in Britain, and not just between Caribbeans and South Asians, but amongst South Asians as a category as well. The vast majority of African Asians and Indians are Hindus and Sikhs (about 90 percent), while Pakistanis and Bangladeshis are Muslims (over 95 %). The latter group take a much more conservative view on matters such as religion, arranged marriages, choice of schools and Asian clothes, even when important factors such as age and economic position are accounted for (Modood 198). This conclusion has been adapted in the situation in *Londonstani*, for instance, when Amit is talking about how strict Samira’s three brothers are:

One a dem even belongs to Hizb ut-Tahir or Al-Muhajiroun or one a dem groups. Dey stricter bout keeping their sister halal than my mum is bout keeping her shit vegetarian so you jus best shut da fuck up (49-50).

Tariq Modood argues that because Asians in the past have experienced a lot of racism and therefore have felt alienated from mainstream British society, a process he calls an “ethnic assertiveness” has occurred. In the beginning of this process, Asians segregated themselves from ordinary British society by embracing the customs and traditions of the “homeland” and found strength in that community, before “rejoining” British society on their own terms, maintaining their own British national identity (Modood 193). Gautam Malkani explored this theory of ethnic assertiveness in his thesis at Cambridge University. In his article “Mixing and Matching” he writes:

And so the Asian boy as victim (represented by the word "paki") may have given way to the aggressor (represented by the names of some gangs such as Shere Panjab, where the word "Sher" translates as lions or tigers). And, in turn, that may have led to a social equilibrium between victim and aggressor implied by "desi."

However, at that time I saw no evidence of British Asian kids using their newly-asserted ethnicity to assimilate on their own terms (3).

In *Londonstani*, Gautam Malkani uses this observation. Hardjit and his crew have no intentions of rejoining society “on their own terms,” but are rather doing all they can to move as far away from conventional Britishness as possible and embrace their “desiness.”

Modood quotes Stuart Hall, whose research into black cultural politics has revealed a major shift from the mid- to late 1980s. Different minorities share a social space, and because of this their different ethnic identities mix and change with new circumstances and form new hybrid forms of ethnic identities. Stuart Hall talks about “A Black Atlantis” where blacks in Africa, the US, the Caribbean, Britain and Western Europe share a cultural tradition (Modood 194). At more or less the same time as the expansion of the Black Atlantis there was a similar development in the Asian cultural heritage, where new identities were formed, not on the basis of regional, national, caste, or religious identity derived from one’s parents, but an identity based on a hybrid South Asianness and on occasion also with influences from black hip hop and rap music and the black pride movement (Modood 194).

Tariq Modood writes about how “the ethnic minorities have made a major contribution to giving plural Britishness the character it has: the negotiation of change through debate, economic mobility, and a high degree of cultural mixing” (193). Robin Cook believed that this pluralism is a great asset for Britain, and very useful in a globalised world, where communication and an understanding of different cultures are becoming increasingly important. Cook held that the British affluence of cultures contributes to “the cultural and economic vitality” of the nation (Cook 3). I imagine that in *Londonstani* young Asians such as Samira and Arun are representations of exactly the kind of people Robin Cook would consider to be an asset to the country, their cross-cultural knowledge would be a valuable contribution to the modern British nation.

When Asians were asked in the *Fourth National Survey of Ethnic Minorities* whether they felt British or not, more than two thirds said that they felt British, and the percentage increased amongst younger people. The majority of respondents also had no problems dealing with hyphenated identities (Modood 196). The modern concept of Britishness is something everyone can potentially identify with: an open nationality, in contrast to the term “English”

which has largely been viewed as a closed ethnic category, reserved for “white” people (Modood 196).

In recent years, being “ethnic” or “black” has not been a hindrance to full membership in the modern British society. The opportunities made available through political structures, education and popular culture have made being British accessible to everyone, no matter what their ethnicity, but based on their nationality. The survey revealed that more and more, ethnicity or blackness is experienced as less of an oppositional identity, and more of a way of being British (Modood 199). The plural Britishness is accepted, even welcomed by many, such as the late Foreign Secretary Robin Cook expressed it in his “Tikka Masala speech.” The celebration of plural Britishness was a part of the New Labour Government rhetoric, especially in their early years of government in the late 1990s, where the focus was on emphasising Britain’s plural and dynamic character (Modood 199). The Runnymede Trust’s instructions to the Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain is a good example of their focus on plural Britishness:

The commission’s remit was to analyse the current state of multi-ethnic Britain and to propose ways of countering racial discrimination and disadvantage and making Britain a confident and vibrant multicultural society at ease with its rich diversity (Parekh Report Preface viii).

Unfortunately, this “plural British” rhetoric and the multicultural trend of the late 1990s has become “counterbalanced by integrationist, anti-Muslim rhetoric” (Modood 199) after the race riots in Bradford and other northern cities in the summer of 2001, where young Asians fought supporters of the racist British National Party, and sometimes even the local police. The anti-Muslim and integrationist views grew even stronger after the terrorist attack on the

twin towers of New York September 11, and USA's subsequent war on terrorism (Modood 199). September 11 changed the whole course of multiculturalism, and fear and scepticism returned. Hopefully Britain will remain an open nation, where citizenship does not involve assimilation, but where hyphenated identities can coexist and join in shared values of equal citizenship.

### ***In-Between and Across Generations***

One of my aims for this chapter is to look at whether there are any differences between the way the first and subsequent generations of immigrants approach their life in Britain. *The Parekh Report* reveals that "many people are learning to live 'in between,'" with more than one identity. An example mentioned is how South Asians and African-Caribbeans support India, Pakistan and the West Indies when they meet England in sports games, but at the same time support the English team when they meet Australia, particularly when the British team includes black or Asian players (*Parekh Report* 36). The very same point is made by Gautam Malkani when he describes how Asian youngsters from the Midlands were wearing shirts with the Union Jack on and cheering on British boxing hero Amir Khan (Malkani, "Mixing and Matching" 4). Khan's family is originally from Pakistan, and the successful young boxer has become a role model for many young Asians. In Gautam Malkani's words: he "simply oozes desi subculture. He has the right hair, the right swagger, the right speech patterns, the right clothes" (Malkani, "Mixing and Matching" 4). When Amir Khan appeared in an ad campaign for Reebok in 2006 with the slogan "I am what I am" he stated: "I used to look up to sports stars such as Imran Khan and now it's going to be me on the billboard. I'm giving Asian kids out there a path to follow" (Lepper). He has made a



successful career as a professional boxer, and he balances his different identities. He is not a Pakistani, he is a desi.

*The Parekh Report* also uses the word “cross-cultural navigators” (29) in describing how young people have developed skills where they can manoeuvre between different areas of their lives, and that these cosmopolitan skills are becoming more apparent in all of the population: everyone has a chance to develop hybrid cultural forms. The commission mentions music and art as a particular arena where hybrid forms have flourished (*Parekh Report* 29).

There are obviously variations between the different generations of Asians in Britain and their approach to ethnic identity. It is not difficult to imagine the difference in experiences between someone who has lived his or her entire life in Britain, and someone who once emigrated from another country to find a better life. Someone born and raised in Britain will naturally view it as their home, and will possibly feel like a visitor in their parents’ homeland, while at the same time being treated as a visitor by some in their own country.

*The Fourth National Survey of Ethnic Minorities* revealed for the first time evidence, based on large data, that the meaning of ethnicity is changing and coming to mean new things. Cultural traditions connected to language, religion and marriage are still widely carried out, but the survey showed a considerable decline in participation amongst the younger generation (Modood 195). Particularly South Asian youths are less likely than their elders to speak to their family members in a South Asian language, attend regular worship or have their marriages arranged by their family. Ethnicity has traditionally been understood by distinctive cultural practices, such as those mentioned above, but recently an additional ethnic identity has emerged, where ethnicity also means taking “pride in one’s origin, identifying with certain group labels, and sometimes political assertiveness” (Modood 195). In *Londonstani*

this pride is visible in the boys' use of different symbols. At the fight between Hardjit and Tariq the boys dress up with colours that symbolize their parents' native countries: Hardjit wears an orange bandana, where the colour symbolizes Hinduism, and Tariq wears a green and yellow Pakistani cricket shirt (105). The police recognize these symbolic colours the minute they arrive, and immediately identify the situation as trouble, despite the boys' attempts to convince them otherwise (111).

It would seem natural that the bond to the homeland fades with generations, and that for a young British Asian today, the identification with contemporary British society follows more naturally than for their parents and grandparents who might have a stronger connection to the original country, and for this reason the experience of Britain for the young generation can be miles apart from that of their parents' and grandparents' generations. In Hanif Kureishi's short story "My Son the Fanatic" this contrast between two generations is visible in the relationship between Parvez and his teenage son Ali. Parvez, originally from Lahore in Pakistan, loves England and the opportunity the country has given him for making a better life for himself and his family. His son, on the other hand, becomes a fundamentalist Muslim, and despises Western society and his father along with it. "How can you love something which hates us?" (126) he says to his father. The short story is set sometime in the 1980s, and it is easy to imagine the racism Ali has lived with his whole life. His defence becomes to segregate himself from British society and embrace his "roots" and "his people," without ever having left England. His father on the other hand, is very grateful for his life in England, and would never go back to Pakistan where he believes his life would be controlled by religion and custom. It becomes impossible for father and son to bridge the gap between their completely different experiences of what Britain is. For the father it is a land of opportunity and freedom, for the son it is a country where he and his father are second class citizens and the target of constant prejudice, discrimination and racial abuse.

*Londonstani* is set twenty years later, and the discrimination and racism of Kureishi's 1980s have, if not disappeared, then at least become far less noticeable in Malkani's novel. The young Asians in *Londonstani* are not hateful like Ali, but have found their hybrid identity in a more accepting British society. Their choice to segregate themselves is perhaps motivated by some experiences of racism in the past, but as Malkani writes himself: "the threat of racism appeared more imaginary than real" (Malkani, "Mixing and Matching" 3). Unlike his brother and his friends, Arun is attempting to live his life like any other British person, but he is having increasing difficulties navigating between the different parts of his life. The planning and preparations for his forthcoming wedding reveal large differences in his parents' and his own views on marriage and family. His views are more in tune with modern British society.

Perhaps the difference between generations might be that the younger generation have come to accept themselves as British citizens, and also feel more accepted by society. They believe that their rights are as good as any other person's. Tariq Modood's theory of ethnic assertiveness makes sense, because here is a generation of youngsters who will not settle for just anything. They want to be heard, and on their own terms. The title of this thesis reflects this: "The New Power Generation," is also the title of a song by Prince, whose music is referred to by Jas several times in *Londonstani*. While their parents took the assimilating, humble view, where they tried to adapt to existing customs (but experienced racism, stereotyping and prejudice), these young people choose to take a different approach, integration through assertiveness. Some of their parents might call them spoiled, not knowing how lucky they are to be born in such a "great" country, with a prosperous future and civil and political liberties. But if that is the case, so is every other youth in Britain, their ethnicity notwithstanding. The biggest difference between Kureishi's Ali and Malkani's Arun is the change that has happened to British society. The authors have placed their characters in two

different decades. The society described in *Londonstani* still involves a degree of racism and prejudice, but the people are less homogenous, and particularly in the cities there is a bigger acceptance of pluralism, regardless of ethnicity. Because Arun feels British, he has no problems embracing conventional British customs, while Ali, who feels pushed out and hated, finds acceptance and a sense of belonging with a fundamentalist Muslim group and removes himself from mainstream society.

Although Malkani reported that he saw no evidence in his research that British Asian youths were “using their newly-asserted ethnicity to assimilate on their own terms” (Malkani, “Mixing and Matching” 3), perhaps this process stretches across time. It is not necessarily the same adolescents that remove themselves from embracing their parents’ original culture, that rejoin society on their own terms, because this process needs longer time. Young people now can enjoy the benefits of the struggle young men, such as the fictional example of Ali in Hanif Kureishi’s “My Son the Fanatic,” went through twenty years ago.

The boys’ choice to segregate themselves and embrace an alternative subculture might seem like an attractive option to them, but everyone else can see that they are heading in the direction of only misery and failure. Their old school teacher, Mr Ashwood, is seriously worried. In his job as a teacher, he is witnessing how the boys, and others with them, disengage themselves from mainstream society. When Ravi questions him on why he cares so much what they do Mr Ashwood answers:

–I’ll tell you why I give a shit, as you put it. I give a shit for the bloody simple reason that it makes it impossible to be a teacher. Don’t you see, all I wanted to do was to turn you boys into great people – future newspaper editors, director-generals of the BBC, Cabinet members, even a prime minister. But how can I do that if you lot want nothing to do with mainstream society? (126-127)

His job as a teacher is to prepare children for adulthood, and educate them so that they can find their place in British society, and his frustration is that Jas and his friends are removing themselves from that same society. Jas used to be his most promising student, and for the teacher it is provoking to witness how they are throwing away their education, and with it they are, in the teacher's opinion, getting rid of any chances of building a good life in the future. In his narration, Jas paints a picture of a teacher who genuinely cares about his students. Mr. Ashford constantly used to interrupt his lessons with talk about education politics, and when he did he always got very passionate and excited. His observations about the boy's empowerment and removal from society are spot on when he says to the boys:

–I'm just glad that no matter how much I feel let down by New Labour, at least they're spending money trying to keep boys like you off the streets. Tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime, or so they keep saying. Mind you, *what about tough on the causes of disengagement from society? I suspect that's the real problem here, isn't it?* (123, my emphasis)

The teacher is trying very hard to understand the boys' situation, but at the same time he is provoked by their "anti-integration, anti-assimilation ethic" and he promises not to rest until he can change their culture from being "so divided along ethnic lines" (126). This is where he irritates the boys: why should they assimilate or integrate to be a part of mainstream society? What is wrong with embracing their ethnicity? They get more irritated when he talks about how their parents have worked so hard to become accepted in Britain, only for their children to throw it all back in their faces. Their answer to that is that their parents had no

choice but to “suck British butt” (126), and that it is time for them to teach their parents some self-respect, and to be proud of their cultural heritage.

When Mr Ashwood quotes newscaster Trevor McDonald who once said that “if you don’t want to integrate, why did you come here?” (127), he reveals his lack of insight into the boys’ situation. Ravi’s obvious answer to this is: “– We din’t fuckin come here, innit, (...) – we was fuckin born here” (127). Although the teacher tries his best to understand, he is getting it wrong, and ironically, he is the one who puts them in touch with Sanjay, and with that sends them even further down their criminal path.

### ***The Twist at the End: Playing with Stereotypes***

At the very end of *Londonstani* it is revealed to us that Jas is in fact not of Asian origin, but comes from an “all white” family. This information is exposed on the last few pages, and creates an instant urge to read the whole novel all over again. What is it that makes us as readers assume that Jas is Asian? A closer reading of the text reveals a lot of small details here and there that make us presume that his ethnic origin is Indian, but it is never stated explicitly that Jas and his family are Asian. Gautam Malkani is playing with the readers, counting on us to make the wrong assumption. It left me feeling embarrassed about my own stereotypical views, and I asked myself why I was so quick to categorize. I have since tried to pinpoint the clues that made me believe he was not white, but of course, that is what is so clever about what the author does with this twist. You can never really understand why you made the first assumption, because when you read the novel for the second time, you know about the twist at the end, and therefore read with different “eyes.” Still, I will try to give an account of what I believe are the reasons why we assume that Jas is a young Asian.

The language is a major contributor, although the next chapter will show that the hybrid language the boys use is not exclusively used by Asians. In his narration, Jas includes himself in the same category as the Asian boys when he says: “First we was rudeboys, then we be Indian niggas, then rajamuffins, then raggastanis, Britasians, fuckin Indobrits” (5). He also refers to Daniel, the boy Hardjit is beating up at the beginning of the novel, as “the white boy” and “the gora” (6), thereby removing himself from the white category.

Jas’ name is another clue. At the beginning of the novel he tells us that another boy, Jaswinder, is upset with him because he already has the coveted nickname. Jas then goes on to explain how long and difficult his surname is, and how none of the teachers at school ever was able to pronounce it correctly. In fact, he is so ashamed of his name that he will not reveal it to the reader. Later in the novel, when Samira questions why he books a restaurant table in the name of Jas, he replies: “C’mon, if you had a surname like mine would you give it to people? It’s such a long-assed surname an people always pronounce it wrong. You know how it is” (248). Later in the novel, he is heartbroken about Samira dumping him, and imagines his own epitaph: “Here lies Jas. My surname too fuckin long an too fuckin shameful to fit on my own fuckin gravestone” (294). In the very end it is revealed that this long embarrassing name is Bartholomew-Cliveden, and Jas is short for Jason (340). Jas’ hair is also so thick that it is impossible to style (28), which also was another hint, as both Afro-Caribbeans and Asians often have thick hair.

Jas’ parents are another contributing reason to why we assume that Jas is a young Asian. His mother has many different pashmina shawls which she wears all the time “even when she’s gardening” (33), she cooks food such as chicken biryani with extra chillies (33) and she has threaded eyebrows (332). Jas’ father watches cricket on television – stereotypically considered to be every Asian’s favourite pastime (198) and works all the time

running his own business (33). When the family goes on holiday their house is watched by cousins (317).

All of these hints build an image of a stereotypical Asian character, disregarding the fact that all of these factors can also be attributed to white people. Jas speaks with a desi accent, his closest friends are all Asians, he has a long and difficult surname, he has thick hair, and his parents behave in a stereotypical way. These attributes are only a small part of his identity, but they are more than enough for us to categorize him as an Asian, which is what I realized when the twist was revealed, and why I was shameful. We might think we are modern sophisticated and accepting, but at the end of the day, we all use fairly simple attributes to label other people and stereotype them into different categories.

Moreover, the paperback edition of the novel I first read has a picture of an Asian boy on the front making it easy to assume that Jas, the protagonist, is the one featured on the cover. The first edition of the novel did not have this picture, but I am fairly certain most readers made the same assumption anyway.

As well as looking for evidence to explain why I made the wrong assumptions about Jas' ethnicity, I also reread the text looking for things I might have missed, that would have made me guess. Here is what I found: Jas is several times compared to Justin Timberlake, a white American pop star; he looks a little like him (28), and he dances like him (227). His old friends all have "white" names: Dave, Gilbert, Spencer, (29) Andy and Mark (146). Samira compares him to Indiana Jones and James Bond, two "all white" heroes but she might just as well be joking with him (102). When the boys talk to Mr Ashwood he says "Your idea of diversity seems to be limited to recruiting Jas," (125) but this could also mean diversity because Jas used to be a "geek," not just because he is white. When Amit and Arun's mother is angry with Jas, she tells him he does not understand anything about their culture (261).



Hardjit, Ravi and Amit also had other people laughing at them because they were hanging out with Jas (277), but again, this could also just mean that he was a “geek.” My conclusion is that faced with all the previous “clues” about Jas’ being Asian, none of the above would make a reader change his or her mind.

After closer examination my embarrassment was reduced when I realized that I was not the only one to jump to the wrong conclusion. Gautam Malkani was very conscious about what information he included and omitted, and he carefully constructed the text so that the reader would make the wrong assumption. On his webpage he writes about why he included the twist at the end: it is “simple enough: it seemed the most effective way of making the point that this stuff’s not about race or ethnicity, but about how those identities are used like tools to be more of a man.” He also writes that he wanted the novel to be a “slap in the face” just to show that the printed text can be powerful, and in this respect, much more powerful than film and videogames (Malkani “About *Londonstani*”).

Malkani also gives another reason for the twist: to show that ethnic identity has become something we choose to express or not. Our identity is more multifaceted and parts of it we may simply select, and we adapt elements of our identity to different sides and contexts of our life. This individualistic contemporary view of how people choose their own identity is a sharp contrast to earlier times when identity was “simply handed to them because of their surname or gender or class or caste or whatever” (Malkani “About *Londonstani*”). Malkani quotes sociologist Ervin Goffman when he talks about identity as performance, and he goes as far as to say that in London and other cities like it, racial identity has become something you can choose to perform; it is not necessarily something you are.

In *Londonstani* Jas has clearly adopted the role of a “desi rudeboy,” and although he has some difficulties adjusting to all levels of the part, he certainly fools all of the readers. He

feels much more confident as part of Hardjit's crew than he did as a book-reading "geek" who did so well in school. Malkani points out that there could easily have been other identities the boys could have used to express themselves, such as football hooliganism or extreme sports (Malkani *About Londonstani*).

## Chapter Four: Hybrid Language

After all, it's all about what you say and how you say it. Your linguistic prowess and debating dexterity (though whatever you do don't say it that way)... (Jas in *Londonstani* 6).

The control over language has been one of the main characteristics of imperial oppression. The authority to name something is a tremendous power, and the expansion of the British Empire included a very conscious strategy to replace native languages with English. As mentioned in Chapter 1, Thomas Macaulay in his famous 'Minutes on Indian Education' from 1835 declares that it is vital for Britain to create a class of interpreters. The introduction of English as the language of commerce, education and governance was a crucial part of this strategy (Ahmad 19). This method was followed throughout the British Empire, and the result of this is the development of a multitude of different local varieties of the English language across the post-colonial world. The Nigerian author Chinua Achebe wrote that English language has become "the world language which history has forced down our throats" (Achebe 429). Achebe is by many considered to be the father of the African novel in English (*Literature Online*). Although the authors of *The Empire Writes Back* make a distinction between English and english, to signal the difference between the 'standard' British English and the different varieties developed in the post-colonial world I have chosen not to follow this in my thesis (*The Empire Writes Back* 8).

This chapter begins by giving a description of how language was of immense importance in Britain's imperial oppression, followed by a brief account of authors of vernacular English literature, their different motives for using English and their different

approaches to the language. Subsequently I will analyse Jas' narration, and the language used in *Londonstani*. The analysis will show firstly how the hybrid language is used to build his identity as a rudeboy, and secondly how the language is used to create barriers and contrasts, but also to communicate well and draw us as readers into Jas' world. The next part will give a description of how language can create stereotypes and how different accents have higher status than others. The final part of the chapter will explore how culture is communicated through language, and how post-colonial writers have used English in different ways to portray the hybridized post-colonial experience.

### ***“Rotten English” – a Hybrid Language***

In 2007, a literary anthology of vernacular poetry, prose, essays and short stories was released, as the first of its kind. The editor of the anthology, Dohra Ahmad, explains in her introduction what she means by the expression vernacular literature. All the writers represented in the anthology write in linguistic codes that are most often spoken rather than written. In addition, these codes also have a lower status than Standard English. There are many different expressions for this type of language, such as “non-standard, dialect, demotic, slang, pidgin, creole, and patois” (Ahmad 16). Ahmad believes that “such designations are slippery and politically loaded” (Ahmad 16). They indicate hierarchical levels and tend to classify vernacular language as insignificant and less correct. In news broadcasting, for example, a dialect is not acceptable, only Standard English will do. Although the term vernacular originally referred to the language spoken by a house slave, it is of course far more neutral today, and Ahmad prefers it to the labels mentioned above, also because it embodies the duality of the phenomenon it describes, a language once spoken by slaves is now a

language used in avant-garde writing (Ahmad 16-17). It is perhaps easier to define vernacular literature by what it is not: written in the language we learn to write in school (Ahmad 18).

The title, *Rotten English*, originates from the Kenyan writer, Ken Saro-Wiwa's *Sozaboy: A Novel in Rotten English*. In the novel's introductory note he explains that his intention was to create a hybrid language that combines Nigerian Pidgin English, broken English and "occasional flashes of good, even idiomatic English." He wanted to use a language that "throbs vibrantly enough and communicates effectively." Saro-Wiwa was fascinated by the adaptability of the English language, and *Sozaboy* is a result of this fascination, and of his observations on how local Nigerian societies developed "New Englishes" linked strongly to the speaker's "socio-economic and educational background." The language reflects on the society it describes, and therefore is "disordered and disorderly" (Saro-Wiwa ii).

The anthology covers a wide selection of literature from authors like Thomas Wolfe, Chinua Achebe, Robert Burns, Rohinton Mistry, Ken Saro-Wiwa, and Amy Tan, and a section from *Londonstani* is also presented in the anthology. All these writers confront "the hierarchy implied by dialect versus language," and assert the fact that Standard English is just another dialect among many, and that politics is the only thing separating it from the rest (Ahmad 17). Whoever holds the power also has the power to define and control the language. Dohra Ahmad calls attention to the fact that the literary lineage of vernacular writing dates back through centuries, and some of the literature we now regard as classical literature, such as works by Dante and Chaucer, were vernacular at the time of writing. Chaucer wrote in Middle English instead of French, and Dante in Italian instead of Latin (Ahmad 18). The nature of language is that it evolves over time, and that it is continually accommodating new forms. Many will not consider American English a vernacular language, but it has evolved from

British English into its own branch of English, and can therefore also be classified as vernacular (Albani).

*Londonstani* has been compared by critics to the Scottish author Irvine Welsh's *Trainspotting* (1993) because of the vernacular language used in both novels (Younge, Saadi, Paxton). *Trainspotting* was Welsh's first novel. At the time of its release it got mixed reviews, but nevertheless it became a bestseller. The book is largely written in the vernacular of Edinburgh's lower class, and in his subsequent work Welsh has continued to write in the Scottish vernacular. He has given a voice to "the 'schemie' dialect of a people and a class that both authors and society in general tended to ignore" (Halsey). I agree that a comparison between *Londonstani* and *Trainspotting* is meaningful because both authors have set their story in a marginalized community, and the characters' language is of course a part of their identity. Writing in the local vernacular empowers the marginal communities, and also makes them more recognizable and realistic. To a reader who speaks that particular vernacular the text will be even more identifiable, and to other readers the diversity of the English language will become more visible:

They should be daein that kind ay arguing in the hoose, no in a pub, another guy sais.  
(Welsh 61)

Despite being written in a local vernacular, both novels "throb vibrantly and communicate effectively," and demonstrate the adaptability of the English language, just as Ken Saro-Wiva observed (Saro-Wiva ii). In both books the effect of the vernacular language is that the dialogue becomes more audible, you can "hear" the characters' voices better, and it also

makes the novels seem more realistic. Had Malkani and Welsh used Standard English, the dialogue would have felt less authentic.

### *Language in Londonstani*

The language used by the protagonist and some of his friends in *Londonstani* is a mix of a variety of different linguistic influences. The boys use London street slang, like *fit* (good looking) and *sorted* (fixed, dealt with), hip-hop slang with influences from black hip-hop music in both America and the United Kingdom, such as *bling* (flashy jewellery or ornaments) and *homeboy* (friend). They also mix in some Panjabi<sup>5</sup> slang, like *kiddaan* (how are you?) and *pendhu* (a fool), along with popular Americanisms, for instance *crew* (a person's friends, entourage) and *feds* (police), and sometimes even SMS/textidioms, like U (you) and 2 (to/too).

–A to B? Hardjit shouted.–Fuckin batty boy, u sound like a poncey gora. Wat's wrong wid'chyu, sala kutta? U 2 embarrass'd to b a desi? (22)

Gautam Malkani gives several reasons for his choice of style on his official website. He believes the novel to be more believable and the milieu recognizable to those people that “know the scene” and that the familiar language would intrigue and engage that particular group of people, who might not have bothered to read the novel otherwise. Malkani originally tried to write the novel in “proper” English, but the attempt did not make the text credible. In

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<sup>5</sup> I have followed Gautam Malkani's example and spelt Panjabi in the local way, as opposed to the British Punjabi.

Malkani's own words: "it sounded stupid and just didn't work" (Malkani, "About *Londonstani*").

When *Londonstani* was released, there were some mixed reviews, and some critics disapproved of the use of colloquial English. Malkani's answer to this is that any space used on defending the language "against accusations that it's too crude and base" is time wasted. Malkani points out that the English language "evolves through corruption," and that for him to enter into such a debate would mean ignoring this fact (Malkani, "About *Londonstani*"). As already mentioned, Malkani is following in the footsteps of many writers before him; his "rotten English" is a hybrid language produced from diverse cultural and linguistic influences, and reflecting the society it describes.

A good example of this linguistic hybridity is Hinglish, a term that has been invented in recent years and has become a popular term for a mix of Standard English, Indian English and South Asian languages. Baljinder K. Mahal, author of *The Queens Hinglish: How to Speak Pukka*, reveals that the number of people speaking English in South Asia is greater than the people in Britain and North America combined. He declares that rather than being a language of the uneducated masses, Hinglish has become "the language of the movers and shakers," a language reflecting a trendy and hybrid society, and its use is not just restricted to Asians, but becoming increasingly available to everybody in British society (Mahal v-vii).

In *Londonstani*, the vernacular idiom is also being used as a technique to emphasize the boys' hostility towards mainstream culture, and their need to assert themselves on their own terms. Standard English is for them a symbol of authority, and in the boys' efforts to break away from the mainstream, disrespecting the standard language becomes an effective tool. Hardjit and Davinder, the two most aggressive characters, also use mobile phone SMS/text idiom a great deal. This is one of the places where the implicit author shines



through: although Jas is the narrator, he is not the one who has made this distinction between the two most aggressive characters and the other boys. Jas repeats what they all say, and orally there is no difference between to and 2. The author explains that because the boys are really just “wannabe bad-boys,” the most effective way of showing this was to provide a lot of dialogue and “just let them talk” (Malkani “About *Londonstani*”). The speech patterns, together with mobile phones, are the characters’ central assets of manliness and virility (Malkani “About *Londonstani*”). The language expresses their desired image as tough, self-determining and masculine “desis.” They articulate to the rest of the world how tough and mean they are.

The protagonist and narrator is struggling to sound correct; he works hard at compensating for his “lack a rudeboyesque panache” (7). His behaviour does not fit the profile of a tough rudeboy, and he is desperately trying to find the right words. He is not consistent in his recording of the boys’ speech. In the example on page six he uses both 2 and to and u and you, and this happens throughout the novel:

–It ain’t necessary for u 2 b a Pakistani to call a Pakistani a Paki, Hardjit explains, –or for u 2 call any Paki a Paki for dat matter. But u gots 2 b call’d a Paki yourself. U gots 2 b, like, an honorary Paki or someshit. An dat’s da rule. Can’t be callin someone a Paki less u also call’d a Paki, innit. So if you hear Jas, Amit, Ravi or me callin anyone a Paki, dat don’t mean u can call him one also. We b honorary Pakis n u ain’t (6).

Jas also keeps saying the wrong things, such as in the opening chapter, while Hardjit is beating up a boy for allegedly calling him a Paki, Jas makes a point out of how to correctly spell the word Paki. Hardjit does not approve of spelling as a suitable subject when his friends

are supposed to be egging him on to fight, and he tells Jas off. To redeem himself, Jas tries even harder to get the language right in his next remark:

To make up for my useless shitness I decided to offer the following carefully crafted comment:

—Yeh, bredren, knock his fuckin teeth out. Bruck his fuckin face. Kill his fuckin...well, his fuckin, you know, him. Kill him.

This was probably a bit over the top but I think I'd got the tone just right an nobody laughed at me. At least I managed to stop short a saying, Kill the pig, like the kids do in that film *Lord a the Flies*. It's also a book too, but I'm tryin to stop knowin shit like that (9).

What he says and what he thinks are miles apart, and his reference to *Lord of the Flies* reveals his real thoughts about the situation. He is really not that comfortable with his friends and himself ganging up on one boy. It also exposes Jas' intellect: he sees the similarity between his and his friends' behaviour on the one hand and on the other hand the boys in *Lord of the Flies*, who when they are isolated from civilization, return to primitive behaviour and end up killing a scapegoat. Later in *Londonstani* Jas gets it wrong again when he starts to tell Hardjit about the history of the local Trinity Church just before Hardjit has an important fight with Tariq, defending a girl's honour (79).

Following the rudeboy rules is, at times, difficult for Jas. He is jealous of the other boys because of their "perfectly authentic rudeboy front" (5). He believes they are better at being rudeboys than he is, despite the fact that he has "watched as much MTV Base and Juggy D videos as they have" (6). In order to sound authentic he has to deprive himself of both vocabulary and knowledge that he has acquired from school and used in his past, before

he joined Hardjit's "crew." He feels that in order to be a proper desi, he has to deny parts of himself, and he makes a conscious choice to forget information and language that do not fit into the "rudeboy-profile." Jas is trying his best to get rid of the evidence of his education in his language, but keeps slipping up:

If I could, I wouldn't be using poncey words like attain an authenticity, innit. I'd be sayin I couldn't keep it real or someshit (4).

In his narration Jas reveals his difficulty in fitting into the desi category, both by the mistakes he makes, the complex language he sometimes uses, and the things he questions. A very good example of Jas' complex language is when he talks about Bollywood movies, and how their plot always revolves around the concept of pride and family honor. In his argumentation he mixes vernacular language like this:

Bollywood films say all kinds a important shit bout how fucked up things can get if you get too hung up bout your pride an your izzat an shit (250).

with complex academic language like this:

Bollywood offers important insights into the tragic dysfunctionalities of sociocultural structures when people confuse the concept of pride with the concept of honour (250).

Sometimes he mixes the rudeboy vernacular up with complex words in the same sentence, like when he talks about how much he admires Hardjit's rudeboy image:

I was jealous a his front – what someone like Mr Ashwood’d call a person’s linguistic prowess or his debating dexterity or someshit (4).

And when he gets into trouble with his friends for verbally defending Samira:

I should’ve buckled as well, but that would’ve contravened my sense a chivalry an shit (61).

He also uses interesting imagery in his narration. When he describes how Hardjit beats up a white boy in the opening chapter, his choice of metaphors is unusual. Hardjit’s fighting technique is illustrated like punctuation in a written text:

Then he sticks in an exclamation mark by kickin the white kid in the face again (3).

Again, punctuation came with a kick, but with his left foot this time so it was more like a semicolon (3).

Another beautiful and elegant simile is when he describes Samira’s laughter as “soft an delicate an thin like hold-ups” (246).

A further interesting point about Jas’ use of the language is when he is struggling with his image, and how he should respond to a difficult question from Samira. His inner dialogue uses contrasting language to depict two different voices; one is urging him to tell the truth, using colloquial but straightforward English, while the other voice, in rudeboy language, is telling him to lie:

My mind cuts in before I can actually say anything. Things are going well, Jas, it starts sayin to me, so how about just telling her the truth? Fuck off wid dat truth shit, man. Well, I wouldn't even talk to me like that if I were you. Remember, Jas, I'm your mind (253).

Alongside the problems about the proper use of rudeboy language, Jas questiones some of the moral aspects of the rudeboy rules. He admits that he finds it difficult to use derogatory words for women and homosexuals (46, 57), and he is against the use of violence, but is clearly ashamed of this (108). He is uncomfortable with some of the language and has to work hard at performing correctly.

Rudeboy rule #4:

According to Hardjit, it don't matter if the proper word for something sounds fuckin ridiculous. If it's the proper word then it's the proper word.

Yard is one a them words. If it was me who was the American hip-hop G or whoever the fuck it was who invented all this proper speak, no way the proper word for house'd be a yard. That's the garden for fuck sake. I in't feeling the word crib either cos that's what American babies sleep in (45).

### ***Language, Ethnicity and Identity***

Ben Rampton has conducted a study of interethnic communication between British-born adolescents with a special focus on language "crossing." His book, *Crossing: Language and Ethnicity Among Adolescents*, offers considerable insight into the language of young British Asians. He uses Victor Turner's concept of the liminal period, a time of transition, outside of normal social structures, where the initiants neither inhabit their past nor future

status. Anthropological studies of agrarian societies have uncovered a liminal period in initiation rites. Turner uses the same term to describe elements in contemporary urban living and Rampton applies this in his analysis of adolescents' behaviour. By "focusing on moments such as these it will be possible to examine adolescents' attempts to escape, resist or affirm the racial orderings that threaten to dominate their everyday experience" (Rampton 19-20). The boys in *Londonstani* can, without a doubt, be seen as going through a transitional period of their lives. They behave in a way they consider to be all grown up, but they are still living at home, and (largely) living by their parents' rules. For instance: when the boys go around to Hardjit's house, they do not sit in the living room, but go to his bedroom (after removing their shoes at the front door), and his mum brings them a tray filled with food and drink, and later she comes upstairs again to yell at them for being too loud (51, 68, 72).

Their efforts to define their own identity, as a strong hybrid cultural faction, rather than trying to assimilate into British mainstream culture could be a reaction to previous racism, and an attempt to resist the stereotypical images of British Asians. Instead they are creating their own, new way of being British.

Gautam Malkani spent a great deal of time perfecting the dialogue of *Londonstani*. He explains that instead of just using the particular slang captured on tape at the time of his research, he tried to build a timeless dialect by using popular slang-words from different periods, so that the slang would be recognizable to a wider range of readers, and not just give a portrayal of a certain point in time. Just like the language of *Sozaboy*, the language of *Londonstani* is not actually a language spoken by anyone. As Dohra Ahmad points out in her introduction to *Rotten English*, none of the vernacular literature in the anthology is simple transcription of actual speech, although many critics seem to believe so (24). Despite that, the vernacular of *Londonstani* still brings out the essence of the culture it describes, it achieves Saro-Wiwa's goal of a language that "throbs vibrantly enough and communicates

effectively.” A journalist from *The Times* brought a copy of the manuscript of *Londonstani* to a sixth-form English class in Hounslow, just before the release of the novel in 2006, to investigate the authenticity of the colloquial speech. She discovered that Malkani was spot on; the teenagers’ response to the dialogue was that this really is how youngsters in Hounslow speak (Paxton).

By creating slang with strict rules for the different characters, Malkani points out the importance of language in creating barriers, in this case, racial and generational boundaries (Malkani “About *Londonstani*”). I believe these barriers are successfully achieved in the contrast created by the use of different vernaculars and the shift between them. The boys’ language accentuates their effort to be different from their parents’ generation, as well as the established dominant culture, and, last but not least, the British Asians who choose to assimilate to the dominant culture (or to be coconuts, as the boys call them, brown on the outside but white on the inside). Malkani’s use of slang effectively draws us into the boys’ world and it makes the contrast between them and the groups mentioned above stand out. A good example of this contrast is when the boys get “rescued” by Mr. Ashwood, their former school teacher, and are being held as “hostages” in his office:

–Yeh, well, I wudn’t even give a shit even if u did have a problem wid it, Tom, I aint’t callin you sir no more. An talking bout yo name, seems dat u still can’t pronounce my proper name proply. C’mon, bredrens, let’s chip.

–You walk out that door, young man, and I’ll not hesitate to call the police. I take time out of my afternoon to vouch for your integrity, I put my reputation on the line with the local beat officers, and you repay me by trying to steal my mobile from right under my nose. What kind of a bloody fool do you think I am? (116)

(...)

–R u deaf, man? I said da name’s Hardjit. Hardjit, innit. Wid a d in it, innit.

–I’ve never known it to be spelt that way before.

–Well now u do, a’ight.

–No, actually I don’t. Don’t think you can terrorise me like you did all the other teachers here. Don’t think you can pen me as one of those teachers who can’t pronounce Asian names just because you’ve decided you prefer it spelt or pronounced a new way. I wasn’t born yesterday (117).

The contrast between Hardjit’s hybrid vernacular and the teacher’s Standard English enhances the difference between them. The double effect of signalling difference both in content and form is very effective, and it creates a barrier between the teacher’s accepted mainstream culture and the boys’ rude-boy world. Hardjit is being disrespectful both by what he says to Mr. Ashwood, and in the way he expresses it. Particularly the boys’ vernacular English provokes the teacher, who expresses his disapproval like this:

No you don’t get it, do you, Ravi? I don’t mind you using your mother tongue. In actual fact I’ve often thought it admirable the way you boys mix up Hindi with Urdu and Punjabi to create your own second-generation tongue. It’s the English code words I can’t stand. It’s ironic isn’t it? The way your use of English makes you lot look like you’re some kind of Asian mafia rather than the use of your mother tongue (125).

This is an interesting point. Had the boys not used vernacular English, and only used Panjabi, Hindi or Urdu to complement Standard English, they would have been unable to communicate effectively, to use Ken Saro-Wiva’s words, because they would have effectively excluded everyone who does not understand those languages, but by using English, they can



get their point across, and be understood by everyone at the same time. There is no point in rebelling if your rebellion is not heard by those you are rebelling against. Mr Ashwood realizes that the boys' use of English is one of the elements that separate them from the mainstream society. Their tough vernacular English is a crucial part of their character and the image of them as hard-hitting rude-boys. Perhaps he is offended because he disapproves of changing the English language, like so many others do. Mr Ashwood is a purist, although as a teacher he must obviously know that languages are forever changing. It is remarkable how Mr Ashwood obviously only feels strongly about preserving the English language, because he has no problem with other languages being mixed to create a new language. As an English teacher, he firmly believes that the preservation of the English language is important. He also realizes that the boys are not doing themselves any favours by rebelling against the establishment: he knows that the path they are on will only lead in one direction, crime and poverty. They will become losers in society, not just locally in Hounslow. In real society this kind of behaviour could lead to Asian youth being judged and pigeonholed because of people's tendency to categorize.

### ***Stylised Asian English and Stereotypes***

Out of the three groups the boys are trying to distance themselves from, two use Standard English. Mr Ashwood represents one group, the regular "white" population, and the British Asians who "are acting like coconuts" represents the other group. The third group is the parents' generation who use Stylised Asian English. Ben Rampton defines the term as speaking with a marked Panjabi accent (Rampton 50). Suhayl Saadi, also an author, reviewed *Londonstani* for *The Independent*, and was critical of the use of vernacular language. He

claimed that the South Asian accent was depicted as clownish. I believe this claim is partly true, particularly in the case of Amit's mum:

–But why you talk? You don't understand such things, so then why you told him such things? Why you talk? Vot you know about our proper style of shaadi? Nothing. You not understand nothing, Arun not understand, Amit not understand even, only we understand. We know vot needs to be done, not you boys (261).

Her accent might make her look silly, and I believe Gautam Malkani is buying into the stereotype, but I doubt that his intentions are to make fun of the accent itself, but rather to make us laugh at the type of domineering mother he is describing. Ben Rampton investigated the British press and television and found that in many cases South Asians were characterized with a derogatory sociolinguistic image. These stereotypes often connect back to the British rule in India and their ideas about “babu” (Rampton 51). The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines babu English as; “the ornate and somewhat unidiomatic English of an Indian who has learnt the language principally from books.” In Rampton's study, Stylised Asian English is associated with negative stereotypes, where South Asians are connected with being “compliant newcomers” and “ineptly orientated to bourgeois success” (Rampton 56).

Rampton also discovered that there was a general feeling of resentment towards Stylised Asian English amongst the adolescents. It was perceived as a transitional language of the past generations of new arrivals and immigrants, and far from the youngsters' own lives (Rampton 57). Dora Ahmad writes that in all literature where characters speak, the words used are oral forms, but often this is only noticed when the language used is “politically disempowered forms, such as black American English, that are considered by the mainstream to be sub-literary” (Albani). In *Londonstani*, Mr Ashwood also speaks in oral forms, but as

readers we are more used to those forms, and therefore we do not reflect on it in the same way as when Amit's mum speaks.

Saadi writes in his review that reading *Londonstani* is like watching 500 episodes of *Goodness Gracious Me*, and that both are lacking in depth. The hit BBC comedy show jokes with “the stereotypical portrayal of Asians that (has) blighted the British media for decades” (*BBC.co.uk*). The award winning show has had tremendous success, and the four British Asians joke about Asian stereotypes as well as reversing roles and looking at Britain from an Asian perspective. In *Crossing*, Rampton documented the reactions of adolescents to comic caricatures of South Asians on television. Their response was “varied and often ambivalent.” Some felt shameful and were worried that other (white) people might think that the stereotypes presented were actually true. Some were offended that the way they (Asians) spoke was made fun of. Some thought it was funny, and others again believed it to be racism (Rampton 56).

Rampton found that both Stylised Asian English and Creole were connected to a set of defined attributes, whilst Panjabi, on the other hand, was not. There was no equivalent to “acting black” and “acting Indian” when Panjabi was used by the adolescents (Rampton 56). There were no stereotypes assigned to Panjabi, and so being associated with it was less stigmatising than Creole and Stylised Asian English. As Rampton's book was released in 1995, and his fieldwork was conducted in 1984 and 1987, it is very possible that this has changed since. Today Panjabi might be connected to “acting desi,” although this is only speculation on my account.

Stylised Asian English may also be classified as an interlanguage, a term coined by Nemser and Selinker, meaning “the genuine and discrete linguistic system employed by learners of a second language. The concept of an interlanguage reveals that the utterances of a

second-language learner are not deviant forms or mistakes, but rather a part of a separate but genuine system” (*The Empire Writes Back* 66). A learner’s language becomes fossilized at a certain point of learning a new language, meaning the learner will stagnate at a certain point, even after years of speaking the new language. The language becomes cross-cultural, and can be viewed as the first step towards appropriating the language (*The Empire Writes Back* 67).

In his review of *Londonstani*, Saadi continues: “Why is it, in so many novels and dramas, a South Asian, Scottish, Welsh or Yorkshire accent is portrayed as clownish while a south-eastern English accent is depicted as ‘cool’?” I believe Saadi is missing the mark here, first of all because in *Londonstani*, it is not the south-eastern English accent that is “depicted as cool,” it is the hybrid language of a new generation of British people, who pick and mix from their parents’ original language, the language of the city they grew up in, as well as the linguistic influences of popular culture. Additionally, as mentioned above, the more a vernacular is being used, the more accepted and familiar it becomes, so any author writing in a vernacular is contributing to adding status and acceptance to the language. Dohra Ahmad draws attention to the fact that out of the winners of the Man Booker Prize over the last twelve years, half have been writers of non-standard English (Ahmad 15-16). I believe it would be rewarding to encourage writers to write more in the vernacular, rather than to criticize them for doing so. Then possibly in the future, more readers will view South Asian, Scottish, and Welsh English as languages on the same level as Standard English. American literature has done just that for American English.

### ***Communicating Culture through Appropriation and Abrogation***

Language is a powerful instrument in describing different cultural experiences. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin write in *The Empire Writes Back*: “The crucial function of

language as a medium of power demands that post-colonial writing defines itself by seizing the language of the centre and re-placing it in a discourse fully adapted to the colonized place” (37). By using the language of their previous oppressors, the post-colonial writers are able to illustrate their own cultural experience and communicate it to a greater number of people. There are two main strategies involved in this process: abrogation and appropriation.

Appropriation means using the language of the centre, whilst reshaping it to fit in with the new context/culture. The language is used to express a cultural experience, and in Raja Rao’s words, to “convey in a language that is not one’s own, the spirit that is one’s own” (Rao 276).

Abrogation involves a “denial of the privilege of English” and a criticism of the centre’s right to control the means of communication. The standard meanings of words and set rules for usage are being refused, as well as the general aesthetic of the whole imperial culture (*The Empire Writes Back* 37).

Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin believe that all post-colonial literatures are cross cultural because they bridge a gap between different cultures, and that bridging this gap involves a simultaneous process of appropriation and abrogation (*The Empire Writes Back* 38). A post-colonial writer bends the language to fit in with his own culture, and this often means breaking some of the rules of Standard English, just like Ken Saro-Wiwa did when he created a language that “throbs vibrantly while still communicating effectively” in *Sozaboy*.

Not everyone agrees that a seizure of the imperial language is the best way to communicate the post-colonial experience. The Kenyan writer Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, who once wrote in English, now asserts the need to reject the colonial language; and he promotes the use of the original language where he believes that the essential cultural identity of a people rests. Many feel this approach is doomed to failure and therefore prefer appropriation. Chinua

Achebe has said that appropriation “is a process by which the language is made to bear the weight and the texture of a different experience. In doing so it becomes a different language” (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, *Language: Introduction* 261-262). The process of colonization has, in many instances, been devastating for those at the receiving end, and therefore the feelings towards the English language are coloured by those experiences. Achebe’s suggestion is that African writers should not throw the good out while rejecting the evil (Achebe 428). He writes: “The real question is not whether Africans *could* write in English but whether they *ought to*. Is it right that a man should abandon his mother tongue for someone else’s? It looks like a dreadful betrayal and produces a guilty feeling. But for me there is no other choice. I have been given this language and I intend to use it” (Achebe 434).

The language in *Londonstani* very much follows the approach of Achebe. Gautam Malkani creates a new language by flexing the English language to his need by ignoring set grammatical rules, and inserting words and phrases from both slang and other languages. It becomes a different language, but it is still recognizable to a great number of readers.

### ***Post-Colonial Writing: Employing Sameness while Signifying Difference***

Oral tradition is handed down in words from person to person, and becomes available only to those who become carriers of cultural knowledge, such as storytellers and the relatively few that witness their stories being told. Written literature democratizes knowledge, and it becomes available to anyone who can read and get hold of reading material. Making vernacular language available broadens the use of English and makes its variants more accessible and easily reached by a larger number of people (Albani). Because of the extensive use of English worldwide, it is only natural that its oral forms still remain more accepted than idioms that have only reached and become familiar to a few, simply because people are more

used to reading (and hearing) it than, for example, the Scottish vernacular. English contracted forms like what's and ain't are forms familiar to most, while wat'chyu (what do you) and bet'chyu (I bet you), used in *Londonstani* are far less familiar.

Because the English language has been used by a large mixture of people it is also more versatile than most other languages. In many of the colonies it also functioned as an inter-regional language, as well as a pidgin language (*The Empire Writes Back* 39).

In post-colonial societies there are three main types of linguistic groups; monoglossic groups where a single-language society only use English as their native language, diglossic, which is a society where a majority speak two or more languages on a daily basis, and polyglossic, where many dialects intertwine to form a generally understandable linguistic continuum (*The Empire Writes Back* 39). In *Londonstani*, the protagonist lives in a small diglossic community, in a part of Hounslow where people often speak two or more languages. It is also possible to argue that the language the boys speak can be defined as a polyglossic language, because of all the different linguistic influences.

In the Caribbean communities, polyglossic language has been studied extensively, the post-colonial linguistic theory of the Creole continuum states that “the Creole complex of the region is not simply aggregation of discrete dialect forms, but an overlapping of ways of speaking between which individual speakers may move with considerable ease. These overlapping “lects,” or specific modes of language use, not only contain forms from the major languages ‘between’ which they come into being, but forms which are also functionally peculiar to themselves” (Bickerton quoted in *The Empire Writes Back* 44.)

Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin conclude that from observing the Creole continuum it becomes apparent that the characteristics of language do not rest with structural abstractions, but in actual practice. They go on to state that “because these conclusions affirm the plurality

of practice, the linguistic theory of the creole continuum offers a paradigmatic demonstration of the abrogating impetus in post-colonial literary theory” (*The Empire Writes Back* 46).

Post-colonial writing, both from monoglossic, diglossic, and polyglossic cultures, uses the English language to “signify difference while employing sameness.” The sameness is what is allowing it to be understood, and by abrogating and appropriating English it is possible to see this as adding a quality of a specific culture to the English text (*The Empire Writes Back* 50). The experience of a rudeboy in Hounslow becomes available and accessible to a reader in Norway through a written text.

Homi Bhabha stresses the importance of the distinction between metaphor and metonymy. He believes that interpreting a trope as a metaphor offers a universal reading, because metaphors, as he sees it, do not allow for any cultural specificity. Bhabha prefers to interpret figurative language as metonymy, because it gives the text a specific character and gives it a taste of the culture behind the text (*The Empire Writes Back* 51). The metonymic gap is a term that is used about post-colonial literature. It describes the cultural gap that occurs in a colonizer’s language when authors “insert unglossed words, phrases or passages from a first language, or concepts, allusions or references that may be unknown to the reader.” Words like these “become synecdochic of the writers culture” and emphasise the cultural difference indicated through the language. The writer is signalling that “I am using your language so that you will understand my world, but you will also know by the differences in the way I use it that you cannot share my experience” (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts* 123).



### *Different Strategies of Writing*

Post-colonial writers apply different strategies to appropriate the English language for their writing. The authors of *The Empire Writes Back* say: “Post-colonial texts may signify difference in their representations of place, in nomenclature, and through the deployment of themes. But it is in the language that the curious tension of cultural ‘revelation’ and cultural ‘silence’ is most evident” (58). One strategy is to contrast the appropriated English with standard English, like Malkani does in the dialogue between Hardjit and Mr. Ashwood quoted above.

The author of a post-colonial text can bridge the gap between two different worlds and is the first editor of his or her work in that the writer can employ different methods to help the reader understand a post-colonial text. Examples of editorial intrusions are: glossing, footnotes, glossaries, and explanatory introductions.

Glossing, where the translation of the original word is placed in brackets directly after the word, is the most common and obvious example of an author’s editorial intrusion into the text. But this can lead to oversimplification of the meaning, and indicate that the referent is the true meaning of the word, that the translated word has the exact meaning as the original. The word *obi* in Igbo can be translated into *hut*, but in the Ibo culture *obi* represents a lot more than *hut* does, it is a building where the family gathers, which is not a common connotation to *hut*. By using a word from a different language in the text, that word becomes a representative for the presence of a different culture, and it becomes a cultural sign. Glossing in a cross-cultural text can lead to problems; it can slow down or even break the pace of the reader because of all the explaining involved. Glossing is far less used now than it was twenty to thirty years ago (*The Empire Writes Back* 60-61). Gautam Malkani does not use glossing in *Londonstani*.

Dohra Ahmad has added a glossary at the end of *Rotten English*, and introduces it by explaining that glossaries in post-colonial and “minority” literature are a source of debate, and that her glossary therefore “represents a compromise between condescension and clarity.” She quotes the Indian author Rohinton Mistry who has expressed the opinion that a glossary can be condescending because “it underestimates the reader’s ability to comprehend through context” (Ahmad 511).

It is worth noting that the American version of *Londonstani* included a glossary at the back, whilst the British edition did not. I can only speculate as to why this was done, but it is an interesting fact. Perhaps because the American audience is less familiar with British vernacular, the publisher felt the need to include a glossary. The glossary does not only contain Indian words, but also includes proper nouns and other words from British society such as *Sainsbury’s*, *A-levels* and *newsagent*, and British slang words like *boffin* (a clever person), *fit* and *sorted*. The glossary even includes slang words that originate from America, such as *bling* and *VPL* (Visible Panty Line), and slang words from other parts of the world, like *rudeboy* from Jamaica and *safe* from South Africa (*Oxford English Dictionary*). I read the British edition, and had no problems following the plot, even though I did not know what certain words meant. In fact, I wrote down a few of the Panjabi words and asked a friend, Aruna Sharma, to translate them for me, and I discovered that I had pretty much already understood the meaning from the context. A glossary would have made me flip back and forwards and interrupted my pace. For instance, the Panjabi word *pehndu* is frequently used, and Aruna told me that it means *villager*: “Jas, u pehndu, I meant his mobile numba” (15) and “An u best not forget 2 sort us out with a new Samsung E700, replace da one u brucked last nite, pehndu” (88). From the context I had gathered that *pehndu* meant something along the lines of *idiot* or *fool* and that it certainly was not a positive expression. Finding out that it meant *villager* really did not add to that meaning (except the fact that I might perhaps assume

that the stereotypical image of a villager as someone simpler and less intelligent might be the same in India as it is in certain circles here in Norway). *Pehndu* is being used as *idiot* in the text, notwithstanding the original meaning. Interestingly, in Dohra Ahmad's glossary for *Londonstani*, *pehndu* was translated as fool (516), which fits much better with the context and the way it is being used, and also with my own conception of the word after reading the novel. The glossary in the American edition of *Londonstani* has the same translation as Ahmad, and is probably the source of her translation (339). *An English-Panjabi Dictionary* translates the word as villager, and also adds that the word is slightly contemptuous (Bailey 131), while *The Queen's Hinglish* defines it as yokel (Mahal 86). My conclusion from this is that the expression has taken on new meaning in the context of a hybrid language, and although it still embodies some of the original meaning, it is unnecessary to give a translation as the meaning explains itself through the context of the text anyway. However, the etymology adds a contrast and reminds us about how urban the boys are. The village is a very distant idea.

Leaving a word untranslated is widely used in literature to communicate cultural distinctiveness (*The Empire Writes Back* 63). Untranslated words give the text a taste of "local flavor," but it also causes the reader to engage actively with the "horizons of culture in which these terms have meaning." The context and further reading of the text will often be adequate for understanding what the word means, but to get the fuller cultural meaning, the reader sometimes has to investigate further, outside the text. In R.K. Narayan's *The Man-Eater of Malgudi* the word *rakshasa* is one of several untranslated words. The *rakshasa* is a demon in Hindu mythology. The traits of the demon are thoroughly defined by Sastri, one of the characters, and there is no need to gloss the word (Narayan 72). However, a further investigation of the word will reveal more about the demon, and also put the entire novel in a different light. The Hindu Bhasmasura myth, which is also mentioned twice in *The Man-Eater of Malgudi*, is a story of the struggle between demons and the Gods, and examining the myth

opens up for an entirely different reading of the novel. The author applies the myth to the novel in a structural way, and knowledge of the myth is crucial in order to be able to fully appreciate and understand the novel (Gjørven 15).

Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin propose that leaving words untranslated in post-colonial texts is ultimately a political act, because glossing will give the translated word a higher status (*The Empire Writes Back* 65). By giving a simple translation, the reader will assume that the translated word has the same connotations as the original. A writer that leaves a word untranslated is signalling that the native language (and culture) holds certain qualities and connotations that are not represented in the English language, and he/she is therefore abrogating the language to express this difference. The untranslated word becomes a symbol of the author's right to use the language in a way he/she sees fit, and represents a denial of the centre's right to control the language.

The development of neologisms in post-colonial texts is crucial evidence of how language and cultural space coexist. It is also a vital part of the development of different English variants. "Colloquial neologisms are a particularly important example of the metonymic function of all post-colonial literature" (*The Empire Writes Back* 70-71). In Gautam Malkani's article "Mixing and Matching" he talks about how the Indian word *desi* gradually has come to refer to a subculture, rather than to strictly ethnic categories (Malkani, "Mixing and Matching" 1). *Desi* is now included in the *Oxford English Dictionary* as both a noun and an adjective.

The last strategy to appropriate the English language by post-colonial writers mentioned by *The Empire Writes Back* is code switching. Switching between two or more codes is the most common method of marking alterity (*The Empire Writes Back* 71). Code switching means combining at least two different languages, especially in speech, and is a

sociolinguistic term often combined with code mixing. Mixing gives emphasis to hybridisation while switching accentuates the move from one language to another. According to the *Concise Oxford Companion to the English Language* there are four major types of switching and they all occur in *Londonstani*.

The first is tag switching when “tags and certain set phrases” from one language are added onto an utterance in another. An example of this from *Londonstani* is when Amit talks to his mother on the phone: “Flour and eggs. Free range. I’ll get it Mama. Alright, Mum, theek hai.” *Theekh hai* means *ok* in Panjabi (16).

The second type is intra-sentential switching when the switch happens within the boundary of a sentence or a clause, like when Priya says to Hardjit: “Oh, Hardjit, you’re such a goody good little angel boy (...) Such a good shareef munda, I should introduce you to my mama.” *Shareef munda* means *good boy* in Panjabi (113), or when Jas writes: “But they can kiss my chuddies” (110). Chuddies is informal for underpants and “the word was introduced into mainstream British vocabulary in the 1990s by the BBC comedy show *Goodness Gracious Me*, and in particular by the catchphrase “Kiss my chuddies, man” (Mahal 27-28).

The third type of switch is intersentential switching, when the shift between two languages occurs at a sentence or clause boundary. Hardjit does this when he talks to the boy he beats up at the beginning of the novel: “Ki dekh da payeh? U like dis chain I got, white boy?” *Ki dekh da payeh* means *what are you looking at* in Panjabi (4).

The final type is intra-word switching which means a switch within the boundary of a word. An example from *Londonstani* is when the boys use the word  *aunty* and add the Panjabi suffix *-ji* to form the word  *auntyji* which is being used as a term of respect to address women who are older, but not necessarily related to them.

All the strategies mentioned above can be combined or used separately, and they enable authors to abrogate and appropriate the language to fit in with the culture they are describing with different orthography, untranslated words and vernacular English. This method of writing is a great representation of a multifaceted and hybridized society. The fictional society portrayed in *Londonstani* is precisely that, multifaceted and hybridized, and Gautam Malkani uses vernacular language combined with more accepted oral Standard English in combination with code switching, and untranslated words to give the reader what is presented as a genuine experience of “rudeboy life.”

## Chapter Five: Conclusion

In this thesis I have explored how hybrid cultures develop in urban spaces, and my focal point has been to look at how hybridity is expressed in the culture and language in Gautam Malkani's novel *Londonstani*. The author's background from Social and Political Science and his research in Hounslow have clearly had an effect on the novel.

*Londonstani* is set in an environment where young people are selecting new types of identities; the characters are not just influenced by their family and ethnic background, but are also inspired by other cultural expressions such as popular music and art. The author is using Hounslow in London, where he grew up, as the setting for his novel. Today's London is a bustling city where new ways of being British are emerging, much because of the diverse and multi-cultural population. The pluralism of British society has been embraced by politicians such as Robin Cook, who sees it as an asset to contemporary Britain. Ethnic minorities are a contributing part of this pluralism, and being "ethnic" or "black" is no longer a hindrance to a British identity. The strength of Britain is that its modern national identity is not based on race, but on shared values and aspirations (Cook 3).

Robert Young questions if there have ever been fixed categories of cultural identity, and he suggests that such categories have been reconstructed retrospectively, and are often perceived as more pure than they really were ("The Cultural Politics" 159). Although I agree with Young, that cultures are never pure, but are forever changing, influencing and influenced by the people living within them, I believe that because of the increasingly globalised world, the modern British nation is a much more multifaceted society with many different cultural influences than in the past. Young's description of hybridity is a great picture of cosmopolitan London: it works in opposing directions turning "difference into sameness and sameness into

difference, but in a way that makes the same no longer the same” (“The Cultural Politics” 158). Living alongside people with so many different backgrounds changes who you are as a person. Essentialism has become increasingly more difficult to apply to modern society because of the complex patterns of hybrid cultures. The “spatial plurality” of the present has replaced the “temporary linearity” of the past (*The Empire Writes Back* 34-35).

Ethnicity has come to mean new things in recent years; The *Fourth National Survey of Ethnic Minorities* revealed that additional identities have emerged, where people find their identity in “certain group labels,” and pride in their origin, and sometimes also show “political assertiveness” (Modood 195). The young Asians in *Londonstani* are exploring some of these new identities through their language and their behaviour.

Hybridity is a useful term in a discussion about cultural differences, and I believe it is particularly valuable in a contemporary urban society such as the one we read about in *Londonstani*. The term is useful because it shifts the focus from a binary “us versus them” distinction to a more nuanced description of how a complex society with a multitude of cultural influences works. Homi Bhabha’s definition of hybridity is unlike the traditional one, where a combination of two different entities forms a new one, he believes that hybridity is an ongoing process, and that different cultural influences are interdependent and are therefore influencing each other. Another positive feature of hybridity is its ability to recognize that identities are “constructed through a negotiation of difference,” and contradictions and dissimilarities are not a sign of failure (Papastergiadis 258).

Bhabha argues that cultural identity emerges in an ambivalent and contradictory space he calls “The Third Space of Enunciation,” where cultural statements and systems are constructed (Ashcroft, Griffith, and Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies* 108). Culture is a result of



an historical process, and can not be traced through the combination of two or more “pure” cultures, but rather emerges through “The Third Space” (Huddart 126).

If we view culture as something that is constructed retrospectively, after hybridization, hybridity can be traced not just in modern cosmopolitan cultures, but in all societies where difference exists, both in the present and the past. In literature Sir Mohan Lal’s mimicry and Hardjit’s “pick-and-mix” identity are two different sides of hybridity; both of them embody the complexity and ambivalence of Bhabha’s third space. Even though the motivational factors and historical contexts are different, they are both “in-between.”

Paul Gilroy’s description of culture is in tune with Bhabha’s third space: culture does not happen along absolute ethnical lines, but evolves in “complex, dynamic patterns of syncretism” (13). Despite Gilroy’s focus on the Afro-Caribbean black communities of Britain, his ideas about culture are easily extended to the Asian diaspora. Subcultures will break up and from them new subcultures will emerge with even more complex patterns of hybridity (Gilroy 217). Jas and his friends live in a subculture influenced by, for instance, hip-hop gangster rap, South Asian customs and religions, and British street culture.

Some of the characters in *Londonstani* are “cross-cultural navigators” (*Parekh Report* 29): they can manoeuvre between very different and sometimes contradictory areas of their lives. Arun lives in two opposing worlds; he has to deal with his family’s traditional views, while living his life in contemporary British society. He is probably the character who best personifies Bhabha’s “Third Space of Enunciation”; he chooses his identity in a space where contradicting and ambivalent influences take place. He challenges Jas to open his mind. The two boys represent oppositional sides in the debate about culture, Jas, despite his very obvious hybrid identity, is an essentialist in this particular debate, and he idealizes the purity of his own culture and believes hybrid cultures are corrupted; while Arun sees culture as a result of

hybridity, just like Homi Bhabha. Arun's story shows that being a cross cultural navigator is not always easy. Making independent choices and mixing different identities is a lot harder than just following a set code. Despite his efforts to be "desi" Jas fails to follow the code and because he breaks the rules and gets involved with a Muslim girl he gets excluded from the gang.

The language of *Londonstani* is used to portray the boys' hybridity. Their vernacular language is a mix of various linguistic influences and it functions to build their characters as rudeboys, but also to create barriers and contrasts between the boys and the other characters in the novel, and to illustrate their hostility towards mainstream society. Mr Ashwood speaks Standard English, some of the parents speak with a Stylised Asian English, and the "coconuts" also use Standard English. By using vernacular language Gautam Malkani also succeeds in drawing the reader into Jas' world, making the text seem more authentic. Malkani follows the course of many authors who write in English, he uses a worldwide language to communicate a particular cultural experience. Ken Saro-Wiwa's words echo through the novel, it "throbs vibrantly" while communicating effectively, the language reflects the small subculture it describes while still reaching a mass of readers.

*Londonstani* is an important novel for many reasons. Malkani wanted to reach readers who normally would not read novels. Up to a point I think he has been successful in this. It is also refreshing to read a novel about "second generation immigrants" that is not primarily about conflicting cultures and racism, but rather about how a new generations of British youths are growing up, choosing their identities from various influences. The novel is not, above all, about being ethnic or different, but about finding yourself in a society where identities are becoming increasingly individualized. Malkani's use of English is interesting, and although it might be a challenge to the reader who is unfamiliar with the local vernacular, I believe it adds to the quality of the novel, making it unique and different.

Despite the aggressive and somewhat destructive behaviour some of the young people in *Londonstani* show, I believe that the novel also represents a fresh and positive outlook on modern Britain. Although the protagonist is struggling with his search for an identity, there are other characters in the novel, such as Samira, who represent second generation immigrants that have found their own place in Britain. The racism of the 1970s and 1980s has shifted to the background, and a new generation of British with a unique ability to pick and mix their identities and a higher acceptance for difference has emerged. I will finish with a quote from a feature article in *The Observer* 18 January 2009, "All together now? A portrait of race in Britain." The article features portraits of ten Britons born in the same year as Stephen Lawrence (1974), and they talk about their perception of race in today's Britain, ten years after the Macpherson report highlighted institutional racism in the Stephen Lawrence case. Shezad Dawood, who grew up in west London with a Pakistani father and Indian mother said:

As a teenager I remember running for my life when I was chased by a gang of skinheads with Stanley knives and baseball bats, and I certainly ran a lot faster than I did at school doing PE. There was also this thing of bowing your head at school – a sort of 'know your place'. ... Now I think London is the most advanced place in the world in terms of being allowed to be who you are ([guardian.co.uk](http://guardian.co.uk)).

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