

## **Abstract**

In this master thesis I discuss the use of space in Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* and Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*, where the notions of history and past gain a new emphasis, and are seen as intrinsically connected to setting and space. It has been argued by theorists such as Sten Moslund, that after the 'migrant turn' within postcolonial studies, there has been a tendency to read migration literature within a celebrative hybridity discourse, which is criticised for discussing the Third Space, and the creative hybrid condition in a celebratory light as a state one can reach, instead of seeing it as a never-ending process of hybridisation affected by ambivalent and contradictive forces. This discourse is furthermore criticised for cutting the ties to the notions of past, origin, home, and history, and by extension letting the reconstruction of history and the political aspect of postcolonial studies come in the shadow of the celebrative hybridity discourse. In my thesis I explore how Kureishi's and Smith's novels open up for a reading that highlights the importance of past and history within an endless hybridisation process, and by using the image of the rhizome I will argue that these notions can be part of the character's identity, without becoming a predatory root taking over completely. By looking at the different spaces in London and its suburbs, we see that the spaces are coloured by different versions of history, by politics, and ideologies, and they affect the characters and become part of their rhizomatic identity. Both novels underline not only the importance of history, but also its flightiness, portraying it as an unstable concept which like the hybridisation process, is in need of constant renegotiation and reconstruction. This leads to an inevitable political perspective, where the need for constant reconsideration of history is emphasised, and the novels are discussed in light of Sarah Ahmed and her argument of what can happen when certain versions of history are reproduced, and renegotiation refused. Ultimately I will show how space is always affected by history, which the characters also realise, and I will discuss these two examples of how migration novels can address these issues and thus demonstrate how space can never be neutral.



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## Introduction

Cultural contact as a result of mobility and migration across borders has always existed both in the course of history and in world literature. However, the second half of the previous century saw a definite increase in the pace and volume of migration compared to earlier centuries, and considering today's political climate and environmental threats, this increase in mass migration only seems to continue. "This has been the century of strangers", Zadie Smith writes in *White Teeth*: "This has been the century of the great immigrant experiment" (2000, p.326). Historical events such as "two world wars, the countless number of regional wars, the process of decolonization, and the emergence of totalitarian regimes played a major role in bringing about the waves of migrants, refugees, and exiles that crisscrossed the globe during the twentieth century", and additionally "technological developments from the late nineteenth century until today [...] have made traveling and communication possible on a scale previously unimaginable" (Frank, 2008, p.1-2). In a world with this scale of mobility, one can no longer see the world in light of old conceptions of essentialism and binary oppositions such as East and West, Self and Other. The world is seen in new perspectives where the concept of identity is more dynamic, roots are no longer rooted, nations become looser concepts, and notions of fixity and stability are replaced by unstable entities, movement, fluidity, self-constructive identities, and hybridity. Suzan Ilcan writes in *Longing in Belonging* that "The idea of home, and belonging are, due to the expanded mobility of peoples and the shifting of settled boundaries, constantly challenged, and the connotations of home as the origin of security, stability and identity are challenged, and thus not only borders but identities become blurry" (2002, p.120). These massive changes in the way we view the world have also urged on a new type of literature. Salman Rushdie describes mass migration as the "distinguishing feature of our time", placing migration and the migrant character in centre of this new literature (qtd. in Pourjafari & Vahidpour, 2014, p.681).

Literature is always connected to the goings on in the outside world, and as George Lukács has argued, the novel is modernity's "genre par excellence" and will always strive to express the contemporary world (1971, p.39). No wonder, then, that migration literature in general, and the migration novel specifically, increased both in quantity and popularity so much during the last decades of the previous century that Søren Frank describes the migrant as the main protagonist of the twentieth century (2008, p.1-2). Frank bases his theory and definition of the migration novel on Lukács's idea that the novel is the ideal literary form to reflect on migration because of its restless form. The form is fragmented and migratory in itself, always in the process of becoming, since literary form always changes and will always

be in an intimate relationship with social situations and historical events and transformations. Frank writes that “Through its form the migration novel specifically sets out to express the content of our experiences of interculturalism and globalization [...] and to resolve the problems posed by these same experiences” (p.22, 7). Migration literature, sometimes referred to as migrant literature, will therefore here be understood in accordance with Frank’s definition which puts focus on the content of migration literature, and takes a step away from biographical readings that focus on the author’s background as a condition for defining the genre. Instead, it is here understood as referring to “all literary works that are written in an age of migration—or at least to those works that can be said to reflect upon migration”, emphasising “intratextual features such as content and form as well as extratextual forces such as social processes” (Frank, 2008, p.2-3). Migration has become the norm, which has resulted in a literature that reflects upon its impact, not only on the movement itself, but on the experience when arriving in a new space and culture. This also includes the impact upon second- and third generation immigrants. Furthermore, this results in new ways to see the world and we renegotiate concepts of identity, belonging, roots and home, and we see history in new perspectives. In the two migration novels that I will explore, *The Buddha of Suburbia* by Hanif Kureishi and *White Teeth* by Zadie Smith, I will therefore refrain from discussing the authors’ backgrounds. The fact that both were born in London, Kureishi with a Pakistani father and English mother, Smith with a Jamaican mother and English father, is here considered less important than the content of their novels, the reflections upon arriving in a strange culture, or growing up with ethnically diverse ancestry. Textual space will in this thesis be seen as intrinsically connected to the outside world, and migration literature is considered a space where historical events and political issues can be addressed.

Some theorists refer to a ‘migrant turn’ in postcolonial studies, that came with the rapid growth of migration literature in the late 1980s, shortly after postcolonialism had been established as an academic area of study (Moslund, 2010, p.8). This migrant turn has resulted in literature and readings that revolve around topics of global migration and not least hybridity – a term thoroughly discussed by writers such as Homi Bhabha and Salman Rushdie. Hybridity is often discussed by these theorists as a migrant condition, a sort of borderland consciousness, a productive and creative space, often portrayed as a coveted state for migrants and all border crossers to reach. Barbara Schaff writes that nowadays hybridity “signifies a positive concept, a ferment which changes culture, an energy field of different forces, or a “Third Space” where different elements encounter and transform each other”, here echoing Bhabha who has argued enthusiastically that identities, cultures, and nations should



be understood as performative constructs that arise from the hybrid interactions and negotiations in the 'in-between' of cultural spaces (Schaff, 2008, p.281-282). And Schaff admits that "In the wake of centuries of migration, of colonisation, globalisation, and productive cultural exchanges, the positive notion of hybrid cultural identities seems more than appropriate" (p.281). However, this notion of hybridity has also been criticised for encouraging celebratory, idealising readings of migration literature. Sten Pultz Moslund has argued that a "certain euphoria" has been developing since the late eighties, when "the study of the literature of the anti-colonial struggle and the emerging national literatures of former colonies gave way to the celebration of migration, border crossing and hybridity as central to the explanation of the post-colonial experience" (2010, p.8-9). Moslund is critical of the unlimited praise of the hybrid condition, as he claims this discourse elevates the ideas of fluidity, movement, and rootlessness, by completely disregarding the notions of home, origin, roots, and history. Instead of ignoring the existence and forces at play in these notions, Moslund sees them as part of the hybridisation process, and in this dissertation, such notions, and especially history, will gain a new emphasis through my reading, and they are considered important elements in a larger process of identity-creation.

*White Teeth* was published in the year 2000, and Barbara Schaff writes that this novel, among others, signals a millennial shift in migration literature which puts more focus on origin, roots and history than what has previously been done in migration and hybridity discourse. She mentions Kureishi as an example of earlier writers representing the formerly "optimistic view" of the migrant condition, "Rather than deploring the fate of the displaced migrant, Rushdie and Kureishi consequently both define the space of in-between as one of immense creativity and possibility" (2008, p.282-283). Moslund, on the other hand, places *White Teeth* as yet another migration novel that contributes to celebrate the hybrid condition (2010, p.5). In this thesis I will argue that Kureishi's *Buddha of Suburbia* (1990) also invites a reading that emphasises the ambivalence in hybridity, and that both novels, in fact, not only problematize hybridity and the contradictive forces involved, but shed light on the characters' relationships to the past, to origin, to a feeling of home and what it means to belong, and of course to history. This implies, which Moslund has also suggested, that in reality it is the former readings of such novels that have idealised hybridity and cut the ties to the past, and that the novels themselves open up for a more nuanced reading. More than a hybrid condition or state that one can experience, a transcendent, creative space you can reach in a hybrid third space, hybridity will here be read as a process. I will discuss the hybridisation process as never-ending and highly ambivalent, where one's past and history can be important parts in

the performative self-enactment process, here discussed as spaces the characters move through and interact with. By using the image of the ‘rhizome’, identity is seen as constantly expanding in the meeting with different spaces, including the space of history and of the past, which can thus become part of the characters’ rhizomatic identity.

Not only will I here argue that these two novels problematize a celebrative reading of hybridity by thematising the characters’ personal pasts, backgrounds, and origins, they also put history in a larger sense back on the map, and all the instability that comes with it. Both novels shed light on history as a constructed concept, destabilizing yet another previously fixed notion. Thus they advocate a constant renegotiation of history, as well as of one’s identity. This view on history is intimately connected to the use of space in both novels. Britain has seen an increase in immigration over the last century, which is largely due to immigration from their former colonies. London has long been a multicultural city, and during the last decades it has become the home of one of the most ethnically diverse populations in the world. London and its suburbs are the settings of both *The Buddha of Suburbia* and *White Teeth*. I will discuss Sarah Ahmed’s argument that in Britain there governs a version of history, of their imperial past, that impacts the migrant’s experiences in the present. She advocates that as long as this version of history is reproduced, the migrant will be in danger of either being subjected to the ‘happiness injunction’: “the social obligation to remember the colonial history as the history of happiness”; or become a ‘melancholic migrant’, unable to let go of the past (2010, p.132, p.148). In both novels the characters move between many diverse places in London and its suburbs, all spaces coloured by different takes on history. This underlines that history is not only very important in these novels, but also very unstable, subjective to different people and spaces, and it highlights how it needs to be reconstructed both on a personal, and a national level. Thus the novels show us that space can never be neutral, untouched by history, even if the characters sometimes wish it could be.

Therefore, in this master thesis I will discuss the use of space in Hanif Kureishi’s *The Buddha of Suburbia* and Zadie Smith’s *White Teeth*, and how space is always connected to history. Space is discussed in relation to the setting in England’s capital and its suburbs, to the many spaces the characters encounter within this setting, and to textual space, and how all these spaces influence and are influenced by history, both on a personal and national level. This problematizes a simple understanding of hybridity, and shows that history and a person’s past are very important parts of the ambivalent and contradictory process of hybridisation, and that the past can become a space the characters move through, and can thus become part of their rhizomatic identity. Therefore, if these two novels have ever been placed within the

celebratory hybridity discourse, I will argue that this is merely due to past readings of the novels, because the novels themselves open up for a reading where history is an important part of one's identity and the hybridisation process, and they problematize an idealised view of the transcendent hybrid condition as the hybridisation process is seen as never-ending. I will also argue that in order to recreate their identities, the characters need to understand history as a social construction, and therefore constantly renegotiate their own history, just like history in the larger sense also needs to be continually renegotiated. History as a flexible and unstable concept, existing in many versions, is a reoccurring theme in both novels, and through my spatial reading I will show how history and truth, in its many versions, are shifting notions, always connected to spaces, how space is consequently never neutral, and that immigrants "cannot escape their history any more than you yourself can lose your shadow" (Smith, 2000, p.466). Before beginning on the discussion of the two novels, I will clarify my above mentioned arguments further with a theoretical basis; I will explain my understanding of terms I use, such as hybridisation, and the rhizome; and I will shortly clarify my approach in the spatial reading of these two migration novels, inspired by Andrew Thacker's discussions of critical literary geography.



## Theory, Terms and Approach

As previously mentioned, what some literary critics, such as Moslund and Schaff, criticise in the hybridity discourse is the tendency to see hybridity as some kind of transcendent condition, a force of positive, creative self-construction in a third space, a creative contact zone of the in-between, proposing the “contemporary transnational and transcultural migrant as a global hero-figure of almost messianic qualities, as a new kind of fluid, complex, open, and inclusive identity, replacing old identities and cosmologies of stability and belonging with the uncertainty of a liminal position in-between two or several cultures” (Moslund, 2010, p.6). They criticise the readings of migration literature in light of this position, where this hybrid condition is considered the ultimate state or goal. This becomes clear from what Pourjafari and Vahidpor write in their discussion of theory within migration literature, when they say that ambivalence often acts as “a passage which *should be* crossed by the migrant character to reach the more secure coast of adjustment, and adjustment is achieved, in most cases, when the character becomes successful in contacting with diverse cultures within a created hybrid space” (2014, p.688, my italics). This exemplifies how this type of hybridity discourse considers the hybrid condition as something one can reach, leaving ambivalence behind, instead of seeing it as a never-ending process. Although postcolonial theory and the hybridity discourse have contributed to a destabilisation of essentialism and the old binary oppositions, the uncritical euphoria of such celebratory readings, it is argued, are also contributing to the creation of new binaries, and what follows is an idealisation of flexibility, movement, fluidity, heterogeneity, and uprooting, at the expense of notions of stability, home, homogeneity, origins, roots and history. Moslund urges us not to embrace this hybridity discourse only because the formerly negative notions of instability now have become accepted truths, because even notions such as flexibility, movement, and uprooting are in danger of becoming fixed if we do not constantly use them with a critical consciousness (2010, p.216). When Moslund renegotiates these terms in his discussion of hybridity, he seems to attempt at saving its theoretical value by ensuring the discourse does not become rigid in its normativity.

In their eagerness to defeat gravity in this mobile world, writers within the celebrative hybridity discourse often indicate the need to cut the ties to the past, because as Bhabha claims in *The Location of Culture*, holding on to “the romance of the past”, to strike roots to history, and to cultural tradition can bring about the “dangers of [...] fixity and fetishism of identities” (1994, p.13). This, according to Bhabha, will ultimately prevent the illuminated experience of recognition of the in-between space, the “unhomely” that goes beyond the old binaries “between the home and the world” (p.13-19). Although I do not completely agree

that all of what has been called celebratory hybridity discourse in fact severs *all* ties to the past, I do agree that it is often overshadowed by the transcendent, fluid, hybrid condition, as exemplified with Bhabha. In my thesis I will avoid such a celebratory reading of *The Buddha of Suburbia* and *White Teeth*, and rather acknowledge a thematic focus on roots and past, allowing history to be an important factor, and give these concepts a new emphasis, without returning to any form of essentialism. Instead, I will attempt to find a compromise based on Moslund's understanding of hybridisation and Glissant's understanding of the rhizomatic identity. Thus I will show that it is merely past readings of these two novels that can be said to be celebratory within the hybridity discourse, because both novels open up for a reading where history is an important part of one's identity and the hybridisation process, and they problematize an idealised view of hybridity and the transcendent hybrid condition.

Moslund has explored a new way of reading hybridity, on which I will be basing my understanding of the term, a view "that avoid[s] both the triumphant hybridity hype and the parochial nineteenth-century notions of ethnic and cultural purity" (2010, p.13). When he reengages with the hybridity discourse he reinvents the dichotomies used within it, such as hybridity versus purity, fusion versus separation, and heterogeneity versus homogeneity. The dichotomous poles are remade into dynamic forces, thus ceasing to serve as states or conditions. Inspired by terms from Mikhail Bakhtin, Moslund rearticulates former static notions into forces of heterogeneity and centrifugality, and forces of homogeneity and centripetality, contradictive forces which are involved in the process of hybridisation. As Moslund points out, hybridity is in itself an example of hybridity, a highly contradictive term, in the field used both as states of cultural fusion and multiplication, bringing together and maintaining separation. A focus on these contradictive and ambivalent forces within it highlights the necessity to look at the "processuality" involved (p.22). Moslund points out that hybridisation is not the same as hybrid, one is an active term, whereas the other is a static description: "The hybrid *is*; it is not the endless process of *becoming*" (p.14-15, my italics). In this way the view on hybridisation as a never-ending process takes a step away from the dichotomies of hybridity versus purity and heterogeneity versus homogeneity. Instead of seeing hybridity as a transcendent condition one can end up with or somehow reach, it focuses on the forces involved in the constant process of becoming within different dynamic spaces. It does not, however, ignore the notions of home, origin, or the past, since the contradictive forces and feelings involved in the hybridisation process are not only tied to the new culture, they are also related to the space of the past, to home, origin, and history. In this thesis I will therefore read in light of an understanding of hybridisation as a process happening in the

meeting with many different spaces, their histories, people, and world views, at the same time wanting to belong, wishing to conform, and being or wanting to be different, figuring out that one can belong in many spaces at once. It is in this movement through spaces, one constructs one's identity, in a never-ending hybridisation process filled with contradictory forces.

I will here be using the image of the rhizome, even though Moslund includes this image in his long list of terms he sees as contributing to celebratory readings of hybridity. However, I find this image very useful when discussing the creation of identity and hybridisation in these novels, as I believe the term falls somewhere in between the idealisation of the hybrid condition and the old static views on roots, home, and stability. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari were the first to criticise the notion of root and being rooted, and came up with the rhizome as an alternative image to discuss identity. In the rhizomatic structure the processual element is emphasised, and instead of roots or points, it is more advantageous to discuss lines that are constantly proliferating (1987, p.20-25). Édouard Glissant defines the rhizome as “an enmeshed root system, a network spreading either in the ground or in the air, with no predatory rootstock taking over permanently” (1997, p.11). He expands on this image and what he calls rhizomatic thought in his *Poetics of Relation*, where every identity is extended, not in opposition to, but through a relationship with the Other, or many others (p.11). And more to the point in this thesis, through a relationship with many different spaces. When Søren Frank discusses the rhizome he acutely points out that “Identity as rhizome does not imply complete rootlessness, [...] and emotional attachment to one's place of birth can indeed be part of the rhizomatic identity” (2008, p.141). He states that “it is not merely the roots of a stabilized past that determine us, the roots of the inconclusive, open-ended future also reach out and touch us, thus bearing witness to our ever-present unrealized potential”. However, next he claims that “What the rhizome nevertheless entails, if not exactly a severing of the roots that connect you with your place of birth, is an addendum of these roots with a variety of other roots” (Frank, 141). Here I will see the rhizome in connection with the process of hybridisation, seeing meetings with new spaces and perspectives as potential addenda in this process, but I will dispute any connotations to a severing of the ties that connect you with your place of birth, or your parents' pasts. As long as *one* predatory root does not take over, they can be included as important parts of the rhizomatic network which exists of *many* lines or connections. A spatial movement does not exclude a temporal one, as the present spaces are always interconnected to history or the past. In my reading of *The Buddha of Suburbia* and *White Teeth*, notions of past, origin, and history will be seen as

spaces for the characters to engage with in the never-ending hybridisation process and the constant expansion of a rhizomatic identity.

Another issue some literary critics have pointed to in respect to the celebrative reading of hybridity in migration literature, is in extension of the disregard of notions of the past, roots, and history, namely the tendency to overlook the political aspect of postcolonial thinking. The indication that one needs to cut the ties to the past, also shifts the focus away from history, and the aspiration to study it from different perspectives. Moslund points to several critics who have problematized this tendency and the turn in postcolonial studies away from the politics of anti-colonial writings and readings, and towards the discourse of hybridity and migration, a “theoretical ruse to establish a neutral, ideology-free zone”, as Benita Perry describes it (qtd. in Moslund, 2010, p.10). The idea is that this ‘migrant turn’, and a continued focus on this celebrative version of the hybridity discourse will only push history, politics, and the anti-colonial aspect back into the periphery. Ella Shohat has argued that this foregrounding of hybridity “supposes a ‘going beyond anti-colonial nationalist theory’, positing ‘no clear domination’ and ‘no clear opposition’. [...] It enunciates the will to a productive third space of hybridity where the binarisms of cultural politics are suspended altogether” (qtd. in Moslund, 2010, p.9-10). It is a dispute between intellectuals within the field, where I believe there can be found a middle ground. Instead of an either-or between binaries, there is a movement back and forth between forces, as argued by Moslund. By avoiding to choose between binaries, or pretending one part does not exist, but rather seeing them as active, moving forces within a political sphere, this perspective does not ignore the importance of history and politics as part of the hybridisation process. The political aspect of earlier postcolonial thinking was more focused on how history or colonialism in its different forms affected the colonised or a minority. When focusing on the importance of history as part of the hybridisation process, and its presence in migration literature, this will accordingly shed new light on the politics involved in historical events and their impact on the present.

When attempting to find a middle ground between these divisions within the field, I will therefore put new focus on the past and history when discussing immigrants’ hybridisation, and what needs to be addressed in this regard is the unstable character of history and the need for its constant renegotiation. History has long been considered a social construction in academic circles, written by the victors of war, the majority, or the coloniser. As Jonathan Friedman argues in his study of the relation between social identification, production of cultural pasts, and the making of history, objective history is “as much a construct as any other history”, and that we have to come to terms with “the contested realities



of formerly silent others” (1994, p.143-145). “Constructing the past is an act of self-identification” he writes, and must be interpreted with the relation between the subjects and their worlds which is motivated in “historically, spatially and socially determinate circumstances” (p.145). Jung Su recognises a connection between a tendency in contemporary British literary works to focus on the past, or history, or as she calls it, an interest in “reconfiguring the past”, and that a lot of this fiction is written by a new wave of prominent contemporary British writers who are immigrants, or sons and daughters of immigrants. “Their impulse to relocate themselves or their historical sense in the British tradition and their sense of dislocation in the social or physical space arguably become a significant register in their writing” (Su, 2010, p.244-246). Not only do many of these writers address immigrants’ own histories, but as Ahmed argues, these stories shed light on how other people’s sense of history, e.g. the British perspective on history, also needs rethinking.

Sarah Ahmed refers to Paul Gilroy’s statement that the British nation is suffering from a postcolonial melancholia, unable to mourn its lost empire, arguing that Britain needs to recognize “the horrors” of their imperial history, because failure to recognise this will only reproduce the happiness duty (Ahmed, 2010, p.132). She describes the happiness duty enforced on migrants, the social obligation to remember colonial history as the history of happiness, as being “continuous with the happiness duty of the natives in the colonial mission” (p.129-130). Echoing Bhabha’s description of the hybrid subject when the colonized mimics the colonizer, she describes the migrant suffering under the happiness injunction as “*almost happy, but not quite; almost happy, but not white*” (p.130). If this version of the past continues to reign, this can also result in migrants who hold on, unconditionally, to their past, unable to let go. They become ‘melancholic migrants’, and are considered a “kind of unnecessary and hurtful reminder of racism”, because this migrant who “remembers other, more painful aspects of such histories threatens to expose too much” (p.148). Their versions of history, is thus considered untrue, or maybe just unpleasant, but nonetheless, un-English. Ahmed concludes that by recognising unhappiness in political memory “We would recognise the impossibility of putting certain histories behind us; these histories persist, and we must persist in declaring our unhappiness with their persistence” (p.159). The recognition of this statement will help to put a political presence back in the postcolonial readings of migration literature and the hybridity discourse, because there is no point in pretending that literature is separated from social and political realities, which only underlines the theme of this master thesis: that no space is neutral. Thus, it is important to note that when I explore how the past affects the characters in the novels, I am not only talking about their own immediate past,

their parents' past, or their origin story, but also history in a larger sense, since, as Ahmed has argued, certain versions of history can affect migrants' situations in the present. This becomes clear to the characters in their movements through the cityscape and the suburbs, and their subsequent meetings with different versions of history.

When approaching *White Teeth* and *The Buddha of Suburbia* through a study of how space and history are intrinsically connected, I will discuss their use of space in several ways. Space will be discussed in its metaphorical sense, especially how the characters themselves imagine the city and the suburbs; space will also be discussed as smaller spatialities and their representations of social space; and it will be discussed in terms of textual space, as social space can help fashion literary form. In his discussion of critical literary geography, Andrew Thacker examines several issues that a critical literary geographer should discuss. On the topic of space in its metaphorical sense he says that it is easy in a theoretical discourse such as postcolonialism to let metaphors such as margins/centre come at the expense of analysing material spaces, and that we must remember that they are mutually implicated (2005, p.62). I will not use much time analysing the material spaces mentioned in the novels, but I will discuss some tendencies in the material spaces of London and its suburbs in their historical setting. As discussed by Ged Pope in *Reading London's Suburbs*, the most significant change in postwar suburban development is the break-up of the "middle-class near-monopoly of suburban living", which, in turn, is a "profound consequence of the working class penetration of the suburbs". He also points to how in the eighties and nineties the suburbs experienced a broader social change, "Once defined as home for mostly white and British-born inhabitants, from the eighties, the suburb becomes increasingly multi-ethnic and populated by immigrants born outside the UK" (Pope, 2015, p.126, 163). Both *The Buddha of Suburbia* and *White Teeth* are set in the seventies, although *White Teeth* is also set in large part in the nineties, in addition to several sections jumping back in time as far as the nineteenth century. It is interesting to note the differences in the suburban descriptions as the suburb in the nineties portrays more diversity, both in terms of ethnicity and class.

The metaphorical use of space in the novels is affected by a long reigning view on the suburbs and the city, metaphors thoroughly discussed by Pope, where the suburb is seen as homogenous, standing still, representing old, English middle-class values, whereas the city is heterogeneous, fast, modern, and always changing, therefore often representing an ideal space for migrants to recreate their hybrid identities. This is also often portrayed as a fantasy or dream, just as imaginary as Rushdie's well-known idea of the imaginary homeland (Rushdie, p.10). Pope discusses how the suburb sometimes in literature is perceived with an odd

“doubleness”, “on the one hand it appears as deathly and empty, a disenchanting zone of everyday ordinariness. Yet this contrasts with the knowledge that this is the place, after all, where people live, grow up and spend their lives, and therefore must in some sense retain the impress of memory, affect, personal meaning and emotion. This is not neutral space, even if it looks that way” (Pope, 2015, p.162). Both the traditional metaphors on the suburbs and the city, and this contradictive doubleness surrounding the suburbs, are present in both novels.

The second way I will approach space in this thesis is through the representation of social space. Thacker discusses the representation of space in cultural texts and urges the literary critic not to view space as a neutral canvas but as social space, referring to Henri Lefebvre’s use of the term (Thacker, 2005, p.62-63). Thus social space is seen as both internal and external, including the literary conception of space, and not only in a large sense such as the city or the suburbs in general, but “specific places within them become our concern when the scale of our geographical focus is upon smaller spatialities” (p.63). Thacker is not the only one to use Lefebvre’s idea of social space in this context. Jung Su, in her reading of *The Satanic Verses* and *The Buddha of Suburbia*, looks at the figure of the flâneur and its way of reconfiguring the past in post-imperial London, and she points to Lefebvre’s argument that space is permeated with ideologies and produced through different means of social and historical networks. Lefebvre draws a clear line from space to history since space is always a social production. “This production of space is, as Lefebvre observes, internalized in and imposed upon the body in everyday life” (Su, 2010, p.249-250). Su points out that novels that reflect upon the on-going mutation of postwar London also highlight the “nexus role the immigrant plays in bridging new histories, along with cultural difference, into the white tradition.” (p.250). This correlates to Ahmed’s call for a recognition of British imperial history, and for a never-ending reconsideration and rewriting of the past within the space of Great Britain. In this thesis we will see how both the suburbs and the city offer the characters many spaces to interact with, spaces with histories to tell, coloured by class, ideologies, and different takes on the past. Some of the characters in *The Buddha of Suburbia* and *White Teeth* seek towards a neutral space, a blank canvas in which to create their own identity, free of history, expectations, and forces of conformism. Interestingly enough this can be read as similar to the idealised view of the creative, hybrid condition in a third space, severed from history, past, and origin, the celebrative hybridity discourse which Moslund criticises. As I will argue here, however, there is another way to read these two novels, where the creation of identity, this process of hybridisation, happens in the meeting with all these different spaces.

Identity is constantly renewed in relation to many others, in a rhizomatic network of different spaces and histories.

The third way I will approach space is by looking into textual space, and how it affects, or is affected by the novels' use of social space and views on the outside world. Thacker discusses how a critical literary geographer can trace the connection between social space and the internal construction of spatial form, textual space, and the interaction between the two. He writes that emphasis can be devoted to spatial features of literature such as "the space of metaphor and the shifting between different senses of space within a text; or the very shape of the narrative forms, found in open-ended fictions or novels that utilise circular patterns for stories", among others (2005, p.63). Just as Søren Frank recognizes a connection between migration and the restless and fragmentary form of the migration novel, I will here mention such features as the division of text, the *Bildung* form, episodic structure, nonlinear narrative, flashbacks, open-ended versus circular form, plural perspectives, and the breakup of syntax. I will include discussions of these textual features to highlight the importance of setting, the characters' movement through spaces, how the past is always part of the present, how history is a changeable, unstable notion, always in need of revaluation, how the characters in the novels never really end their process of hybridisation, and how space, textual or otherwise, can never be neutral.

## **“Going somewhere”: Hanif Kureishi’s *The Buddha of Suburbia***

My name is Karim Amir, and I am an Englishman born and bred, almost. I am often considered to be a funny kind of Englishman, a new breed as it were, having emerged from two old histories. But I don’t care – Englishman I am (though not proud of it), from the South London suburbs and going somewhere. Perhaps it is the odd mixture of continents and blood, of here and there, of belonging and not, that makes me restless and easily bored. Or perhaps it was being brought up in the suburbs that did it. Anyway, why search the inner room when it’s enough to say that I was looking for trouble, any kind of movement, action and sexual interest I could find [...] Then one day everything changed. (Kureishi, 1990, p.3).

Thus we are introduced to the main character in *The Buddha of Suburbia*, the famous first lines of Karim, our narrator and protagonist. This first paragraph tells us a lot about Karim, the process he is starting, and several of the major themes of the novel central to this thesis. Describing himself as a new breed, having been raised in the London suburbs, with an English mother and a father who migrated from India, the topic of hybridity is pointed to from the very beginning. He is “going somewhere”, which describes movement and process, indicating a yearning for success, being famous and rich. This is tied to his wish to leave the suburbs and go to London, the beacon of modernity, a space idealised by Karim as the setting of diversity and opportunities, the place where he will find himself. The description of “going somewhere” also describes the process which he is beginning, not only as a coming-of-age story, as the novel is often discussed as a *Bildung* novel, but a never-ending process of hybridisation starting in the suburbs and continuing in the many spaces he moves through in the city. Here he will meet contradictive forces of homogeneity and heterogeneity, already hinted at in the reflection on at the same time “belonging and not”.

The topic of history is foregrounded as he points out that he has “emerged from two old histories”. However, the topic of history, as well as his reflections on his own being and his restlessness, is shrugged aside: “Anyway, why search the inner room when it’s enough to say I was looking for trouble, any kind of movement”. Karim’s reluctance to reflect on his experiences, his own process, and his rejection of everything to do with his past, his father’s past, his own suburban past, and any understanding of past or history having impact on the present, not only makes Karim an unreliable narrator, but is a reoccurring theme throughout the novel. He often avoids reflecting on his experiences, and does not understand the implications of events until long after they have taken place. As he refuses to search the inner room he starts moving through different spaces in great speed, always “exhilarated by thought and motion” (Kureishi, 1990, p.63). The many spaces he visits both in the suburbs and in the city will ultimately end up influencing him, both negatively and positively, and they all become part of his rhizomatic identity. As the opening passage suggests, at the beginning of

the novel Karim cannot wait to get away from the suburbs, and “Then one day everything changed”.

The catalytic incident for Karim is in many ways his father Haroon’s affair with Eva, an English, middle-class, eccentric woman, and after a while he leaves Karim’s mother for Eva Kay. This incident is pivotal in Karim’s process, first of all because this can be read as Karim’s first experience with something that he saw as safe, steady, and fixed, being uprooted, and suddenly turned into something unstable. His childhood past and home are no longer stable notions, the rug is pulled away from underneath his feet, and as a result it seems Karim attempts to sever all ties to past and history, no longer a source to be reckoned with. Secondly, this incident shows Karim his father’s own struggles with the hybridisation process and the contradictory forces involved. Haroon, inspired and encouraged by Eva, starts a new career path. After reading up on Oriental philosophy, he is guiding the suburbanites Eva can gather in meditation and the “exotic”, “mystic arts” of the East (p.12-13). This earns him the title “The Buddha of Suburbia”, or “God”, which is how Karim refers to him in the beginning. However, he also describes him as “a renegade Muslim masquerading as a Buddhist”, which shows Karim’s ambivalence towards this new side of his father (p.16).

Karim is very conflicted about the situation, and does not understand whether his father is doing it to stand out in some way, since he knows his father has craved a certain amount of attention in the past. He is not accepted in the suburban space represented by Karim’s mother: “Mum’s ambition was to be unnoticed, to be like everyone else, whereas Dad liked to stand out like a juggler at a funeral” (p.42). This indicates a heterogeneous force in his father, which is recognised and appreciated in his new space with Eva. However, what Karim and his father fail to realise in the beginning of the novel, is that this acceptance is based on Haroon conforming to the image Eva has of a man from India, thus mimicking the expectations others have of him. They do not reject his Otherness, but celebrate it, which opens a door to acceptance with another crowd of people in the suburbs. In this space Karim’s father is in fact subjected to a highly contradictory homogenous force, allowed to fit in, but only based on his Otherness. This becomes painfully clear later in the novel, after he and Eva have moved to the city, where Eva has started her dream of climbing the social ladder, and tells Haroon: “For Christ’s sake, can’t you cut down on the bloody mysticism – we’re not in Beckenham now” (p.151). Once again she wants him to change to fit in, highlighting that this was what she was doing in the first place. His father’s struggle with contradictory forces of heterogeneity and homogeneity, confuses Karim, and his father’s struggle is mirrored in Karim’s experiences.

Cast out into a journey of Bildung, and the process of hybridisation developing a rhizomatic identity, Karim is affected by his father's struggle, as he reacts to the same conflicting forces as his father in the movement through different spaces. Karim wants to stand out, recognizing in himself that "although [he] hated inequality, it didn't mean [he] wanted to be treated like everyone else": "I recognized that what I liked in Dad and Charlie was their insistence on standing apart" (p.149). At the same time he wants to fit in, and resenting his father for not being able to do so, he criticises his father's inability to adapt to his surroundings: "he stumbled around the place like an Indian just off the boat [...]. I sweated with embarrassment when he halted strangers in the street to ask directions to places that were a hundred yards away in an area where he'd lived for almost two decades" (p.7). For a long time Karim is destabilised by the observation of his father's process, and it takes Karim a long time to reflect on this, but after a while he stops referring to him as God or Buddha, and figures out he "no longer wanted to be like him" (p.195). Karim reflects: "I'd also begun to see Dad not as my father but as a separate person with characteristics that were contingent. He was part of the world now, not the source of it" (p.193).

Similarly, it is not until towards the end of the novel that Karim reflects on how much his father leaving has affected him, and how much he resents him for it. In the beginning he does not stop to think about it, he goes along with it, and sees the new world that Eva and her son Charlie are introducing him to as a door that opens up opportunities for him, a door to a new space, a door to the city. Karim is in many ways using Eva to get out of the suburbs, the same way that she is using Haroon as her ticket to bring them out of the monotonous, homogenous suburbia, by encouraging and exploiting his exotic Otherness. Karim simultaneously wants to stand out and to fit in to this intriguing new space. By jumping on Eva's social climbing ladder he is introduced to many new places and people, and he continues his process of hybridisation, developing a rhizomatic identity in relation to the others he meets along the way. At the one hand he realises that he can have more roots than one or two, creating a network of relations, and on the other hand, he still denies that his past has any place in this network. He rejects everything about his own background and the suburbs, he stops talking to his mother, writing her off as weak, and focuses on the opportunities offered to him by Eva, the mother substitute, and their move to London.

The division of the novel into two parts, "In the Suburbs" and "In the City", does not only signal a hybrid form, but it highlights the importance of space in the novel, how these two settings are crucial to any reading of the story, and it signals the pull London has on Karim, and his movement from the periphery to the city. This centripetal force draws him

towards the centre, wanting to belong, and at the same time, what is drawing him there is the diversity and heterogeneous forces in urban life. The city becomes a space where he can find himself and construct his own identity away from the conforming forces of suburbia, although this turns out to be problematic as London, in many ways, does not live up to his expectations. The setting in London's suburb in the seventies is in some aspects, according to Pope, still a place for white middle-class inhabitants; however, the demography is starting to change, both in respects of the working classes moving in, as well as a more diverse ethnic population, although the latter will not escalate until the following decades. It is not unlikely, therefore, that Karim would be one of only a few Asian children in a school in the South London suburb at this time. The suburb is portrayed as still mostly white, and not particularly welcoming of migrants in the contemporary political climate. Karim is used to violence, being called "Curryface" at school, and there is even an incident when he is kicked by a teacher. He describes the area not far from him, where his friend Jamila lives, as closer to London and far poorer: "It was full of neo-fascist groups, thugs who had their own pubs and clubs and shops. On Saturdays they'd all be out in the High Street selling their newspapers and pamphlets. [...] Frequently the mean, white, hating faces had public meetings and the Union Jacks were paraded through the streets, protected by the police" (p.56). Besides from triggering eerie associations to today's political climate, this clearly portrays the growing pains of the London suburbs in the seventies. The novel being written in a post-Thatcherite era, does not hesitate to reflect on and criticise the racial issues in Britain in this period.

It is not only racism, however, that motivates Karim to leave the suburbs. The suburban metaphor discussed by Pope where the suburb is described as a tedious, monotonous, and homogenous space, filled with forces of conformism, is in large part what drives Karim to leave. Represented by people like his mother, who wants to blend in and disappear, the suburbanites are constantly described as creatures of routine, all acting the same, going to bed around the same time. When returning for a visit right after he left the suburbs Karim concludes: "I knew it did me good to be reminded of how much I loathed the suburbs, and that I had to continue my journey into London and a new life, ensuring I got away from people and streets like this" (p.101). He is ambivalent towards the suburbs, however, just like the doubleness described by Pope, at once deathly and empty, at the same time the place where people live. Towards the end of the novel it seems as though Karim changes his conception of the suburbs, the place of his childhood memories, and he regains a relationship with his mother. The suburb is not an empty and neutral space, and it also is not *one* space at all, as in one, large, homogenous area. It is many different spaces that Karim



moves through, social spaces all coloured by politics, ideology, world views, and different versions of history, showing the suburb as a rather diverse space after all.

The episodic structure in the novel underlines the impression of moving through different spaces alongside Karim's constant, restless movements from place to place. In the suburbs one of the most significant spaces for Karim is Eva's house, the space substituting his parent's bleak, suffocating, suburban home, for a space not only representing the white middle class, describing the Kays as "much better off than us, and [they] had a bigger house, with a little drive and garage and car", but a version of the middle class that was filled with art, music, culture, intellectuals, and a hint of bohemia and pretentiousness, which Karim highly coveted (p.8). Here Karim describes his first meeting with Eva:

When Eva moved, when she turned to me, she was a kind of human crop-sprayer, pumping out a plume of Oriental aroma. I was trying to think if Eva was the most sophisticated person I'd ever met, or the most pretentious [...] Then, holding me at arm's length as if I were a coat she was about to try on, she looked me all over and said, 'Karim Amir, you are so exotic, so original! It's such a contribution! It's so you!' (p.9).

This description shows not only Eva's pretentiousness, cynicism, and exploitivism, but it portrays this sort of well-meaning, progressive, semi-intellectual thinking, as naïve, reductive, and somehow narrow-minded. Eva becomes a force that exaggerates Karim and his father's Otherness, and at the same time this is done to gain access to a certain crowd, seeing immigrants in a certain light that foregrounds orientalism and exotic features. The comment on his Indian choice of clothing as being "so you", becomes extra ironic when Karim five minutes later completely adapts to Charlie's, Eva's son's, fashion advice, promising himself never to wear anything else than a shirt and Levi's ever again (p.17). This highlights Karim's desire to fit into this world, no matter which way he needs to adjust. Furthermore, this becomes evident by his obsession with Charlie: "My love for him was unusual as love goes: it was not generous. I admired him more than anyone but I didn't wish him well. It was that I preferred him to me, and wanted to be him. I coveted his talents, face, style. I wanted to wake up with them all transferred to me" (p.15). Within this space, and in this part of the novel, it is clear that Karim is strongly affected by homogenous and centripetal forces.

Another space in the suburbs that Karim passes through is the "better part" of the neighbourhood, the place of the upper-middle classes, described as "so impressive for people like us that when our families walked these streets [...] we'd treat it as a lower-middle-class equivalent of the theatre. 'Ahhh' and 'ohhh', we'd go, imagining we lived there" (p.29). Here he encounters a different kind of racism than the fascist violence and parades by the National Front that he describes in the poorer parts of the suburbs. This form of racism is represented

by Helen's father, a white girl Karim has been seeing, to whom Karim ascribes the nickname Hairy Back, a Powell supporter, not thrilled by an immigrant's son dating his daughter, telling Karim: "We don't want you blackies coming to the house [...] We're with Enoch" (p.40). Several readings of this novel have commented upon the incident when Hairy Back's Great Dane jumps Karim from behind and ejaculates on his back, and how it initiates "a number of scenes in which he will be literally and figuratively fucked by white society" (Fischer, 2011, p. 219). This scene can be seen as a parallel to his relationship with Eleanor in London, where he is manipulated by their controlling director Pyke, who later fucks Karim together with his wife, an "exploitative, objectifying sex in which power is exerted over Karim as an 'exotic' Other" (Fischer, 2011, p. 219). What I find really interesting about this parallel, is that it takes Karim a long time to notice the "dog jissom" on his jacket, not realising what had happened while it was happening, the same way as it takes Karim a long time to reflect on and understand the abuse he is subjected to later. This can in many ways be tied to his lack of understanding of uneven power structures, and by extension the impact certain histories can have on the present.

Karim's blind spot on such matters is implicitly commented upon at several occasions throughout large parts of the novel, and in the suburbs this is often pointed to in the contrast to his friend Jamila. In addition to representing a space tightly connected to past and history, as Jamila's father is Haroon's childhood friend from India, Jamila's home also accentuates Karim's limited understanding of the outside world. Although feeling he knows a lot more than Jamila's parents, it often becomes clear in his discussions with Jamila that he has no political or historical awareness whatsoever. An incident exemplifying this is when the librarian Miss Cutmore, who had taken it upon herself to teach Jamila, learning her about the fine arts and literature, feminist writings and other "big ideas", decides to leave South London. Karim describes Jamila as grudging and ungrateful, as she turns on her teacher after leaving, and accuses her of forgetting that Jamila was Indian:

'She spoke to my parents as if they were peasants', Jamila said. She drove me mad by saying Miss Cutmore had colonized her, but Jamila was the strongest-willed person I'd met: no one could turn her into a colony. Anyway, I hated ungrateful people. Without Miss Cutmore, Jamila wouldn't have even heard of the word 'colony'. (Kureishi, 1990, p.53).

Karim completely dismisses the chance of there being any truth to this, even ignoring the fact that Miss Cutmore used to be a missionary in Africa, once again refusing to see the incident in relation to a bigger picture. He is completely disconnected to history.

Similarly, Karim blames his father and Jamila's father Anwar for not being able to integrate properly. He compares Anwar's turn towards being a strict Muslim, going on a

hunger strike to make his daughter marry the man he has arranged for her from India, and his own father's turn towards Eastern philosophy. He contemplates: "Perhaps it was the immigrant condition living itself out through them. For years they were both happy to live like Englishmen. [...] Now, as they aged and seemed settled here, Anwar and Dad appeared to be returning internally to India, or at least to be resisting the English here" (p.64). Karim sees no connection to how this might have been affected by the space the two men are living in, and the rejection they experience. In many ways they are turning into melancholic migrants as discussed by Ahmed. Unable to let go of their past, they hold on to their different, imaginary, versions of India, because the alternative will be to accept a version of history that has rewritten their own and their homeland's history, in a happy light. Pushing them to accept this version is what Ahmed calls the happiness duty. In Haroon's case this becomes extra complicated and contradictive, since he in many ways attempts to embrace a version of this happiness duty in his affair with Eva. When considering whether he should leave his family, he contemplates: "I believe happiness is only possible if you follow your feeling, your intuition, your real desires. Only unhappiness is gained by acting in accordance with duty, or obligation, or guilt, or the desire to please others", although next he says that you should not do this selfishly, "but remembering you are part of a world, of others, not separate from them. Should people pursue their own happiness at the expense of others? Or should they be unhappy so others can be happy?" (p.76). He reflects upon this and his own infidelity, and in the end choosing to leave with Eva. It seems he realises too late that by choosing Eva, he is in many ways only choosing to conform to a different kind of happiness duty than what he has experienced so far in the English suburbs. He is in fact just adjusting to Eva's view of him, and to her world view and version of history.

The city seems to be Karim's answer to all his problems in the first part of the novel. This fast-moving, modern place, filled with diversity and opportunity, as discussed by Pope, often seen as offering a perfect space for the migrant, hybrid identity. This is Karim's dream, but it quickly needs adjustment. Before moving, Karim describes how he pictures it:

In bed before I went to sleep I fantasised about London and what I'd do there when the city belonged to me. [...] There were kids dressed in velvet cloaks who lived free lives; there were thousands of black people everywhere, so I wouldn't feel exposed; [...] there were shops selling all the records you could desire; there were parties with boys and girls you didn't know took you upstairs and fucked you (p.121).

After a while Karim realises this was only a fantasy, and immediately after arriving he describes the city as bright, fast, brilliant, and "vertiginous with opportunity", but "it didn't really help you grasp those possibilities. I still had no idea what I was going to do. I felt

directionless and lost in the crowd” (p.126). This idealised and naïve image of London is further underlined by comments such as this, after his first meeting with Eleanor, foreshadowing his experiences with her: “But how stupid I was – how naïve. I was misled by my ignorance of London into thinking my Eleanor was less middle class than she turned out to be” (p.173). The comment on her being middle-class, here meant in the worst possible way, also introduces the reader to what Karim will meet in the city – a different kind of progressive world view, and a different, and sneakier kind of racism than what he is used to from the suburbs, open violence and Great Danes. The spaces he meets in the city are just as coloured by politics and views on history as they were in the suburbs, illustrating that all spaces are social spaces.

The two most prominent spaces that Karim encounters in the city, are the two plays he acts in, and the contradictory forces of homogeneity and heterogeneity are evident in his experiences in the theatres and in his desire to be an actor. His wish to be an actor is in itself contradictory, as it is based on a wish to stand out, be in the spot light, and at the same time, as an actor Karim is forced to conform to his roles. As it turns out he is only picked for his parts because of his foreign, “exotic” looks, and in both plays he needs to adjust himself and his own views and values to the image of him that is needed. In the first play it turns out he is to play Mowgli in *The Jungle Book*. “You’re just right for him”, the director says, “In fact, you are Mowgli. You’re dark-skinned, you’re small and wiry, and you’ll be sweet and wholesome in the costume” (p.142-43). Karim also has to exaggerate his accent, after the director figures out that Karim does not speak Hindi: “‘But your father speaks, doesn’t he? He must do.’ Of course he speaks, I felt like saying. He speaks out of his mouth, unlike you, you fucking cunt bastard shithead.” (p.140). Karim feels strongly about this. He knows that this is not right, but he does not protest much, and he does the accent anyway. They also paint his skin darker, exaggerating his “exotic” features. “So I kept my mouth shut even as her hands lathered me in the colour of dirt” (p.146). He looks around at the other actors when he tries to protest, but gets no response:

One of them, Boyd, had done EST and assertion-training, and primal therapy, and liked to hurl chairs across the room as an expression of spontaneous feeling. I wondered if he might not have some spontaneous feeling in my defence. But he said nothing [...] I wanted to run out of the room, back to South London, where I belonged, out of which I had wrongly and arrogantly stepped. (p.147-148).

Not even his communist friend Terry, who constantly tries to convert him to the Party, speaks up for him, and the whole incident can be seen in relation to the reigning version of colonial history, and the happiness duty imposed on immigrants as discussed by Ahmed. None of his

actor colleagues wants to defend him, thus they are, in their silence, reproducing Kipling's, the director's, and the reigning British version of history. So Karim adjusts to his role and the happiness duty, thus avoiding turning into an inconvenient reminder of racism and a version of history best forgotten.

Although Karim feels that what he is doing is somehow wrong, it seems he is not conscious of precisely what is wrong about it, which becomes apparent by his family's and Jamila's reaction to the play on opening night. Karim's naivety of the impacts of history is evident in this scene, where the negative reception of his Mowgli character takes him completely by surprise. At first they say nothing, until his father bursts out: "Bloody half-cocked business, [...] That bloody fucker Mr Kipling pretending to whitey he knew something about India! And an awful performance by my boy looking like a Black and White Minstrel!". And Jamila, starting a little softer tells him: "You looked wonderful [...] But no doubt about it, the play is completely neo-fascist, [...] it was disgusting, the accent and the shit you had smeared all over you. You were just pandering to prejudices" (p.157). His father's reaction is, of course, in many ways ironic, since this incident has a clear parallel in Haroon's performance as the Buddha. When still living in the suburbs, Karim overhears his father in the bedroom: "He was speaking slowly, in a deeper voice than usual, as if he were addressing a crowd. He was hissing his s's and exaggerating his Indian accent. He'd spent years trying to be more of an Englishman, to be less risibly conspicuous, and now he was putting it back in spadeloads. Why?" (p.21). Observing his father's struggle with the contradictory forces involved in the hybridisation process, has confused Karim. This seems to contribute to his rejection of his past, and arguably, to his ignorance when it comes to history and the impact it can have on the present.

In the next play Karim participates in, he is also casted because of his skin-colour and Indian looks, although here under the pretentious cover of the director Pyke wanting to create a play about class, portraying characters representing the different social classes in England. Karim has to base his character on someone he knows, "Someone black", "your family [...] They'll give the play a little variety" (p.170). The situation escalates after Karim decides to base his character on Anwar, Jamila's father. His portrayal of this character is met with shock from one of the actors, Tracey, the only other black girl in the play, "respectable in the best suburban way, honest and kind and unpretentious" (p.179). Although thawing in his view on the suburbs in his description of her, Karim appears blank and oblivious to any understanding of Tracey's criticism. She explains that such a representation of Black and Asian people worries her, the portrayal of a fanatical Muslim, the topic of arranged marriage, and his

hunger strike as “irrational, ridiculous, as being hysterical”. Karim insists that it is only *one* old Indian man, but Tracey argues: “Your picture is what white people already think of us. [...] Why do you hate yourself and all black people so much, Karim? [...] We have to protect our culture at this time, Karim. Don’t you agree?” He answers that truth has a higher value. “Pah. Truth. Who defines it? What truth? It’s white truth you’re defending here. It’s white truth we’re discussing” (p.180-181). In her reading of the novel, Susan Alice Fischer correctly points to this incident as showing how well-meaning progressive thinking also can uphold accepted orthodoxies by the “potentially falsifying notion of ‘positive images’, promoted by progressives in those years as an antidote to false or absent images, but which sometimes distorted the truth” (2011, p.287-288). Additionally, this incident also shows how little the outside world is on Karim’s radar, once again how unaware he is of the impact of history, oblivious to the fact that this might be a reaction. This, despite it being the exact same reaction he got from Jamila, back in the suburbs, when he asked her if he could tell Helen about her father’s hunger strike: “Yes, if you want to expose our culture as being ridiculous and our people as old-fashioned, extreme and narrow-minded” Jamila told him (Kureishi, 1990, p.71).

Read in light of Ahmed’s argument it is also interesting that Karim is not allowed to portray the image of a melancholic migrant, not only because of the image “white people already think of us” which Tracey fears, but also because Anwar’s character is in danger of becoming an unnecessary reminder of Britain’s imperial history. What Tracey does not see, is that the portrayal of such a miserable character, stuck in his past, can also awaken questions of how he came to be this way, which opens a can of worms it seems no one wants to touch. This again might explain why “when she [Tracey] did begin to talk about my Anwar the group kept out of the discussion. This thing was suddenly between ‘minorities’” (p.180). This lack of involvement and the director taking Tracey’s side, contribute to reproduce the existing version of Britain’s “happy” history. None of this, of course, is on Karim’s radar. Closing his eyes to the goings-on in the world, Karim the individualist, is not conscious about such issues at this point, and does not comprehend, what is painfully obvious to both Jamila and Tracey, that history is constructed by people. However, Karim comes to develop some consciousness through the meetings with these different, what Thacker calls “Lefebvrian” social spaces (2005, p.65). Towards the end of the novel it seems he has expanded his rhizomatic network, and through his meeting with all these different spaces, has learned something along the way.

One of the more significant moments of Karim’s reconciliation with the past, takes place at Anwar’s funeral. Surrounded by Anwar’s old friends and family, Karim

contemplates: “But I did feel, looking at these strange creatures now – the Indians – that in some way these were my people, and that I’d spent my life denying or avoiding that fact. I felt ashamed and incomplete at the same time, as if half of me were missing, and as if I’d been colluding with my enemies, those whites who wanted Indians to be like them”(Kureishi, 1990, p.212). It seems as though he realises that his Indian past could also be part of him, part of his rhizomatic identity. In her reading of the novel, Jung Su argues that Karim is drawn towards pop culture and the city, as part of a modernity complex, but that he through the act of *flânerie* reconfigures the past, meaning his parents’ past and his Indian cultural heritage. She states that it is in Anwar’s funeral that Karim “finally comes to terms with his Indian past and thereby completes his *Bildung*”, and that in the end he is left with a “determination to recognize different parts of him and to carve out a career of his own” (2010, p.259-260). While I do agree that this incident reconciles Karim with his Indian past, I have two problems with this reading. First of all this creates the impression that it is only one past that Karim needs to reconcile with, as though this is not only one of many spaces that have affected Karim and becomes part of his rhizomatic network. Secondly, such a reading implies that his *Bildung* and hybridisation process is something that can be completed, something that has an ending, and can thus be seen in connection to the celebrative readings of hybridity, where Karim carving out a career of his own, ends up in a hybrid, creative condition in a third space.

Karim does come to see not only his Indian past, but his own past and experiences, as well as history in general, as important. At the same time history is seen as something flighty and unstable, since it is socially constructed it is also socially dependent, changing from space to space. This realisation becomes clear to Karim at the funeral when he reflects on how it is his father’s fault that he has so few connections to India: “So if I wanted the additional personality bonus of an Indian past, I would have to create it” (Kureishi, 1990, p.213). Past is here something that can be constructed and implemented in his present identity, and in the same fashion Karim seems to become more aware that history can impact the present. Towards the end it does not take him as long to recognise and reflect on oppression and racist situations. When Karim goes to New York with his acting group he watches a show of Haitian dancers, and he comments that “It made me feel like a colonial watching the natives perform” (p.244). He is quicker to reflect on racist situations now, and when he visits Charlie, Karim experiences another epiphany: “it was at this moment [...] that I realised that I didn’t love Charlie any more. I didn’t care either for or about him. He didn’t interest me at all. I’d moved beyond him, discovering myself through what I rejected.” (p.255). Karim recognises that he is in a process, and he seems more aware that people’s expectations of him might not always be

in his best interest, so he should not be conforming to their image of him wherever he goes. By moving through different spaces and meeting different people, he is discovering himself through what he rejects, but also through what he learns and takes with him through his relations with others, all becoming part of his rhizomatic identity. He goes back to the suburbs, and reconciles with his mother, who represents the English suburbia he once left behind, and he no longer sees her as weak, but acknowledges part of the blame for the divorce to his father. In this way he renegotiates his own past on a personal level.

It also becomes clear that he has developed a better understanding of the impact of history and social constructions in a conversation he has with his brother towards the end. His brother, who has barely been mentioned before this, only to be described as a coconut, wanting to assimilate completely, explains why he dislikes the politics of what he calls the “whingeing lefties”: “Their clothes look like rags. And I hate people who go on all the time about being black, and how persecuted they were at school, and how someone spat at them once. You know: self-pity”. Which makes Karim respond: “Shouldn’t they – I mean, we – talk about it, Allie?” (p.267). Here, he is much more aware of the need to talk about such issues, aware that ideas, prejudices, and history are social constructs, and therefore possible to change. He seems more conscious that he is part of a process, an ambivalent process, and in a scene after Eleanor has broken up with him, and he has learned that her former boyfriend was driven to suicide by racism, he reflects on the process experienced by immigrants, and on being in this process of hybridisation:

we pursued English roses as we pursued England [... and at the same time] we stared defiantly into the eye of the Empire and all its self-regard – into the eye of Hairy Back, into the eye of the Great Fucking Dane. [...] But to be truly free we had to free ourselves of all bitterness and resentment, too. How was this possible when bitterness and resentment were generated afresh every day? (p.227).

It seems as though as long as certain versions of history remains the governing ones, any sort of defiance or unhappiness with the state of things will put you in danger of becoming a melancholic migrant. The last words Eleanor speaks to him are: “‘Karim.’ She looked at me. She wanted to say something kind, so she said, ‘Don’t get bitter.’” (p.238). One can read this comment, not only in light of what happened to her last boyfriend, but it also shows that she puts it on Karim not to turn into a bitter migrant, unable to let go of the past, in this situation not only the memory of colonial history, but of his own experiences with repression, violence, and not least, abuse of power from white people. Karim is able to reflect more on these abuses towards the end of the book though, which gives the impression that he has learned something



from his experiences. Through his meeting with different social spaces, he realises that history is important, but a flighty concept, changing from space to space.

Karim's reconciliation with his past, and the positive development he goes through in his process of hybridisation, is not to say that the story should be read in a celebratory light within the hybridity discourse that elevates an arrival at the end of a journey to a transcendent, creative, hybrid condition, where he has "carved out a career of his own". He gets the role in a television soap opera, "which would tangle with the latest contemporary issues", but what is most seductive to him is the "money-power" that comes with it (p.259, 283). Karim is still going back and forth, still seems uncertain, even though he is less so than in the beginning of the novel, it seems clear that his process is not over. In the very last scene he is sitting in a restaurant with his family and friends reflecting on this process:

I could think about the past and what I'd been through as I'd struggled to locate myself and learn what the heart is. Perhaps in the future I would live more deeply. And so I sat there in the centre of this old city that I loved, which itself sat at the bottom of a tiny island, and I felt happy and miserable at the same time. I thought of what a mess everything had been, but that it wouldn't always be that way. (p. 283-284).

He is now able to think about the past, which is something he was not able to at the beginning of the novel, and this ending is hopeful towards the future, where he perhaps can "live more deeply", and where his life could be less of "a mess". However, this last paragraph also shows that it is not really a happy ending, even though he is optimistic towards the future. In the present he is "happy and miserable at the same time", still in an ambivalent process, and the pointing towards the future shows us that his process is not over. Therefore, I will argue that he is not returning, having completed his *Bildung*, in a fixed state of adulthood, or in an elevated hybrid condition where Karim finds himself in a third space of productive creativity, similar to what readings of the novel in light of the celebrative hybridity discourse might have done. In fact, I believe it might be necessary to discuss a deconstruction of the *Bildung* form, which implies an arrival, a return, an ending to this never-ending process. In relation to migration literature, at least, it seems contradictory to assume such a return, where such a goal indicates a finished, fixed, grown-up state, and an ending with a static, hybrid condition for the migrant, when it is only the beginning of a long, never-ending process of reconstruction – a process of becoming.

With celebrative readings within the hybridity discourse, there often follows an implication that one needs to sever the bonds to the past to be able to move on, as discussed by literary critics such as Moslund, and that there must be an uprooting of the notions of past and history to reach the elevated hybrid condition. This is interestingly enough also what

Ahmed argues is the underlying happiness duty enforced on migrants in Britain, to forget one's history, or at least only remember a certain version of history. However, this novel, as I have argued, opens up for a reading that indicates the exact opposite. In many ways Karim's story is a story not of letting go of your past, but letting it be part of you, and part of your rhizomatic identity. Although not the only part. It is also a story of how he comes to terms with the fact that past and history are unstable notions, which can change from space to space, which also shows that these notions are constructed. There is also hope in that, exemplified in the realisation at the funeral when he figures that he can create an Indian past himself, and Karim seems more aware of the forces involved in his hybridisation process. He has moved through many spaces, been affected by contradictive forces of homogeneity and heterogeneity both in the suburbs and in the city, and all the spaces are coloured with politics, prejudices, ideologies, class, different takes on history, race, and world views. All these spaces affect him, and just like his past, they all become part of his rhizomatic identity, constantly renegotiated and reconstructed.

## **“Past Tense, Future Imperfect”: Zadie Smith’s *White Teeth***

This has been the century of strangers, brown, yellow and white. This has been the century of the great immigrant experiment. It is only this late in the day that you can walk into a playground and find Isaac Leung by the fish pond, Danny Rahman in the football cage, Quang O’Rourke bouncing a basketball, and Irie Jones humming a tune. Children with first and last names on a direct collusion course. Names that secrete within them mass exodus, cramped boats and planes, cold arrivals, medical checks. It is only this late in the day, and possibly only in Willesden, that you can find best friends Sita and Sharon, constantly mistaken for each other because Sita is white (her mother liked the name) and Sharon is Pakistani (her mother thought it best – less trouble). (Smith, 2000, p.326).

In *White Teeth* we meet a multitude of different characters and storylines, jumping back and forth in time, as far back as 1857 and the beginning of the twentieth century for the backstories, or ‘root canals’, of some of the characters. Most of the story takes place in the seventies with the first set of characters, and then accompanied by their children in the nineties. Just as in Kureishi’s novel, most of the action in *White Teeth* is set in London and its suburbs, and the focal point switches between the multitude of characters we meet there. The above paragraph sheds light on this multiplicity and diversity in the London suburbs, and Willesden specifically. The diversity of the setting is mirrored in the construction of the novel. The plurality of characters, perspectives, and storylines, is accompanied with different discursive levels, where the narrator often intrudes with reflections and metafictional comments, all coming together in what Søren Frank would call a migratory form in Lukács’ spirit of letting the novel mirror the outside world. In Willesden we meet Irie Bowden Jones, her parents Clara Bowden from Jamaica and Archie Jones from England, Archie’s friend from the Second World War, Samad Iqbal, his wife Alsana, both from Bangladesh, and their twin sons Millat and Magid. Additionally we are introduced to the Chalfen family, here representing the English middle class. The novel presents a much larger character gallery of people in the city and the suburbs, in addition to many of the characters’ ancestries. Although they are all connected in a rhizomatic network of different spaces and stories, all influencing each other, I will here discuss Samad, his family, and the Chalfen family, but mostly focus on the character of Irie, who will exemplify how the different spaces impact her hybridisation process creating her rhizomatic identity.

The novel is very conscious about the existing views on identity in this mobile and multicultural world filled with contradictive world views, and it discusses both the essentialist idea of static and fixed identities, and the constructivist idea of dynamic and flexible ones. It is consciously playing with the opposing views, making fun of the idea of fundamentalism, and at the same time portraying a certain kind of idealising, liberal, progressive thinking on multiculturalism and hybridity as naïve, often highly generalizing, and just as short-sighted.

This can arguably be read as a criticism of the celebrative hybridity discourse discussed by writers such as Moslund and Schaff. If not explicitly criticised, the novel at least clearly thematises the impossibility of neutral spaces outside the influence of history where you can create an identity free from your own past or history in general. As already mentioned, Schaff argues that Smith belongs to “a new generation of writers” who look back from the twenty-first century on the history of migration, exploring the complex issues and contradictions involved in hyphenated, hybrid identities, but who are “not, however, bent on denying the importance of origin and roots” (2008, p.291). Schaff places Kureishi with the writers in the latter category, which, as I argued above, has more to do with former readings of his novels, because as exemplified with *The Buddha of Suburbia*, this novel opens up for a much more nuanced reading. When it comes to *White Teeth* she is right in saying it emphasises the importance of past and history in the hybridisation process, although I will argue that the image of the root is being ridiculed side by side with fundamentalist thinking. More than that, just like *The Buddha of Suburbia*, I will argue that the novel points to the instability of history. Not only portrayed as unstable, random, uncontrollable, and often false, but history is shown as contingent on the social factors and world views tied to the novel’s different spaces. Before discussing how history is depicted in the novel, and how Irie’s process is affected by the spaces she moves through, I will first present the different views on identity, which is illustrated by different characters and spaces in the novel.

In the multitude of different world views presented in *White Teeth* the fundamentalist thinking is what receives the clearest criticism. It is ridiculed through characters such as Hortense, Irie’s grandmother, a devoted Jehova’s witness, Millat’s participation in KEVIN, a radical Islamic group, the Chalfens’ son Joshua’s joining of FATE, an extremist animal rights group, who all, in the climactic last scene, incidentally end up protesting the biggest fundamentalist of them all, the scientist Marcus Chalfen. His experiment with transgenic mice, adding to the genome to be able to control its life span and diseases etc. provokes the above mentioned religious groups. “You eliminate the random, you rule the world”, Marcus says (Smith, 2000, p.341). However, no character more clearly demonstrates the shortcomings of fundamentalist thinking better than Samad Iqbal, who will be discussed here because he is simultaneously depicted as a nuanced and complex character, even though his fundamentalist tendencies, and his need to control everything much the same as Marcus, is clearly criticised. Samad sees origin, history, blood, and roots as important already before moving to England, talking to Archie during the war he figures that the only sure way to “cement his friendship” with Archie is by telling him about his great-grandfather, because “for Samad, nothing was

closer or meant more to him than his blood” (p.99). The story of Mangel Pande, the Indian war hero and Samad’s grandfather, is what makes Samad so desperate to make a glorious tale of his own which he can pass on to his children, resulting in him manipulating and pushing Archie towards killing a Nazi-sympathetic French prisoner. The story of Mangel Pande, as well as their own tale from the war, will later be rewritten, revealed as unstable stories, and complicating factors in their friendship.

After arriving in England in 1973 with his wife Alsana, Samad’s fundamentalist thinking is only worsened, and it seems the more England and his life as a waiter disappoint him, the more he looks back to his past, in many ways becoming a melancholic migrant. “I have been corrupted by England”, Samad tells a fellow waiter, “I see it now – my children, my wife, they too have been corrupted. [...] I don’t wish to be a modern man! I wish to live as I was always meant to! I wish to return to the East!” (p.144-145). His struggles with the conforming forces, results in an even stronger belief in the necessity of looking back, highlighting his fundamentalist thinking where everything needs to be either-or, nothing can be in-between. This is what infuriates him about Millat, namely his hybridity, here clearly echoing Bhabha: “Millat was neither one thing nor the other, this or that, Muslim or Christian, Englishman or Bengali; he lived for the in between, he lives up to his middle name, *Zulfikar*, the clashing of two swords” (p.351). The epigraph at the beginning of part two of the novel, Samad’s section, is a quotation by Norman Tebbit on the classic cricket test for immigrants, “which side do you cheer for? ... Are you still looking back to where you came from or where you are?” (p.123). This underlines Samad’s extreme either-or way of thinking, where he becomes stuck in the past, and ultimately resulting in him sending one of his sons back to Bangladesh without his wife knowing. He could not afford sending both, thus splitting up the twin brothers due to his reluctance to hybrid thinking.

The concept of roots is ridiculed through the character of Samad, here indisputably underscored by the narrator’s comment on tradition and roots as something sinister:

if religion is the opium of the people, tradition is an even more sinister analgesic, simply because it rarely appears sinister. If religion is a tight band, a throbbing vein and a needle, tradition is a far homelier concoction: poppy seeds ground into tea; a sweet cocoa drink laced with cocaine; the kind of thing your grandmother might have made. To Samad, [...] tradition was culture, and culture lead to roots, and these were good, these were untainted principles. [...] you would get nowhere telling him that weeds too have tubers, or that the first sign of loose teeth is something rotten, something degenerate, deep within the gums. Roots were what saved, the ropes one throws out to rescue drowning men, to Save Their Souls. And the further Samad himself floated out to sea [...], the more determined he became to create for his boys roots on shore. (p.193).

Samad's belief in roots as "untainted principles", as something pure, is here clearly mocked. This passage shows how the more Samad is influenced by English culture, the more he floats out to sea without being able to simultaneously keep some of his old traditions and own history, the more he holds on to the past. In fact, every time that Samad does something in line with his extreme fundamentalist thinking, it is made fun of on the next page. After having planned the kidnap of his own son, trying to decide which of them to send away, Archie receives a letter from his Swedish friend saying how he finally has chopped down a large oak tree in his garden: "*I had been suffering under the misapprehension all these years that I was simply an indifferent gardener – when all the time it was that grand old tree, taking up half the garden with its roots and not allowing anything else to grow*" (p.195). This is clearly a reference to Samad's obsession with roots. He is unable to see identity as something that can be created in relation to a network of roots as in the image of the rhizome, because in his world there is only one authoritative root that counts, the one linked to your family's past, your genes, your homeland, and your history.

Fundamentalism is not the only way of thinking that is ridiculed. A more progressive kind of thinking on multiculturalism is portrayed as naïve, and an idealised 'happy' version of history, here colonial history, comes off as short-sighted and false. In Glenard Oak, the children's school, we meet several examples of these attitudes. First of all, the music teacher Poppy Burt-Jones, who Samad has a short affair with, is often making highly generalising and condescending remarks such as: "You know, your boys are really adorable – they're very unusual. [...] Indian children, if you don't mind me saying, are usually a lot more – [...] *Quiet*. Beautifully behaved but very, I don't know, *subdued*." (p.134). This after having already been corrected on them being Bangladeshi, and *not* from India. Also, the headmaster speaks highly to Irie and Millat about the school's founder, the philanthropist Edmund Glenard, who, as it turns out, was actually someone who had made a lot of money on a colonial tobacco farm in Jamaica. In one of the flashbacks later on in the novel it is also revealed that he had sexually abused Irie's great grandmother Ambrosia in a church in Jamaica many decades earlier (p.306, p.360). This sort of glorified hypocrisy is criticised, and history is portrayed as very unstable, and subjective to different people and spaces. The school thus becomes a space haunted by false versions of the colonial past, and portraying a romanticised, "happy" version of history, not only of the school's history, but Jamaican history, of Irie's history, and the history of white people's abuse of power. All these layers of history come together and affect the present situation of Irie and Millat at Glenard Oak.

The place where this sort of naïve, middle-class liberal thinking is most obvious, is at the Chalfen house, and through the character of Joyce Chalfen, Marcus' wife. The reader is introduced to Joyce through her writings on plants and cross-pollination, both a reference to her husband's work with genomes, and, her being a gardener and hobby psychiatrist, it is adjacent to read it in light of her idealised and romanticised view on hybrid identities. In her book *The New Flower Power* she writes:

The fact is, cross-pollination produces more varied offspring that are better able to cope with a changed environment. [...] In the garden, as in the social and political arena, change should be the only constant. [...] If we wish to provide happy playgrounds for our children, and corners of contemplation for our husbands, we need to create gardens of diversity and interest. (p.309-310).

This highlights Joyce's celebrative view on hybridity, and explains why the Chalfens sent their children to Glenard Oak "daring to take the ideological gamble their peers guiltily avoided, those nervous liberals who shrugged their shoulders and coughed up the cash for a private education" (p.313). When Irie first sets foot inside the Chalfen residence she is amazed because "She'd never been so *close* to this strange and beautiful thing, the *middle class*, and experienced the kind of embarrassment that is actually intrigue, fascination." (p.321). Joyce, however, quickly comes off as condescending and extremely generalising, telling Irie and Millat that her toddler son finds having strangers in the house really stimulating: "Especially brown strangers! Don't you, Oscar?", and she tries to make Millat into one of her charity projects, psychoanalysing him, and trying to shape him into a perfect hybrid of her own creation (p.326). Joyce's hypocrisy becomes the most transparent when Alsana sends her lesbian cousin to visit them, and she reveals deep chinks in their liberal middle-class armour. Clearly uncomfortable with her homosexuality, Joyce suddenly blurts out a question at the dinner table of whether they "use each other's breasts as pillows": "It's just, in a lot of Indian poetry they talk about using breasts for pillows. [...] I just – just – just wondered, if whites sleeps on brown, or, as one might expect, brown sleeps on white?" (p.350). As Paul Jay points out in his reading of the novel, that even though Smith embraces a "transgressive hybridity we associate with writers and critics like Rushdie, Bhabha, Appadurai, and Appiah, [...] Yet she is critical of fatuous talk about multiculturalism and the kind of uninformed pieties it can embrace" (Jay, 2010, p.169-170). Such fatuous talk and uninformed pieties become painfully obvious in the Chalfen house, a space clearly coloured by hypocrisy and a certain perspective on history.

The diversity of people and by extension the multitude of world views that flourish in *White Teeth* are portrayed through a large gallery of characters, and the plurality in the novel

in many ways mirrors the choice of setting. The London suburb, first in the seventies and then later in the nineties, is illustrated through the variety of spaces representing different social classes, ideologies, ethnic backgrounds etc. As Pope points out the suburbs in the eighties and nineties saw a broad social change, in addition to the break-up of the middle-class near-monopoly of suburban living, one saw an expansion of the multi-ethnic population. Not only is the diversity here evident in the difference between spaces such as the Iqbal family, the Chalfens, and the school, but it is directly commented upon by the narrator and the characters on several occasions. Alsana appraising her new neighbourhood, reflects on whether it is more liberal than others, concluding: “‘Liberal? Hosh-kosh nonsense!’ No one was more liberal than anyone else anywhere anyway. It was only that here, in Willesden, there was just not enough for any one thing to gang up against any other thing” (Smith, 2000, p.63). She is also very conscious about the class differences between the neighbourhoods, and the world views and prejudices this often entails: “Willesden was not as pretty as Queen’s Park, but it was a nice area. No denying it. Not like Whitechapel, where that madman E-knock someoneorother gave a speech that forced them into the basement while kids broke the windows with their steel-capped boots. Rivers of blood silly-billy nonsense” (p.63). It seems the suburb is becoming more diverse, a heterogeneous network of spaces, in Lefebvrian terms, social spaces, where ideologies, class, history, and racism, once again represented by Enoch Powell’s rhetoric and supporters, are present all over these streets and neighbourhoods.

The novel’s plural form, and its constant movement between spaces in London and its suburbs, also help emphasise a reading of the novel that favours a view on identity and the hybridisation process in line with Glissant’s discussion of how one’s rhizomatic identity is created through the relations with others. Irie moves through the different spaces, similar to Karim in *The Buddha of Suburbia*, affected by them in different ways, through learning or rejection, but always through a relationship with the other, all ultimately becoming part of her rhizomatic identity. A section that underlines the impression that relations between people are important in this novel, is when Irie is doing a job for Marcus Chalfen organising his filing system, and she decides to “file by author primarily, then chronologically, rather than let simple dates rule the roost. Because this was all about people. People making a connection across continents, across seas” (p.365). It seems Irie values the relations we make in the meeting with new people and places higher than a focus on roots, genes, or history at this point in the novel. Although history, as we will see, becomes another space for Irie to move through, and an important part of her process, it seems as though it is less important to Irie than the meeting with new spaces at this stage in her process. This comment upon how it is all



about making connections between people, could be read as a comment upon how to understand the hybridisation process in the novel in light of the image of the rhizome. All the spaces Irie moves through, and the people she meets along the way end up influencing her, and becoming part of her rhizomatic identity. However, the past ends up being very important in this novel and in Irie's process as well, proving that it is not only the spatial movement that is important, but a temporal movement as well. The novel constantly jumps back in time, creating spaces of the past, and present spaces unequivocally intertwined with history.

Irie Jones goes through a long and ambivalent process of hybridisation, and like Karim she begins by rejecting everything to do with her own past, and she quickly wants to flee from her suburban surroundings. Even though the suburb is described as more diverse in the nineties, the traditional metaphor of the suburbs being a bleak and homogeneous place, as discussed by Pope, seems to linger. When Irie declares to her parents that she wants to travel the world for a year, she argues: "I've lived in this bloody suburb all my life. Everyone's the same here. I want to go and see the people of the world [...] I just want to see how other people live!" (p.377-378). Of course, her mother tells her that if that is what she wants she can just go to the next door neighbour. Her mother's response shows that the suburbs and the spaces Irie moves through there are important, but it is also clear that Irie is looking for something else. For a long time she rejects her suburban childhood past, as well as her Jamaican past and physical genetic inheritance.

Struggling with homogenous and centripetal forces, Irie is for a long time trying to rid herself of everything that makes her stand out, be it her Jamaican body shape, or her afro hair. When turning up at the hair dresser to straighten out her hair, "intent upon transformation, intent upon fighting her genes", she ends up burning it all off, having to glue on hair from an Indian woman. In the end she has to wear her hair short, and in an ironic twist of fate she is complemented on "not pandering to the erotic fantasies of Western sexuality" (p.273, 296). Her obsession with the Chalfen family is also part of her ambivalent feelings towards her cultural inheritance and towards England and Englishness. When first entering the Chalfen household she is fascinated; "She was crossing borders, sneaking into England; it felt like some terribly mutinous act, wearing somebody else's uniform or somebody else's skin. [...] She just wanted to, well, kind of, *merge* with them. She wanted their Englishness. Their Chalfishness. The *purity* of it" (p.328). Later, it seems she is drawn away from the Chalfens' middle-class Englishness, turning towards her Jamaican history. After having listened to Joyce talking about gardening on the radio: "Irie switched Joyce off. It was quite therapeutic switching Joyce off. This was not entirely personal. It just seemed tiring and unnecessary all

of a sudden, that struggle to force something out of the recalcitrant English soil. Why bother when there was now this other place?” (p.402). Thus Irie gives up on conforming to the expectations of the Chalfen family, whose home is a space which to her represents English middle-class culture, and Irie decides to run away to Hortense, her grandmother on her mother’s side, a space representing her Jamaican past, but also the dream of something more.

When Irie goes to live with Hortense for a while, she in many ways reconnects with her Jamaican past, and this does seem to become an important experience in Irie’s process. Jay writes that while Smith is “careful to have Irie reject the desire for racial and cultural purity [...], she creates in Irie a character whose reconnection with her Jamaican roots is serious and moving” (2010, p.169-170). This is in many ways true, however, this reconnection with her past is in large parts, as it was for Karim, a construction, “somewhere quite fictional, for she’d never been there. [...] She laid claim to the past – her version of the past – aggressively, as if retrieving misdirected mail” (Smith, 2000, p.400). This is not to say that this fiction is not significant and becomes part of her rhizomatic identity. What is conspicuous about Irie’s experience with her Jamaican past, on the other hand, is that it seems as though what is tempting about it is the blankness of it, somewhere to start afresh. Echoing Salman Rushdie the narrator tells us:

No fictions, no myths, no lies, no tangled webs – this is how Irie imagined her homeland. Because *homeland* is one of the magical fantasy words like unicorn and soul and infinity that have now passed into the language. And the particular magic of homeland, its particular spell over Irie, was that it sounded like a beginning. The beginningest of beginnings. Like the first morning of Eden and the day after apocalypse. A blank page. [...] But every time Irie felt herself closer to it, to the perfect blankness of the past, something of the present would ring the Bowden doorbell and intrude. (p. 402).

Already here it is clear to the reader that Irie is looking for something untouched by her present or the more recent influences of her past. She is looking for a neutral, blank space, but the ringing of a doorbell already signals the impossibility of such a space.

The longing for a neutral space, free from influence of history, becomes evident when Irie lashes out at her family and the Iqbals on the subway. Embarrassed by their discussions she asks for quiet, saying “*this is how some families are all the time*”:

What a peaceful existence. What a *joy* their lives must be. They open a door and all they’ve got behind it is a bathroom or a lounge. Just neutral spaces. And not the endless maze of present rooms and past rooms and the things said in them years ago and everybody’s old historical shit all over the place. [...] And every single fucking day is not this huge battle between who they are and who they should be, what they were and what they will be. [...] No shit in attics. No skeletons in cupboards. No great-grandfathers. I will put twenty quid down *now* that Samad is the only person in her who knows the inside bloody leg measurement of his great grandfather. And do you know *why* they don’t know? Because it doesn’t *fucking matter*. As far as they’re concerned, it’s the *past*. (p.514-515).

As pointed out by Paul Jay, this incident must be seen in light of an event earlier in the novel. Joyce is looking for a neutral place for Millat and Magid to meet after their long separation, and the narrator reflects: “A neutral place. The chances of finding one these days are slim [...] The sheer *quantity* of shit that must be wiped off the slate if we are to start again as new. Race. Land. Ownership. Faith. Theft. Blood. And more blood. [...] There are no people or places like that left in North London” (p.457-458). Jay is right to connect these two passages, and I believe that this might be the very heart of the novel. The characters cannot find a place free of history, and as Millat and Magid begin to argue we are told that “they make a mockery of that idea, a neutral place; instead they cover the room with history – past, present and future history (for there is such a thing) – they take what was blank and smear it with the stinking shit of the past like excitable, excremental children” (p.464).

The idea that it is impossible to find a space untouched by history is directly commented upon by the narrator in a longer philosophical reflection about immigrants, and how one often imagines them as able to change course at any moment, stepping “into their foreign lands as *blank people*, free of any kind of baggage, happy and willing to leave their difference at the docks and take their chances in this new place, merging with the oneness of this greenandpleasentlibertarianlandofthefree”. If their road lead to a dead end they will “merrily set upon another, weaving their way through Happy Mutlicultural Land” (p.465). This section is especially interesting in light of Sarah Ahmed’s idea of the happiness duty, where immigrants are under pressure of leaving their pasts “at the docks”, not supposed to mention their own perspectives on history. The narrator goes on to discuss Zeno’s paradox and concludes that multiplicity is no illusion:

Nor is the speed with which those-in-the-simmering-melting-pot are dashing towards it. Paradoxes aside, they are running, just as Achilles was running. And they will lap those who are in denial just as surely as Achilles would have made that tortoise eat his dust. Yeah, Zeno had an angle, he wanted the One, but the world is Many. (p.466).

Even though the paradox, and the thought of leaving everything behind, might be alluring, the narrator concludes that immigrants cannot “escape their history any more than you yourself can lose your shadow” (p.466). The novel explicitly tells us that you cannot cut the ties to history, nor to your personal past. There seems to be as many versions of history as there are people, each with their specific pasts; there are no blank spaces, just as there are no blank people, and the characters in the novel seem to realise that they must bring their past baggage along with them, into their futures, and let them be part of their self-creative process.

It seems as though Schaff’s statement that *White Teeth* places an “emphasis on matters of roots and origins and explore what it means ‘to belong’ in a contemporary global culture”,

was in many ways on point (Schaff, 2008, p.283). Although distancing itself from any fundamentalist thinking, or fixed ideas of identity, and as I have argued the image of the root, history, however, is time and time again stressed as a very important factor in this universe. All the main characters, and often even the peripheral characters, get their own backstory, or their own 'root canal' as they are called, implying the character's history and origin as being very important. The novel often underlines the importance of having the whole picture, as when the novel rewinds to tell the story of Ambrosia, pregnant with Irie's grandmother: "for if this story is to be told, we will have to put them all back inside each other like Russian dolls, Irie back in Clara, Clara back in Hortense, Hortense back in Ambrosia" (Smith, 2000, p.356). And already in chapter two, in the first time jump explaining how Clara came to marry Archie, we are told: "Just like a good historian need recognize Hitler's Napoleonic ambitions in the east in order to understand his reluctance to invade the British in the west, so Ryan Topps is essential to any understanding of why Clara did what she did." (p.27). History becomes an essential part of this universe, as pointed out by Schaff and Jay. However, just like in *The Buddha of Suburbia*, it is not only the importance of history that is thematised, but its flightiness and instability is a major concern throughout the novel.

From the very beginning of *White Teeth*, history comes off as very arbitrary. In our first description of Archie we are told that he once participated in the London Olympics in 1948, sharing thirteenth place with the Swedish man who is to become his pen pal. "Unfortunately this fact had been omitted from the Olympic records by a sloppy secretary who returned one morning after a coffee break with something else on her mind and missed his name as she transcribed one list to another piece of paper" (p.15). In addition to portraying Archie as an unlucky character, this also highlights the topic of history as something unstable, dependent on people, and it could even be read as showing history as something constructed by those in power, by those who write it down. The contingency of social space and different versions of history has already been touched upon by the examples of middle-class liberalist thinking in the children's school, by both the headmaster and their music teacher, in addition to the Chalfen family. No space in the novel, however, exemplifies the unstableness of history, its dynamic, constructionist qualities, and the dangers of sticking to one fixed version of history, better than the O'Connell's café.

O'Connell's is Archie and Samad's regular spot, where the two old men meet to discuss and reminisce, and pass their time away from their families. After Mickey the owner delivers a phrase he hasn't changed for ten years, Archie reflects: "that's what Archie loved about O'Connell's. Everything was remembered, nothing was lost. History was never revised

or reinterpreted, adapted or whitewashed. It was as solid and as simple as the encrusted egg on the clock” (p.192). Archie is a simple man who does not see the complexity of things, and does not want history to be “revised or reinterpreted”. He is portrayed as lovable to the reader, oblivious to the realities of racism, wanting everyone to live in peace and harmony, but he is also quite naïve. When Archie and Clara are having the Iqbals over for dinner for the first time, Clara tells Archie she is worried that they might expect her to cook them curry, and Archie replies: “For God’s sake, they’re not *those* kind of Indians”. Then the narrator ironically explains how “Samad and Alsansa Iqbal, who were not *those* kind of Indians (as, in Archie’s mind, Clara was not *that* kind of black), [...] were, in fact, not Indian at all but Bangladeshi” (p.55). As the years go by, this naïveté frustrates Samad to no end, and Archie’s reluctance to reconsider history can be read as symbolic for the white man holding on to a simple, pleasant version of history, and is especially interesting read in light of Ahmed’s argument on the necessity for its constant renegotiation.

As has already been established, Samad relies a lot on his past, his origin, his blood, and above all the glorious story of his great grandfather Mangel Pande, which during the war became one of the cornerstones in his friendship with Archie, because “there was no stronger evocation of the blood that ran through him [...] than the story of his great-grandfather” (p.99). When Archie later questions this tale, it seems as though this becomes the last straw in Samad’s disappointments of England, and every time they discuss this in their booth at O’Connell’s, it sends Samad into “spasms of fury”. In the chapter called “The Root Canals of Mangel Pande”, (note the plural form), we are introduced to the many theories and different versions of what might have happened back in 1857, from the two old men and the different historians they have dug up. O’Connell’s, the place where “nothing changes” and “things are only retold”, is the setting of all of their discussions, “but ever since Archie found out the ‘truth’ about Pande, circa 1953, there was no changing his mind” (p.244, 250). He had looked up the word ‘Pandy’ in the dictionary, discovering that this word, indeed tracing back to Samad’s great grandfather, is not only used for “any sepoy who revolted in the Indian army”, but is also used for a “traitor”, or any “fool or coward in a military situation” (p.251). Samad refutes: “my point is that this is not the *full story*. And, yes, I realize that we have several times thoroughly investigated the matter, but the fact remains: full stories are as rare as honesty, precious as diamonds” (p.252). This is a clear comment upon the elusive and subjective character of history, and next follows Samad’s long justification of his family, and history’s injustice towards the Indian uprising, “The whole of the steamy Indian summer of 1857, the whole of that year of mutiny and massacre would be hauled into O’Connell’s”

(p.252). He explains how “one version of events – by a contemporary historian named Fitchett” can be reproduced, just as Sarah Ahmed discusses in her article on England’s version of colonial history: “Like a Chinese whisper, Fitchett’s intoxicated, incompetent Pande had passed down a line of subsequent historians, the truth mutating, bending, receding as the whisper continued” (p.255). Samad makes a desperate attempt to redeem some forgotten glory, and O’Connell’s becomes the reluctant setting of this redemption, a symbol of England as a whole. As Ahmed argues, there is a reigning version of history, and it seems any contestation of this view is considered unpleasant and unnecessary, turning Samad into the figure of the melancholic migrant. Samad and his history is rejected from the space that is England, and this rejection, along with the happiness duty pushing him to remember history in a certain way, and this same space’s refusal to renegotiate its own reigning version of history, can thus create melancholic migrants, unable to let go of their past.

In a conversation between Samad and Irie, it becomes clear how Samad struggles with his disappointments in England where he is “only tolerated”, grieving the results of the plan for his sons: “The one I send home comes out a pukka Englishman, white suited, silly wig lawyer. The one I keep here is fully paid-up green bow-tie-wearing fundamentalist terrorist”, and it forces him to reconsider what it means to belong:

‘And then you begin to give up on the very idea of belonging. Suddenly this thing, this *belonging*, it seems like some long, dirty lie ... and I begin to believe that birthplaces are accidents, that everything is an *accident*. But if you believe that, where do you go? What do you do? What does anything matter?’ As Samad described this dystopia with a look of horror, Irie was ashamed to find that the land of accidents sounded like *paradise* to her. Sounded like freedom. (p.407-408).

Not only does this show another side of Samad, it also shows the difference between him and Irie. Formerly fixed notions such as origin and birthplaces are destabilised and accidental, which in Irie’s case, is only reaffirmed towards the end of the novel when she in fact does not know whether Magid or Millat is the father of her unborn child, and since they are twins and share genetic identification, there is no way for her to find out. So, even though history is important in *White Teeth*, the novel also constantly reminds us that genes and birthplaces are not the only things that define you, and it does not correlate with any kind of deterministic thinking. Thus Samad’s fundamentalism once again ends up suffering, as the novel often tells us that life, and the self-creative process the characters go through are always accidental, and prone to influence from the spaces one moves through, and never determined by your genes.

The climactic final scene in the novel stretches out over several chapters, as this is the day, on New Year’s Eve, when all the storylines come together. The chapter called “The Final space” ends in a long description of the room where everything is to go down, where Marcus

Chalfen is to hold a conference on his study on transgenic mice called FutureMouse©, and all the characters gather to either demonstrate, partake, or watch the conference. “And all these people are heading for the same room. The final space. A big room [...] used for the meetings of people who want to meet somewhere neutral at the end of the twentieth century”:

a virtual place where their business [...] can be done in an emptiness, an uncontaminated cavity; the logical endpoint of a thousand years of spaces too crowded and bloody. This one is pared down, sterilized, made new every day by a Nigerian cleaning lady with an Industrial Hoover and guarded through the night by Mr De Winter, a Polish nightwatchman [... A space where] people can finally give the answers required when a space is being designed, or when something is being rebranded, a room/furniture/Britain (that was the brief: a new British room, a space for Britain, Britishness, space for Britain, British industrial space cultural space space) [...] they know what is meant by national identity? symbols? paintings? aps? music? [...] they know what they want, especially those who've lived this century, forced from one space to another [...], renamed, rebranded, the answer to every questionnaire nothing nothing space please just space nothing please nothing space (p.517-519).

The impossibility of such a neutral space once again becomes apparent in this section, underlined by the complete breakdown of syntax towards the end, history leaking in everywhere. This attempt at emptiness, where one can “rebrand Britain”, only seems to highlight the futility of such a project if history is ignored. This also seems to foreshadow the chaotic events taking place in this “neutral space” in the final chapter.

When interpreting the ending of the novel, one must see it in relation to Irie's process and her reconciliation with her past, the suburbs, and her childhood memories. Towards the end of the novel, before the final showdown, there is a moment when Irie steps “out into streets she'd known her whole life, along a route she'd walked a million times over”. “If someone asked her just then what memory was, what the *purest definition* of memory was, she would say this: the street you were on when you first jumped in a pile of dead leaves” (p.458). As she relives her childhood memories in the streets she grew up with Magit and Millat, she “wished she could give herself over to these past-present fictions: wallow in them, make them sweeter, longer”. Admitting that these spaces have been a part of her life, and thus a part of her rhizomatic identity, she recognises that “She didn't *want* to be involved in the long story of those lives, but she *was*” (p.458). Thus she lets herself drown in the memories for a moment, and “She jumped over the small wall that fringed the Iqbal house, as she had a million times over, and rang the doorbell. Past tense, future imperfect” (p.458-459). In this scene, maybe more than anywhere before, including her trip to her grandmother and her Jamaican past, it seems as though Irie reconciles with her past. Strolling down this memory lane she finds out that even though the past is not perfect, it is part of her, it is part of her rhizomatic network of spaces, and she brings it with her to the imperfect future.

One way of reading the ending of the novel is in light of the celebratory discourse of hybridity. There is especially one passage from Irie's walk down memory lane that seems to invite us to read Irie's hybridisation process as 'reaching' some sort of elevated hybrid condition, but which the novel later tells us would be a misconception. While Irie is skipping through the leaves we are told: "Despite opting for a life of dentistry, she had not yet lost all of the poetry in her soul, that is, she could still have the odd Proustian moment, note layers upon layers, though she often experienced them in periodontal terms." (p.459). As Schaff points out, the fact that Irie becomes a dentist, removing teeth, and fixing damaged teeth, could be read as a way for her to find a middle-ground between herself, her history and family memories (2008, p.284). This does not seem like a far-fetched reading, and I also believe it is fruitful to see it in connection to "the poetry in her soul", and how she often experiences things in "periodontal terms". *White Teeth* is filled with wordplays on teeth, not only the 'root canals', but 'twinges', 'aches', and 'phantom teeth', are used in descriptions and metaphors throughout the novel. The comment on Irie seeing things in periodontal terms, the same way as the novel does, could be read as Irie being the one writing it, that she is the one telling the tale of all of these people who have affected her in different ways, in layer upon layer. Thus it is tempting to read the entire novel as a creative third space for her to come to terms with her hybrid identity.

Furthermore, such a reading of *White Teeth* is supported by one way of reading the final scene, which at first sight seems to give the novel a closed, circular ending. As the events in the final space escalate, the reader is finally told the ending of Archie and Samad's tale from the war that left us on a cliffhanger. We left Archie and Samad at the end of part one of the novel, not knowing whether Archie shot the French Nazi-scientist, although we knew Samad urged him to do so, and it is later revealed that Archie told Samad that he had done it. In the last chapter, history catches up with them, as the believed-to-be-dead Dr Marc-Pierre Perret, is suddenly sitting in the panel with Marcus Chalfen. Samad, in this moment of anagnorisis, "realises that he has been lied to by his only friend in the world for fifty years. That the cornerstone of their friendship was made of nothing more firm than marshmallow and soap bubbles" (Smith, 2000, p.532). Then we jump back in time, and the reader is told what happened when Archie ended up not killing the Frenchman, but accidentally shooting himself in the foot instead. Many things happen in the end, and Archie turns out to save Perret a second time, when back at the conference he jumps in front of a bullet going straight for the Frenchman, fired by Millat, aimed at Marcus. The novel seems to end in a circular form by tying up loose ends, giving us an ending to the unfinished story. If additionally read as though



Irie has ‘ended up’ in a transcendent, creative third space, it would be easy to place the novel within the celebrative hybridity discourse. However, it does not end here, and as the narrator ironically tells us, “If this were TV you would hear the saxophone around now; the credits would be rolling” (p.540).

The novel is playing with the possibility of a closed ending, dangling it in front of the reader’s eyes before removing it. By tying all the fragmented stories together in the end, in this final space where the possibility of neutrality is deconstructed, by a multitude of unbelievable coincidences bordering on the fantastic, *White Teeth* ironically shows us how the novel could have ended if only life worked this way. Because the novel continues:

*But first the endgames.* Because it seems no matter what you think of them, they must be played, even if, like the independence of India or Jamaica, like the signing of peace treaties or the docking of passenger boats, the end is simply the beginning of an even longer story. (p.540).

The idea of something ever ending is mocked, and the novel goes on to paint a pretty picture of how things could have worked out. A world where Millat was not convicted due to a case of mistaken identity, only receiving community service served in the garden of Joyce’s new project; and we get a “snapshot seven years hence of Irie, Joshua and Hortense sitting by a Caribbean sea [...]”. However, the novel shows us that this is all an illusion, stating: “But surely to tell these tales and others like them would be to speed the myth, the wicked lie, that the past is always tense and the future, perfect. And as Archie knows, it’s not like that. It’s never been like that” (p.541). The novel ends as the mouse escapes, whose life was ironically designed to be controlled from beginning to end. The last scene ends in chaos, signalling the impossibility of control, and the impossibility of closed endings.

This mockery of closed endings supports an understanding of the characters’ lives, their identity development, and the process of hybridisation as constant, thus reminding us that their story never really ends. Irie goes through a long process in the novel, moving through many different spaces, and is affected by contradictive forces. She is at once constructing an identity in relation with many separate spaces, people, and pasts, and at the same time wanting to fuse with these spaces, experiencing the contradictory character of hybridity itself. History is always tied to different spaces, and is always portrayed as unstable and in need of constant reconstruction, yet another process which is never-ending. Irie is in the process of creating her own rhizomatic identity in relation with all the places she meets, and as she reconciles with her different pasts, these also become part of her rhizomatic network. I argue that the novel should not be read as though Irie ends up in an elevated hybrid state or condition, even if Irie becomes a novel-writing dentist, having found creativity

through her process, because *White Teeth* clearly shows the reader that her process is not over. The novel distinctly ushers both Irie and the reader towards the future, with an open ending and no closure, the process only seems to continue, as the novel, in fact, ridicules the possibility of anything ever ending. Furthermore, *White Teeth* has not exactly idealised a third space throughout the novel. Indeed, it has constantly been telling us that a neutral, blank space, severed from history, is impossible, and the chaotic ending in the final space, with history all over the room, seems to be the final nail in a neutral coffin. Where *The Buddha of Suburbia* ended in an ambivalent present, with a chaotic past, but optimistic towards the future, *White Teeth* ends with chaos in the present, chaos in the past, and also pointing towards the future, an imperfect future, showing once again that the process is never finished.

## Conclusion

To say that *The Buddha of Suburbia* or *White Teeth* is written in line with a celebrative hybridity discourse, a type of migration literature that idealises the image of reaching a third space of creativity, a sort of elevated consciousness for the hybrid identity, would be to ignore important parts of both novels. Although this type of hybridity discourse, which has flourished within postcolonial studies during the last decades, often focuses on identity as self-creation, and even though these ideas were the first step away from essentialist and old binary thinking, they also, as Moslund has argued, tend to focus only on the positive aspects of hybridity. Reminiscent of how Joyce Chalfen saw the hybrid breed as some sort of *Übermensch*, this perspective can result in celebratory readings of migration literature which overshadow other important aspects of the novels. For instance, such readings stand at risk of ignoring the ambivalent and contradictory forces involved in the hybridisation process, and they imply that there is a hybrid condition or state you can end up in, thus indicating an end to the process. This celebratory hybridity discourse also implies a severing of the ties to the past and one's origin as imperative to achieve this goal, which consequently moves the focus away from the political aspect in postcolonial studies that used to focus on exploring history from different perspectives. As I have argued in this thesis, however, if *The Buddha of Suburbia* or *White Teeth* has ever been placed within this celebratory hybridity discourse, it is the former readings of the novels that have put them there, as both novels open up for other readings.

By looking into the different spaces in the two novels, it soon becomes clear that the characters are in a process of hybridisation, dealing with the pull from contradictive forces, and are in different ways affected by the spaces they meet. Where Karim saw urban modernity and the city as the answer, Irie moves from her own childhood home, to the Chalfens, and continues on to her grandmother to explore her origin-story and the imaginary space of Jamaica. Both characters are in different ways looking for a neutral space for them to create their identities with no connection to their pasts, or to history, but both realise the impossibility of such a space. Karim slowly understands that his dream of the city was only an illusion, and that all the spaces he meets are coloured by politics, ideologies, and history, in every sense of the word, social spaces. Irie's dream of a neutral space is continually punctured, as the novel clearly shows us that neutral spaces do not exist. Both characters are in the beginning denying their pasts, running away from their childhood homes, distancing themselves from the suburbs, and ignoring or fighting their genetical inheritance, in addition to denying history's impact on the present. In their eagerness to run away, they are intermittently affected by homogenous and heterogeneous forces, as they both long to belong

somewhere, and simultaneously wish to stand out or find a space all of their own. Ilcan discusses how the notion of home is no longer a source of stability in a world of mass migration and mobility, and it is interesting that it is not only the hybrid and unsettled origin-stories of these two characters that destabilise their idea of home, and make them run away from their family and the suburbs. In Karim's case it is his father's affair that catalyses his process, and Irie seems to be running away from the extreme fundamentalist thinking which resulted in the kidnapping and loss of one of her best friends. The notion of home is very unstable at the beginning of both of these characters' stories, and thus they restlessly start looking for other places to belong. They are pulled between contradictory forces along the way, and both are, for a while, strongly affected by the conforming, homogenous forces of the English middle class culture, but in the end both come to realise that finding themselves include their own pasts, and that they can in fact belong in many spaces at once.

Karim's and Irie's reconciliations with their pasts show the reader that past, origin, and history are important notions in both novels. Schaff argues that Smith represents a new generation of writers that puts a new emphasis on issues of history, roots, and origin. I have argued that although *White Teeth* indeed does this very explicitly, it is also clear that earlier works such as *The Buddha of Suburbia* emphasise the importance of one's personal past, of memories, of family origin, and the influences of history. This again supports the view that it is the former readings that in this case have severed the novels' ties to these notions. I have also argued, however, that the image of the root is mocked in *White Teeth* alongside the idea of fundamentalism, and I have been using the image of the rhizome in this thesis as an alternative way to look at the influences on identity and the self-creative process. This alternative can be read as a middle ground between cutting all connections to your roots and past, and to letting them identify you completely. Karim and Irie both reconcile with their personal pasts, their Indian and Jamaican origins, as well as their suburban home and childhood spaces. It seems as though they both come to the conclusion that the suburbs do not need to define them, and neither do their parents' origin or their genetic inheritance, because there is no need for one predatory root ever to take over. Rather, their pasts can be, and are in fact, part of them, and become part of the constantly expanding network of their rhizomatic identities. They expand their networks through the many spaces they meet, spaces of memories, imagined or constructed spaces, as well as the concrete places they move through in the city and the suburbs. All the spaces are coloured by history in its many forms, and the characters expand their rhizomatic network through the relations they make with others in all these different spaces. Both through rejecting and learning they are influenced in different

ways, and this hybridisation process does not only foreground the ambivalence involved, but it highlights that this ambivalence is part of a never-ending process. Both novels end by pointing us towards the future, not only by explicitly referring to the future, but also through the novels' use of textual space, by deconstructing the Bildung form in *The Buddha of Suburbia*, and refusing us a closed or circular ending in *White Teeth*. Whether the future is optimistic or imperfect, it is nevertheless uncertain, because the characters' process is never finished, their identity is constantly renegotiated, and thus their stories are never-ending.

The characters of *The Buddha of Suburbia* and *White Teeth* also come to realise that the concept of history is in need of constant renegotiation as well. History and the past are established as important parts of the process of rewriting one's identity in the hybridisation process, and the understanding of these notions as unstable, constructed, and subjective to different spaces and people, is important to see that they are also in need of continuous reconstruction. History is very present in both novels, and the past is pointed to through form, as in the constant flashbacks or root canals in *White Teeth*. The different spaces within the setting of London and its suburbs are filled with history in its many versions, both on a personal and a national level. All these spaces are social spaces, intrinsically connected to history and politics, charged with different world views, ideologies, and prejudices. In both novels England is portrayed as a space where there is one reigning version of history, one which does not easily open for renegotiation from immigrants. Different characters are subjected to a happiness injunction enforced as a result of refusing to see history from different perspectives. This sometimes results in different ways of conforming to a space's expectations, and sometimes it results in the figure of the melancholic migrant. Ahmed argues that by recognising unhappiness in political memory, we can recognise the impossibility of putting certain histories behind us, and therefore the need for their constant reconstruction. Jung Su argued that migration literature is a way for immigrant authors to relocate themselves and their historical sense within the British tradition, and I argue that migration literature can also be an encouragement for all its readers to reconsider their own views on history.

Investigating how our past affects our present will also result in looking at our social structures, which again reignites the political aspects of postcolonial studies. The discussion of hybridisation and identity in migration literature should not be an excuse not to discuss political topics and historical incidents as well, and I believe that in migration literature especially, this is, and should be, particularly hard to avoid. History is present all over these pages, and like the characters of their novels, it seems both Kureishi and Smith "take what was blank and smear it with the stinking shit of the past" (Smith, p.464). Therefore, as we

discuss the hybridisation process of these characters, it is at the same time necessary to discuss the “former” postcolonial topics of looking at history from different perspectives, fronting the idea that it needs to be rewritten, and in fact should be constantly renegotiated and reconstructed. Because no space will ever be neutral, untouched by history, or free from ideology, and the textual space of migration literature is no exception. This is a space where important issues can be addressed, and in the spirit of Lukács, the novel form mirrors the outside world, and the restless form of the migration novel will always strive to recreate itself, thus reflecting the social, political, and historical happenings in the world. *The Buddha of Suburbia* and *White Teeth* illustrate the impact history can have on the present, and how it influences all the spaces the characters meet, thus highlighting the interdependent relationship between space and history. Both novels are filled with politics, history, and spaces of the past, present, and future, and they show the reader that they are both literary spaces that are anything but neutral.

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## **My Thesis' Relevance to the Teaching Profession**

In the process of writing my dissertation I have learned many things which will be useful in my chosen profession. First of all I feel that I have grown as a writer, and to work with a longer writing project has not only provided me with insights into research methods, source criticism, and analytical work, but it has made me more conscious of the writing process in its different stages. To be able to work with your own text, the structure, coherence, etc. is the first step to be able to help others in the same process. When working with my students I feel as though I will be able to get a better overview of their texts, as well as a better understanding of where they are in the writing process, and what they need in the different stages. I have also learned a lot about a type of literature and a theoretical field that I did not know much about when I started out, which has made this a very educational experience.

What literature to bring into the classroom is a very important decision for an English teacher, a decision which opens up immense possibilities, and responsibilities. Renegotiation of the literary canon, including contemporary works in our list of classics, and expanding our conception of what English literature is, all begin in the classroom. Migration literature reflects on the situation in the world today where mass migration constantly increases, and it seems more than appropriate to bring the issues addressed in such novels to school. As a teacher, I need to be politically neutral, but as has been the mantra of this thesis, no space can ever be completely neutral. Thus, it is important to acknowledge that in the classroom I will meet a diversity of students, each with different backgrounds, histories, and world views, and it is my job to teach them how to respect, listen, and understand each other and their different perspectives. Migration novels can be an entryway into discussions on difficult topics, and it is important to know how to address them. Through this process I have been introduced to new ideas, terms, and ways of thinking which can be useful in the classroom when discussing topics such as migration, racism, prejudices, cultural heritage, hybridity, and history.

Furthermore, by reading literature in general, and migration literature, specifically, the students can learn to see the world in new perspectives, and thus develop their empathic skills. Paul White argues that creative or imaginative literature “has the power to reflect complex and ambiguous realities that make it a far more plausible representation of human feelings and understandings than many of the artifacts used by academic researchers” (White, 1995, p.15). Through the meeting with literary characters, they can learn about other people, new cultures, and different ways of thinking. Migration literature can also be a catalyst for students to start thinking about their own sense of self, their relationship with others, and the process of constructing their own identities, a process which they are only just beginning.