"He worshipped elephants and wore turbans."

The construction of cultural identities in Zadie Smith's

novel *White Teeth*

Bachelor's Thesis
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Tiivistelmä – Abstract

Globalisoitumisen aikakausi on mahdollistanut vapaasti liikkuvan työvoiman ja myös lisääntyvän maahanmuuton. Siirryttäessä kulttuurista toiseen kulttuuri-identiteetit hämärtyvät: toiset yrittävät säilyttää näennäisen yhtenäisen entisen kulttuuri-identiteettinsä torjumalla kaikki vaikutteet uudesta kulttuurista, kun taas toiset hyväksyvät uuden hybridisen identiteettinsä. Voidaksemme paremmin ymmärtää identiteetin etsinnän neuvotteluja sekä oman paikan etsimistä yhteiskunnassa, on tärkeää tutkia tapoja, joilla maahanmuuttajat rakentavat identiteettejään diskurssin kautta.

Juuri nämä aiheet ovat Zadie Smithin romaanin *White Teeth* keskiössä. Romaania on kiitelty sen henkilöhahmojen ja heidän ongelmiensa kuvauksesta uudessa kulttuuriympäristössä. Kirjallisuus on tapa kuvata yleistä yksityisen kautta: yhteiskunnassa tapahtuvia yleisiä ilmiöitä voidaan kuvata yksityisen henkilön elämän avulla. Fiktiivisten tekstien tutkiminen voi siis antaa viitteitä siihen, miten asiat ovat myös todellisuudessa. Koska kirjallisuus on todellisuuden heijastumaa, voimme olettaa, että romaanin *White Teeth* henkilöhahmojen identiteetin rakentumisen tutkiminen antaisi viitteitä niihin ongelmiin, joita maahanmuuttajat kokevat muutettaessa kulttuurista toiseen.

Diskursiivinen analyysini pohjautuu sosiolingvistiikkaan ja kriittiseen diskurssianalyysiin. Kielen, kulttuurin ja identiteetin välinen suhde on monimutkainen: merkityksiä tuottavien identiteettilausumien taustalla vaikuttavat niin historialliset, poliittiset kuin sosiaaliset tekijät. Kriittisen näkökulman omaksuminen mahdollisti näiden taustatekijöiden löytämisen ja näin myös yhteiskunnan eriarvoisten valtasuhteiden paljastamisen.

Tulokset osoittivat, että hybridisyys oli läsnä molemman sukupolven maahanmuuttajalla, joskin eri muodoissa. Molemmat hahmoista samaistuivat sekä intialaiseen kulttuuriperintöönsä että britannialaiseen kulttuuriin, jossa asuivat. Kahden kulttuurin välinen neuvottelu oli läsnä molempien hahmojen diskurssissa, ja molemmat etsivät paikkaansa yhteiskunnassa. Heidän identiteettinsä olivat alituiseen muuttuvia rakennelmia, joiden eri puolia he korostivat eri tilanteissa.

Säilytyspaikka – Depository

Muita tietoja – Additional information

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the ever more globalising world, cultural identities are becoming blurred. Due to free moving labour and increasing immigration, more and more people are moving across national borders. As people move from one culture to another, cultural identities become contested for: some people want fiercely to preserve their seemingly unified cultural identity and reject any influence of the other culture, while others adopt their new hybrid identities. In order to better understand these negotiations for an identity, and the struggle for a place in the society, it is important to examine the ways with which immigrants construct their identities.

These questions of the construction of immigrant identities are central in Zadie Smith's novel *White Teeth*. The novel has been praised for the description of its characters and their problems facing a new cultural setting. As literature is a way of depicting general phenomena in the society through the experiences of individuals, examining fictional texts can also give reference of the state of affairs in real-life. Since literature is considered as a reflection of reality, it is worth while to take a closer look at how cultural identities are portrayed in the novel in question. As a consequence, this may give way to the problems immigrants face when moving to a different culture.

Due to certain limitations, the analysis includes only two of the novel's characters: Samad Iqbal, an immigrant from Bengal, and his son Millat Iqbal, born and raised in London. The identities of these two characters are of special interest because, as they are two different generations of immigrants, they represent the two-fold relationships of their two cultures: to Samad, originally a Bengali, the British culture is new, whereas to Millat the British society is the only one he has ever lived in, though his ethnic roots are oriental. As a result, it is worth examining how these factors influence the construction of their identities, with special emphasis on the cultural aspect of them.

A fair amount of studies have been conducted of the novel before. However, earlier studies have concentrated on the novel as a whole, or only to one side of their identities, not on the overall construction of their cultural identities. The precise discursive, and thus qualititative, analysis I will perform has not been adopted before. With this approach, I will try to trace the factors influencing the construction of the characters' identities and also discover how the two cultures interact in their discourse.

The theoretical background of the thesis is built on the relationship between culture, language and identity. In Chapter 2, I will be defining culture and identity and, further, describing their mutual relationship. In addition, previous studies of *White Teeth* will be introduced. The background of the analysis is based on sociolinguistics and critical discourse analysis which will be explained in Chapter 3. In Chapter 4, the data - Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* – is presented. Consequently, chapters 5 and 6 will focus on the analysis and results and lastly, in Chapter 7, I will discuss the implications of the results.

2. WHAT IS CULTURAL IDENTITY?

2.1. Defining culture

There is no one right way of defining what is meant by the term 'culture'. Researchers from different academic backgrounds are prone to define it from different perspectives according to how it corresponds to their research field. Culture can be seen, for example, as communication, collective mindsets, as ways of performing or as a set of values and symbols (Barker 2005; 23). For a long time the term had a specific connotation with the so-called high culture: arts, theatre, literature and so on. However, in the postmodern era, the use of the term 'culture' has expanded and, as a result, it is nowadays used with other areas as well; for example, there are such concepts as national culture, sports culture, pop culture and religious culture. Therefore, culture can also be seen as a shared set of values and symbols of a specific group (Barker 2005; 23). This definition is appropriate for the purposes of this research because it provides a tool for clearly setting boundaries between different national cultures the effect of which this research aims to expose.

So what, then, does this national or ethnic culture consist of? What are the characteristics essential for defining a 'national culture'? For example, one way of defining a national culture could be the physical boundaries of it, i.e. the physical boundaries of a (national) state. Almost every nation has its own customs, values, lifestyle and language. Through these characteristics we usually tend to define what is essential to that national culture, what it means to be part of that culture; what kind the people of that national culture are, whether their lifestyle is rural of urban, what kind of values they hold dear or whether it is a individualistic or communal culture. Through these characteristics also stereotypes of specific nationalities are based upon. Hence, identity is defined by the fact of being a member of a

national state. Yet, as Hall (1999; 54) states, nations are not unified cultural identities. Instead, they are unified only through the use of cultural power; in other words, through cultural homogenisation, the issue which I will address later. Seeing nations as diverse cultural entities, we need to further define 'ethnicity' and 'hybridity'.

Just as national culture could be defined as having shared values of a certain geographical area, 'ethnicity', too, can be defined as a group having a shared set of norms, beliefs, symbols and practices (Barker 2005; 23). Ethnic groups are not defined by geographical borders like national groups: there can be various ethnic groups within the borders of one state and, furthermore, an ethnic group can be 'cut' by a state border. In other words, an otherwise unified ethnic group can be separated as belonging into different states by a state border (as is in many cases of tribes in Africa whose villages are cut by a state borders). Hence, the concepts of ethnicity and nationality cannot be separated from each other completely.

As global migration increases, the concept of hybrid identities has become up for discussion. Hybridity refers to a combination of two or more cultures which, then, together create a "third space" of culture (Hammond 2007; 222). Barker (2005; 232) also addresses the concept of hybridity by saying that hybridity refers to "[m]ultiple, shifting, fragmented identities that can be articulated together". That is to say, one can sustain one's cultural heritage and still take influences from another culture thus combining two sets of cultural traditions as one. However, as national identities represent attachment to specific places, events, symbols and histories, there is a tension between global and local and to which one identifies with (Hall 1999; 62-3). If hybrid identities are seen as separate sides of identity articulated together, it is possible to trace the different factors within that hybrid identity. Noteworthy is, of course, that these sides of identity are in themselves not stable. As a result, so should the hybridity of one's identity be seen as unstable; at specific times, different sides of that hybrid identity can be foregrounded.

In opposition to this rather a concrete view of nationality and ethnicity, it has been suggested that national identities are metaphorical in nature because they are not encoded in our genes. In contrast, nations are, above all, cultural representation systems. Nationalities, cultures and ethnicities are 'imagined' communities and, thus, exist only on a symbolic level. Memories of the past, the will to live together and cherishing traditions construct these imagined

communities and memberships in them. In addition, nations are not unified cultural identities – this is why they should be viewed as discursive entities. (Hall 1999).

The effects of globalisation are seen in national identities: at the same time they (national and other local identities) are both reinforcing and decaying (Hall 1999; 58). Specific national identities become emphasised as a kind of rebellion against globalisation but, yet, at the same time, hybridised identities are taking their place. The overall effect of globalisation on identity is contradictory; others want to regain the former unity of their identity while others accept that their identity is a product of history, politics and representation (Hall 1999; 70). Hence, as a counterbalance for globalisation and hybridity, there is a 'rebirth' of ethnicity. One extreme example of this rebirth is fundamentalism which is an attack towards the threat of hybridity. (Hall 1999; 73).

2.2.   Identity

As is culture, so is the concept of identity difficult to define in a straightforward way. However, researchers in the field of linguistics and identity widely agree on one thing: that identity is not fixed, but rather an ever changing construct (Blommaert 2005; 205, Barker 2005; 11, Hall 1999; 19). However, people are not entirely free in identity constructing work: the construction of one's identity is affected by political, historical and social dimensions as well as personal ones (Hall 1999; 16). In addition, it is not just the individuals who construct their own identities: on the contrary, identities are negotiated and renegotiated among members of society. Hall (1999; 53-54) argues that societies are forms of cultural power: social groups, e.g. social classes, ethnicities and gender groups, are unequal in relation to each other and have become so through the use of cultural power. Thus, the access to identity-building resources and the articulation of possible identities within society are unequal as well (Blommaert 2005; 207). In addition, these inequalities can also be seen in a global scale. Blommaert (2005; 211) calls this indexicality; a specific identity in one part of the world does not correspond the equivalent counterpart in another part of the world. In other words, cultural power relations between cultures also affect an individual's resources to construct a desirable identity.

Starting from the notion that identity is variable, Blommaert (2005; 204) argues that identity is representation. This representation involves situating oneself in relation to others; situating oneself in groups, categories, and according to different situations. This results in 'relevant identities' which are dimensions of identity foregrounded in specific situations (Blommaert 2005; 204). Hall (1999; 60) and Barker (2005; 221) share a similar kind of performance perspective on identity, stating that all identities are located in a specific time and place. Hall (1999; 12) and Barker (2005; 220) also note that identities are recognised through sameness and difference; therefore, identity is both personal and social (Barker 2005; 220). In addition, Mesthrie et al. (2000; 322) state that since the self is a collection of roles acted by the self and recognised by others, identity is fundamentally social.

Identities are the ways with which the tales of the past position us and the way with which we position ourselves to them. This way of situating oneself with the tales of the past gives a feeling of continuance and thus it answers the questions of who we have become. Identities are moulded in the discourses of history and culture; thus, identities are positioning, identification, not essences. It is in the negotiation of continuance and positioning that formation of identity happens. (Hall 1999; 227- 229).

Seeing identity as this kind of constructing semiotic (i.e. meaning-making) work enables us to see the different layers within it and the resources available to construct it and, thus, give us a possibility to link identity research to globalisation (Blommaert 2005; 207). As Huddard (2007; 21) states, all modern cultures are hybrid, and therefore, the effect of relationships between cultures in speakers' repertoires and their ability to construct their voice must be taken into account (Blommaert 2005; 15).

However, almost as a symbolic protest towards globalisation, a phenomenon called cultural homogenisation is taking place. According to Hall (1999; 62), in cultural homogenisation, all cultural differences and divisions are blurred into an international lingua franca with which traditions and identities can be articulated. In other words, identities are becoming detached from time, place, history and traditions and, as a consequence, the differences and traditions that used to define cultural identities, are becoming homogenised (Hall 1999; 62-3). Yet, at the same time, there is an increasing attraction to ethnicity and otherness which acts as a balancing force to homogenisation (Hall 1999; 63-4).

Furthermore, as a result from this homogenisation, individuals may experience a so-called identity crisis. As individual identities were previously anchored in ethnicities, races and nationalities, among others, homegenisation blurs all these qualities into one single attribute. This change challenges our individual identities to the point where one's identity is contested for. (Hall 1999; 20).

For finding the factors that best characterise the identities of Samad and Millat, a critical approach is appropriate. With this semiotical approach it is possible to trace the effects of cross-cultural immigration on the characters' identities and, also, the organisation of the two cultures in the characters' identities. In effect, with taking a viewpoint of identity as a social and historical construct, we can see how the perceptions of others and the impact of history are portrayed in the characters' identities. This critical approach will also enable the analysis of the power effect within the British society and how this is reflected in identity. Having now defined some of the ways in which identity work and culture can be seen, it is time to consider how these issues are represented in and with language. The relationship of culture, language and identity is an intermingling one where each one has an effect on the others.

2.3.   Culture, language and identity

Yule (2006; 216) argues that language precedes cultural knowledge; through language we categorise the world around us according to implicit cultural norms. Thus, identities are cultural constructs and they cannot be detached from cultural effects (Barker 2005; 220). Hall (1999; 16) also argues that identities are located in language, history and culture. As a result, all articulations of identity are anchored in a specific time and place (Hall 1999; 60, Barker 2005; 221).

According to Barker (2005; 102), there are cultural "rules" of discourse: who can speak, what, where and when. This is due to the unequal power relations in society; social relations within the society dictate how people are to communicate with each other. In other words, the inequality of their social statuses is reflected in their discourse and they are to speak to each other accordingly. These rules can restrict the construct of one's identity in specific situations, because social rules of behaviour and discourse are embedded in their discourse. In addition, Mesthrie et al. (2000; 342) argue that, because of these inequalities within societies,

sociolinguistic competence varies among members of the society. Blommaert (2005; 14) addresses similar issues when talking about linguistic repertoires and their unequal distribution in society. The ability of individuals in constructing their identities heavily depends on sociolinguistic competence and repertoire; therefore, individuals are not entirely free in identity constructing work (Blommaert 2005; 206).

Barker (2005; 221) sees identity as a description in discourse. As a result, the different formations of identity can be seen in the use of language. Thus, language reflects identity (ibid.). Blommaert (2005; 204) agrees with this notion by saying that identities are produced in semiotical practices and, thus, it is in this semiotical level that the different levels of identity can be seen. The ways in which identities can be constructed through discourse include, for example, identification to different groups and the use of socially conditioned language, i.e. slang or dialects (Yule 2006; 207-212). These issues of slang and dialect will be more thoroughly discussed in the next chapter.

To sum up, the relationship between culture, language and identity is an extremely difficult one to define in any straightforward way. Language and culture can both constrict and give possibilities in our ability to construct our identities. Cultural norms and expectations, as well as power relations within society, affect the ways in which we position ourselves to other people and how we see our place in the society. In addition, the way in which we position ourselves with the stories of the past helps us to create a coherent, continuous self identity. Power relations, in a local and global level, affect the indexicality of identity: a specific identity in one part of the world may not be the same in another part. As a result, identity is an ever changing construct, not an essence. Identity is fundamentally positioning and identification; it can change from time to time, and according to place.

In this thesis, I will use the term 'cultural identity' to refer to both national and ethnic identities of the characters. This may sound like a simplifying view because the two can be defined as somewhat separate concepts. However, the two concepts are starting to intermingle: for example in the British society, it is difficult to separate the two because of the growing number of immigrants and the fact that the British society itself consists of three ethnic origins (i.e. the English, the Scottish, the Welsh and the North-Irish). Therefore, the British society in itself is not in any case a unified cultural entity. In addition, because using either one concept separately would result into a complexity beyond the scope of this thesis, I

have chosen to use the term 'cultural identity' to refer to both national and ethnic identity, which is Bengali in the case of the characters in the novel.

2.4.   Previous studies on White Teeth

Because the novel had such a widespread popularity after its publication, a fair number of studies have been conducted of the novel in recent years (see e.g. Sell 2006, Beukema 2008). Different approaches from literature to social studies have been adopted by different researchers, but as far as I know, an approach similar to mine has not yet been applied. The dimensions of the characters' identities, be it effects of history on identity or the influence of chance, have been studied, but not with the detailed discursive analysis I intend to perform. Earlier studies have concentrated on wider background influences on identity, where as my goal is to expose *how* the characters portray their identities through identity markers in discourse – not *why* their identity is what it is. Of course, in order to understand the overall identities of the characters, one needs to take these reasons into consideration.

In the field of literature, Launimaa (2008) studied cultural boundaries and the notion of self in the novel with special emphasis on the separation of private and public worlds. Sykkö (2003) studied the cultural and ethnic identities of the "second generation" immigrants in the novel in relation to Englishness. Launimaa studied the novel from a hermeneutic perspective, and he saw the characters as representations of their culture. Launimaa found that the characters' hybrid identities challenges the essentialist perceptions of culture and, thus, also the power relations between cultures. In his view, the essentialist perceptions of culture create static cultural identities, whereas hybridity enables variation.

Since the point of view taken in Launimaa's thesis was that of literature, it is rather different from the point of view of this thesis. Similarly, as Sykkö aligned the identities of the characters with the rewriting of the English identity, her approach is different from the approach of this thesis, which is a discursive one. Although Launimaa's text is of different approach, it is used as a source in this thesis because it provides vital additional information of the other dimensions of the novel which are not studied in this particular thesis, but which provide important insights to the novel.

3. SOCIOLINGUISTICS AND CDA

The connection between culture, identity and language discussed above will be evident in the discourse of the characters as well because they cannot be detached from each other. If we are to see identity as a description in language, and as a discursive construct, we need now to define how identity can be portrayed through language. Since sociolinguistics studies the relationship between language and society, it is well justified to use its concepts as a guideline for the central analysis of this thesis. Furthermore, critical discourse analysis (CDA) is used to take a critical point of view on identity and to expose the power relations in the society.

In short, sociolinguistics studies the place of language in human societies (Yule 2006; 205). Sociolinguistics aims at exposing the ways language constitutes, supports and reflects inequalities in societies (Mesthrie et al. 2000; 317). Because of the social character of the approach, it is strongly connected to sociology, anthropology and psychology as it investigates language and culture, the role of language in organisations of social groups and how in- and out-group behaviours are identified within these social groups (Yule 2006; 205). These are the topics that I will touch upon in this thesis and, thus, this approach will be adopted to analyse the two characters' identities.

The way inequalities within societies manifest themselves in language can be seen in different variations of language. Such variations include, for example, regional dialects, social dialects or sociolects (e.g. the so-called Queen's English, Cockney), youth language and slang and ethnic variations (e.g. African American English [AAE], Jamaican London ect.). Each variation has its distinct features (grammatical, phonetic, and/or semantic), and these features act as social markers. The use of these social markers indicates the social group to which the user belongs (Yule 2006; 207). Yule (2006; 212) also argues that these variations and their use can act as in-group/out-group identifiers: slang, for example, is used by the youth to foster a sense of unity within a certain age group.

Some variations are more highly thought of among members of a society. Yule argues (2006; 210) that the prestige of one variation, or lack there of, is where the inequalities within the society can be seen. This point is agreed upon by Fairclough (2001; 46) who states that standardised language, which is highly prestigious, is an exercise of power by the authorities over other variations. Nevertheless, Yule (2006; 212) and Mesthrie et al. (2000; 337-8) argue that there are forms that 'rebel' against the prestige forms of language used typically by higher-status groups.

For example, youth slang and AAE, used for instance by the Rastafaris, challenge the standardised norms of language use, and, hence, the whole dominant culture and value system.

However, since sociolinguistics does not concern itself with the *reasons* of varieties in language, it is necessary to include critical discourse analysis (CDA) into my analysis. Fairclough (2001; 6) states that "[s]ociolinguistics is strong on 'what?' questions but weak on 'why?' and 'how?' questions". In other words, sociolinguistics aims at categorising the different aspects of linguistic variation in societies, but leaves aside the questions of the origins of variation. Thus, to be able to adequately analyse the identities portrayed in the discourse of the two characters, CDA must be included into the analysis.

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) sets of from the notion that language has power: one of its focuses is the relationship between language and society. Language is a form of social practice and thus a part of society; linguistic phenomena are social phenomena and vice versa (Fairclough 2001; 19). That is to say, language use is always socially conditioned and language is always a part of social practices. As well as within societies, there are power relations within language use. As a consequence, CDA aims to expose how power is displayed in and behind discourse (Fairclough 2001; 36) and how power effects take place in societies (Blommaert 2005; 2).

As CDA aims to expose the power relations in and behind discourse, it is used in this thesis to take a critical point of view to the characters' construction of identity in discourse. In order to analyse how the two cultures are portrayed, and in addition how they effect the construction of identity, the power relations of the two cultures, and also within the British culture, must be taken into account.

The principles of critical discourse analysis and a sociolinguistic approach are used to analyse the discourses which construct the identities of the two characters of interest, Samad and Millat. Adopting a sociolinguistic point of view enables to see how language use reflects the characters identity and also, how their identity is portrayed through language. Adding CDA to this, we are able to trace the power relations which affect the construction of the characters' identities. These are the starting points of the analysis in this thesis; that there is a hierarchy of cultures in the construction of identities and that language and its use reflect these power relations.

I will now move on to describe the author, Zadie Smith, and the novel *White Teeth* more closely. Firstly, I will take a look at Zadie Smith's place within the field of British literature. Secondly, I will introduce the author and lastly, I will explain my reason for choosing this specific novel and describe its general plot and conflicts.

4. DATA – ZADIE SMITH'S *WHITE TEETH*

In Britain, the post-colonial literary movement, which concerns itself with issues of colonisation and the effects of it in Britain and former colonial countries, began in the late 1970s. The so-called 'Thatcher era' – the time when Margaret Thatcher was the Prime Minister – was labelled by "a desire for a mono-lingual, mono-cultural Britain": individualism and nationalism came to a new rise, and national identity was associated with being white. (Hammond 2007; 224). The movement wanted to touch upon this anti-diversity atmosphere of the Thatcher era and bring the problematic effect of colonisation and the difficulties of immigrants from the former colonised countries to the general awareness (ibid.). In the forefront of this movement were, for example, Salman Rushdie and Hanif Kureishi. The newest addition to the group is Zadie Smith.

4.1.   Zadie Smith

Indeed, Smith is no stranger to the lives of immigrants; she was born in 1975 to a British father and a Jamaican mother and is, thus, herself from a diverse cultural background. In addition, she has, for the most part of her life, lived in Willesden Green, the multicultural neighbourhood in northwest London where the novel is situated as well. Smith's writing has been compared to that of Rushdie and Dickens and the novel itself has been aligned with Kureishi's *Buddha of suburbia.* As noted earlier, Rushdie's and Kureishi's works, among others, launched a whole literary movement dealing with the issues of immigrants, clashes of cultures as well as divided and hybrid identities born from these clashes. Smith's work is said to continue this tradition of post-colonial British literature. (Biography of Zadie Smith online, 20.3.2010.)

4.2.   White Teeth

The reason I chose this book specifically is because of the impact and high praises it has had. The book, published in 2000, was, in fact, rated among the top 100 best novels since 1923 by the Time magazine (2010). The novel has won the Guardian's First Book Award and the James Tait Black Memorial Price for Fiction. The novel's description of London as a melting pot of cultures and traditions has been widely praised among critics and readers around the world. Smith's multidimensional depiction of the characters' struggle with how the past and the present affect their self- conception is seen as an accurate description of the struggles many immigrants face. This is why I thought it would be worth while examining closer how the identities of the characters are constructed. Also, in my opinion, the topic can shine a light to the problems of immigrants in real life as well.

In the centre of the book, there are three families: the Joneses, the Iqbals and the Chalfens. The story starts from the unsuccessful suicide attempt of Archie Jones, one of the main characters of the novel, and an antihero as it were. He is reconnected with his friend from World War II, the Bengali Samad Iqbal. Since the war, Archie has divorced his first wife and remarried a Jamaican ex- Jehova's Witness Clara Bowden. Samad went back to Bengal after the war, married Alsana Begum – a Bengali woman, and gained a degree in engineering. He and his wife immigrated to London in search for work. However, life did not go as he planned: he ended up waiting tables at an Indian restaurant. The two couples and their children, Irie Jones and Millat and Magid Iqbal, become friends. This mixture of different cultures and religions create the basis of the novel's theme and introduce the reader to the central conflicts of the novel.

The first half of the book is dedicated to Archie and Samad and their stories. The life-long friendship of the indecisive, paper-folding Englishman and the Bengali waiter started in the WWII and continues in London when they, by accident, are reconnected. They meet weekly in an Irish pub, *O'Connell's* to analyse and agonise over their spouses, children, the past, the present, the future and life, in general.

The second half tells the story of Irie, Millat and Magid, the second generation of these immigrant families, who are torn between the culture of the British society and their ethnic roots. When another family, the Chalfens, who are "more English than the English", are thrown into the soup, cultural identities become even more blurred and contested for than

before. The courses of the lives of the characters are determined not solely by the past or expectations of their cultures but by personal choices and chance.

The title of the novel, *White Teeth*, is an introduction to the central issues of the novel. As Launimaa (2008; 1-2) observes, white teeth are a symbol of wellbeing and success in the Western world. A part of a tooth is visible but, yet, other parts of it cannot be seen. The root of the tooth connects to the gum; this is a metaphor for how our roots are in the past and how we are thought to be attached to a certain geographical place on earth. In other words, Launimaa sees that the teeth are a metaphor of humans and their cultural heritages. Furthermore, Launimaa (2008; 2) argues that this notion of belonging to a specific location is questioned in the novel.

4.3.   Aim of this thesis

The novel having had such a wide-spread popularity after its publication, and being praised by critics and readers alike, it is worth taking a closer look at how the identities of the characters are constructed. It could be assumed that, as the main characters of the novel are immigrants, the complex relationship between their cultural heritage and the host culture is seen in their discourses of identity. As the relationship between language, culture and identity is such a complex web, it is only through precise discursive analysis that the articulations of identity and the power relations behind them can be detected. The purpose of this thesis is, thus, to see how the characters construct their identities and how the two cultures interact on identity level.

In the light of the topics discussed earlier in this paper about cultural identities, I expect to find some kind of a dialogue or negotiation of cultural identities in the characters' discourse. It has been shown that cultural identities are constantly defined and redefined among members of societies; there are historical, societal and political factors influencing the construction of one's identity in addition to individual ones.

Since discourse shapes the world as well as is shaped by it, and hence language has power, it is worth considering how cultural identities are constructed in texts and in narratives and, in addition, how power relations between cultures are constructed through these discourses of identity. In the novel in question, how these multicultural or –ethnic identities are constructed

by the subjects themselves and by others can also tell much about the post-colonialist British society and cultural power relations within it.

Therefore, the aim of this thesis is to answer the following questions:

- What kinds of identity markers are used, by Samad and others, to construct Samad's identity?
- What kinds of identity markers are used, by Millat and others, to construct Millat's identity?
- What is the relationship between the cultures (British and Bengali) in these characters' identities?

Choosing these specific characters enables us to trace possible differences of attitude between two generations of immigrants. Because they are related to each other (i.e. father and son) they share both a common cultural background and host culture. By including two generations in to the analysis it is possible to trace the difference of how they perceive their cultural heritage and the culture they presently inhabit.

Taking into account the limitations set for a Bachelor's thesis, the novel would be too broad to be used as data as a whole. Therefore I chose to include only two of the four chapters of the book into my analysis: the one on Samad (p. 125- 261) and the other (partly) on Millat (p. 415- 542). The reason why these chapters are included is because they are from the points of view of the two characters of interest. I will present examples from these chapters of how the cultural identities of these characters are portrayed through discourse.

5. ANALYSIS

By close reading the chosen two chapters, I looked for examples of how the identities of the characters are portrayed through discourse with specific interest to how their cultural backgrounds are displayed and how their cultural backgrounds effect their identity construction. Giving actual examples of the text is vital because they will show the patterns of the construction of the identities in discursive level. There are certain limitations to analysing only two chapters of the book; the chapters excluded from the analysis may also contain discourse that would give insight to the characters' identities.

Since much of identity work is done also by others (Blommaert 2005; 205), it was also crucial to investigate what kind if identities were ascribed to the characters by others in addition to how they described themselves. Further, since the use of different language variation reflects group and social identities (Yule 2006; 207), I looked for examples of what *kind* of language the characters used. In other words, the language variant the characters used can also provide an insight to how they perceive their position within the society. This will hopefully give a more in depth view to the construction of the characters' identities.

6. RESULTS

The number of instances where identity constructing work could be seen in the characters' discourse was innumerable. Almost all of their expressions contained something that could be read as an act of identity. Taking into account the limitations set for a Bachelor's thesis, I could not include all the instances in the text.

In the following section, I will present some examples of how the two characters' identities were portrayed in the novel. The examples I chose to include are the one's I analysed further. The chosen examples are the ones that, in my opinion, most clearly demonstrate the dimensions of the characters' cultural identities. Therefore, in this section, I will present the examples that, to my mind, best illustrate the construction of the characters' identities.

The examples are divided into categories firstly according to character, in other words Samad and Millat, and, then, into subcategories according to what kind of identities are ascribed to them.

6.1.   Samad

In the case of Samad, I will firstly present some examples of how his cultural heritage as a Bengali was portrayed in the chosen chapters. Second, I will exhibit the influence of the British culture on Samad, and lastly, the negotiation between the two cultures.

6.1.1.   Samad's cultural heritage

For the most part, the way Samad exhibited his oriental cultural heritage was through his Islamic religion. In Examples 1-3, Samad expresses the importance faith has in life:

> (1) A man's God is his community! Said Samad, raising his voice. (WT 130)

(2) I'm a Muslim, Mickey, I don't indulge anymore. (WT 186)

(3) Nobody even thinks to pick up the Qur' ān. Key item in an emergency situation: spiritual support. (WT 222)

In these examples, it is obvious howSamad's religion controls his life. He lives by the rules set within that religion and he turns to his religion when in distress. This kind of attachment to his religion implies his will to preserve his cultural roots in the East. However, in Example 4, we can see Shiva challenging Samad's religiousness:

(4) 'Oh, you should never have gotten religious, Samad. It don't suit you.' Shiva wiped an onion-tear away. 'All that guilt's nor healthy.' (WT 144)

Shiva implies that Samad has not always been religious, but has in some point in his life turned to religion, perhaps in order not to be detached from his cultural heritage.

In Example 5, Samad explicitly states his attitude towards the two cultures:

(5) That is precisely the point! 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! (WT 145)

In this example, it can be seen what his attitude to his cultural heritage is; he sees his culture as something that defines what kind of a life he must lead, and what values to hold dear. He also rejects the values of the West, and the current culture he lives in. Samad takes up the binary opposition of tradition and modern, and openly chooses to live according to the former. In this example, it can be seen that Samad feels there is no middle way for him and he must choose either or. Hall (1999; 73) labelled this quest in finding identity the 'rebirth' of ethnicity; as an opposition to a hybrid identity, Samad excessively emphasises his cultural identity as a Bengali.

Samad's opinion towards his cultural heritage can also be seen in Example 6:

 (6) To Samad, […], tradition was culture, and culture led to roots, and these were good, these were untainted principles. (WT 193)

Samad wants to maintain his cultural heritage. As Hall (1999; 52) argues, this statement of membership in an 'imagined' community is one way of expressing one's identity. Further, saying that traditions are "untainted principles" implies that Samad wished to preserve these traditions as they are, free from the influence of Western culture.

For Samad, one defining story, to which he bases his cultural roots on, is the story of his ancestor Mangal Pande, a rebel of the Indian war of independence:

> (7) 'The story of Mangal Pande,' Samad protested, 'is no laughing matter. He is the tickle in the sneeze, he is why we are the way we are, the founder of modern India, the big historical cheese.' (WT 226)

As can be seen in Example 7, Samad sees the story of Mangal Pande as still determining the identities of Indians. If identity is the way in which we position ourselves towards the narratives of the past (Hall 1999; 227) Samad clearly sees the past as a defining factor in his identity as well.

In these examples Samad emphasises the wish to live according to his cultural traditions and the will to cherish his cultural roots. Nevertheless, Samad's identity was not constructed of his Bengali roots only. Examples of a Western influence on his identity are exhibited and discussed in the following chapter.

6.1.2. Samad's Westernism

There are some elements in Samad's discourse in which we can see an influence of the British culture. He seems to have adopted the rights which he has as s citizen of the UK, as seen in the following example:

> (8) I have an opinion. I have a right to an opinion. And I have a right to *express* that opinion. (WT 126)

This would imply at least a partial adoption of the Western culture's freedom of expression and, thus, a more free ability to convey also his identity. Since the construction of one's identity is affected by historical, political and social dimensions as well as personal ones (Hall 1999; 16), also one's place within that society affects the dimensions of identity. Samad has accepted the principles of the British society, thus expressing membership within it. In Examples 9 and 10, we can see how Samad applies some Western principles to his cultural identity:

> (9) Samad, being Samad, had employed the best of his Western pragmatism… (WT 139)

> (10)… he was thinking like a Christian again; he was saying *Can't say fairer than that* to the Creator. (WT 154)

Hence, Samad takes on some influences of the British society and combines them to his Bengali identity. This shows an inclination to bend the strict rules of his religion (discussed earlier) and to tendency to construct an identity that combines Western rationality to Bengali tradition. Still, these statements of a hybrid identity in the making have a negative implications in relation to Western influence.

Having spent decades in the UK Samad is also familiar with the English language. In the following example, he criticises the current use of the language:

> (11) 'What kind of phrase is this: "So what?" Is that English? That is not English. Only the immigrants can speak the Queen's English these days.' (WT 181)

Samad has a clear image that only the Queen's English is proper English. He does not understand this innovative use of the phrase 'So what?' and he also makes a comment on the language skills of the British. Yule (2006; 210) argues that the prestige forms of language, like standardised language, are a form a cultural power use. Yule (ibid.) also argues that the use of these prestigious forms implies a membership within a higher-status group. Since the use implies a high social status, these forms can be used as a kind of rise in the social scale within the lower social classes. In his example, Samad exhibits a better understanding and knowledge of the British culture and language than the British themselves, and thus taking a cultural power position over them saying that they do not know their own language, but, yet, at the same time accepting the power relations within the British culture which are implicated through language.

Blommaert (2005; 204) argues that different sides of identity can be foregrounded in different situations. Example 12 shows how Samad's identity differs in different situations:

> (12) Outside the doors of the Palace he was a masturbator, a bad husband, an indifferent father, with all the morals of an Anglican. (WT 141)

Blommaert (ibid.) calls these foregroundings 'relevant identities', meaning that different sides of identity become emphasised in specific situations. At his work place, the Indian restaurant Palace, Samad's cultural identity as a Bengali becomes foregrounded because of the Indian surroundings. Yet, outside his work place, as can be seen in Example 12, the influence of the British culture on his identity becomes more visible. In Example 5, Samad clearly states his desires of not wishing to be a modern man and not to belong to the British culture, but, in contrast, in this example Samad accepts that the British culture has had an effect on him. Hall (1999) states that identity is positioning and identification; in the Palace, Samad identifies himself as 'same' both with the other employees and with the cultural surrounding, but that same identification no longer applies outside the Palace. Outside the Palace, his cultural identity has always implied 'the other', but now he can see some effects of identification of the British culture in himself.

As can be seen, Samad identifies himself as both a British and a Bengali, thus creating a hybrid identity where these two sides are emphasised in specific situations. In the following chapter, I will show some examples of the negotiation of the two cultures in Samad's discourse.

6.1.3.   Negotiation

Barker (2005; 232) states that hybrid identities refer to a collection of incomplete cultural identities which can be articulated together. The two previous chapters showed Samad's twofold identity as a Bengali man with a British influence. The examples in this chapter will illustrate the effect of the negotiation of the two cultures on Samad's identity.

The relationship between the two cultures, Bengali and British, becomes rather straightforward in Samad's discourse. In the comments he explicitly makes of the British culture, it can be seen that Samad perceives it to have a negative effect on his cultural heritage as a Bengali, as in Examples 13 and 14:

> (13) I am corrupt, my sons are corrupt, we are all soon to burn in the fires of hell. (WT 192)

> (14) … how can I teach my boys anything, how can I show them the straight road when I have lost my own bearings? (WT 189)

The use of the word 'corrupt' in Example 13 implies that Samad's dedication to his culture has somehow been stained or broken, he has betrayed his devotion. Implication to religion is, of course, obvious: 'burning in the fires of hell' means that, in Samad's mind, he has sinned and needs to be punished. The sin in this occasion seems to be his yielding to the immorality of the British culture. In Example 14, it can be seen that, being detached from his cultural community, Samad's feels he has no direction in his life. As his identity is no longer anchored in his cultural traditions, Samad reaches an identity crisis whereupon his identity becomes contested for (Hall 1999; 20). This is reflected on his performance as a father; he feels that he can no longer teach his sons 'the right way of life' and in consequence, his sons too are deemed to life of sin caused by the British culture.

Further, the feeling of alienation is evident in Example 15:

> (15) She had spotted the madman in him (that is to say, the *prophet*); he felt sure she had spotted the angry man, the masturbating man, the man stranded in the desert far from his sons, the foreign man in a foreign land caught between borders… (WT 178)

Samad feels he is alienated both from his family and from his place on earth, or in other words, from his place within national community which has, hitherto, brought a feeling of belonging in his life. Now he feels he is in no-man's-land; in Britain, he is a foreigner, and, in addition, he feels detached from the strings that have been keeping him attached to his cultural heritage. As noted earlier in connection to Example 12, in Britain Samad is 'the other' thus being excluded from the majority population. He has no place where he can feel that he is 'the same' thus creating a void in his identity, as illustrated in Example 16:

> (16) '*Early will I seek thee*,' sings Hortense. '*My soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is...*' Samad watches it all and finds himself, to his surprise, unwilling to silence her. Partly because he is tired. Partly because he is old. But mostly because he would do the same, though in a different name. He knows what it is to seek. He knows the dryness. He has felt the thirst you get in a strange land – horrible, persistent – the thirst that lasts your whole life. *Can't say fairer than that,* he thinks, *can't say fairer than that*. (WT 530)

To sum up, in the examples provided, we can see that Samad identifies himself to both cultures, Bengali and British. Primarily, he identifies himself as a Bengali man with values and traditions of that culture. However, the British culture has started to have an effect on him. This change he sees as negative – somehow staining his pure cultural heritage as a Bengali. These two cultures do not, thus, coincide harmoniously within Samad; he sees the British culture as a threat to his cultural heritage. As a result, his identity as a Bengali man becomes contested for. The connections to his cultural heritage become weakened and consequently he no longer knows where he belongs – and, thus, Samad is in a stage of identity crisis.

In Example 14, we saw Samad expressing his concerns about his competence as a father. In the next chapter, I will take a closer look at one of his sons, Millat, and how his cultural identity had been portrayed in the novel.

6.2.   Millat

On Millat's part, the examples are organised, in the most part, chronologically. This is because the different sides of his identity follow rather a chronological pattern, from childhood to early adulthood. Firstly, I will present text examples of British influence on his identity. Secondly, the effect of counterculture will be examined and, lastly I will present examples of a struggle for a "unified" identity.

6.2.1. Western influence on Millat

Born and raised in London, it is only natural that the British culture can be seen in Millat's discourse. The very first signs can be seen in his outside appearance as in Example 17:

> (17) Millat bullied Alsana into purchases of red-stripe Nike, Osh-Gosh Begosh and strange jumpers that had patterns on the inside and out. (WT 134)

As can explicit verbal statements express membership in in-groups, so can external signs express a will to be associated with a specific group. For example, different religions have different external signs with which they express their conviction. In Millat's case, the use of multinational corporation's clothing which are popular among the youth implies a will to be a member of that group and not to be an outsider. Another example of the will to be a part of the British youth culture is the use of Jamaican English:

> (18) '*Cha*, man! Believe, I don't *want* to tax dat crap,' said Millat with the Jamaican accent that all kids, whatever their nationality, used to express scorn. (WT 167)

As Yule (2006; 212) noted, these youth variant of language can function both as group membership indicators and as a rebellion against the dominant culture. Here, nonetheless, the use of the variant seems to act more as a group membership indicator than a rejection. Noteworthy in Example 18 is also that the variant is used across cultural origins: this would imply a multiethnic, though still in a way unified youth group where everyone is 'the same', regardless of nationality. Millat's 'relevant identity' in this situation is the universal experience of youth, not his cultural identity as a Bengali.

Millat's love for popular culture is, yet, another indicator of his Western influenced identity. The following example is from a situation where Millat's music teacher wants to know something about Millat's musical preferences, assuming that they are Oriental:

> (19) 'For example, what kind of music do you like, Millat?'
>
> Millat thought for a moment, swung his saxophone to his side and began fingering it like a guitar. 'Bo-orn to ruuun! Da da da da daaa! Bruce Springsteen, Miss! Da da da da daaa! Baby, we were bo-orn – '
>
> 'Umm, nothing – nothing else? Something you listen to *at home*, maybe?'
>
> Millat's face fell, troubled that his answer did not seem to be the right one. […]
>
> 'Thriiiii-ller!' sang Millat, full throated, believing he had caught his father's gist. 'Thriii-ller night! Michael Jackson, Miss! Michael Jackson!'
>
> Samad put his head in his hands. […] 'OK, thank you, Millat. Thank you for sharing…that.'
>
> Millat grinned. 'No problem, Miss.' (WT 156)

In this example, Millat's music teacher addresses Millat as 'the other' according to his cultural heritage and is surprised that Millat's answers are not what she expected. Millat, on the other hand, seems to be rather proud of his Western preferences and does not even understand what is 'expected' of him. The possibility of answering the questions with an Oriental song does not cross his mind. So, on the face of it, it would seem that from the cultures, the British one is more relevant to Millat than his cultural heritage as a Bengali.

Further, Millat constructs an identity of a 'tough guy' – an identity known from Hollywood gangster movies of which Millat is a fan. Hollywood is sometimes seen as the embodiment of the Western culture. For Millat to like Hollywood movies, and further to re-enact them in his own life, indicates a strong attachment to Western values. Millat even takes on the language used in these films, as seen in Example 20:

> (20) .. there was no doubt, NONE, that he was the best of the rest, on any scale of juvenile delinquency he was a shining light of the teenage community, the DON, the BUSINESS, the DOG'S GENITALIA, a street boy, a leader of tribes. (WT 218)

Not only is he a part of the youth populace, he is the leader of it. As a fan of these Western produced films, Millat has taken the elements of these movies and applied them to his own life. As a result, his 'gangsta image' has earned his a respected position within the community. This gangster identity later evolves into a membership first of the Raggastani and then, after Millat's religious awakening, into membership in the fundamentalist Muslim movement KEVIN (the Keepers of the Eternal and Victorious Islamic Nation).

6.2.2.   Raggastani and KEVIN

The examples in the previous chapter showed Millat's preference for the Western culture. However, as he grows older, he becomes more and more aware of his 'otherness' within the British society. Consequently, he joins groups that question the order of the majority culture and the minority cultures' statuses within it. Millat's position as a leader of the youth community firstly converts into leadership of the Raggastani:

> (21) Millat's crew looked like trouble. And, at the time, a crew that looked like trouble in this particular way had a name, they were of a breed: *Raggastani.* […] manifesting itself as a kind of cultural mongrel of the last two categories [Nation Brothers, Raggas and Pakistanis]. Raggastanis spoke a strange mix of Jamaican patois, Bengali, Gujarati and English. Their ethos, their manifesto, if it could be called that, was equally a hybrid thing: Allah *featured*, but more as a collective big brother than a supreme being, a hard-as-fuck *geezer* who would fight in their corner if necessary; Kung Fu and the works of Bruce Lee were also central to the philosophy; added to this was a smattering of Black Power (as embodied by the album *Fear of a Black Planet*, Public

> Enemy); but mainly their mission was to put the Invincible back in Indian, the bad-aaaass back in Bengali, the P-funk back in Pakistani. (WT 231-232)

As can be seen in Example 21, the Raggastanis are a culturally diverse group, consisting mainly of non-British youngsters. It celebrates cultural diversity explicitly and implicitly and wants it to be acknowledged in the British society. This setting creates a rather different view to Millat's identity; as before he was, and he saw himself as, 'the same' within the youth population, now he also defines himself as 'the other'. As Yule (2006) and Mesthrie et al. (2000) noted, the use of a mixture of less prestigious language variants among Raggastanis implies rebellion against the dominant language and culture. Therefore, a transition from adopting and living within the British culture to rejecting it can be seen in Millat's identity. In other words, his identity is shifting from a British one to a Bengali one.

This 'rebirth' of ethnicity, as Hall (1999; 73) named it, can be seen in Millat's discourse in Example 22:

> (22) 'It's a fucking insult!' said Millat, spitting some gum against the window. 'We've taken it too long in this country. And now we're getting it from out own, man. Rhas clut! He's a fucking bādor, a white man's puppet.' (WT 233)

In the example, Millat expresses his opinion about Rushdie's *Satanic Verses*. Millat is aware of his culture's position in the country thus placing himself in the role of the oppressed 'other'. His opposition towards the British culture and the (poor) position of other cultures within it is a direct contrast to how his earlier identification as a British youngster. He reinforces his newly-found cultural identity as a Bengali with the use of Bengali words, and by creating an opposition between us (the Indian/Bengali, or, alternatively, immigrants) and them (the British).

Furthermore, after his religious awakening, Millat makes a transition from the Raggastanis to KEVIN. The reasons for Millat joining are listed in the below examples:

> (23) He had joined KEVIN because he loved clans (and the outfit and the bow-tie), and he loved clans at war. (WT 442)

> (24) In place of the questions of honour, sacrifice, duty, the life and death questions that came with the careful plotting of clan warfare, the very reasons Millat joined KEVIN –][…] (WT 501)

The transition to a religious fundamentalist movement is yet another protest to the threat of hybridity (Hall 1999; 73). The movement requires that all attachments to the Western culture are cut off and that the members live according to the teachings of the Qur'an. Hence, membership in the group marks a rejection of Western values thus creating an isolated cultural group. The earlier examples showed how Millat makes a division between us and

them. These examples (23, 24) suggest that Millat's love for clans would stem from a will to be a part of a group. As the majority population excludes Millat to an out-group, within KEVIN he is in the in-group.

Maybe one further reason for Millat joining KEVIN is also in his love for gangster movies; the noble principles in Example 24 sound just about the same than in his favourite movie *GoodFellas*. Millat even makes a comparison between his religion and one's of the movie's lines:

> (25) It was his most shameful secret that whenever he opened a door – a car door, a car boot, the door of KEVIN's meeting hall or the door of his house just now – the opening of *GoodFellas* ran through his head and he found this sentence rolling around in what he presumed was his subconscious:
>
> **As far back as I can remember, I always wanted to be a gangster.**
>
> […]And when he found himself doing it, he tried desperately not to, he tried to fix it, but Millat's mind was a mess and more often than not he'd end up pushing upon the door, head back, shoulders forward, Liotta style, thinking:
>
> **As far back as I can remember, I always wanted to be a Muslim.** (WT 446)

From this it is obvious that Millat has not completely abandoned his love for the Western culture, no matter how hard he tries. On the contrary, he tries to reason something that is not natural to him (i.e. his religiousness) with the rules of something that is familiar to him (the world of gangster movies). He tries to subdue his love for Western entertainment but is unable to do so. So, he combines the two – his becomes a Muslim conviction seasoned with a dash of Western popular culture. As can be noted from the examples above, Millat identifies himself with both cultures, British and Bengali. Next, I will take a look at how the two cultures are seen in relation to each other in Millat's identity.

6.2.3.   Struggle

As could be seen in the examples in the previous chapters, Millat acknowledges the inequalities within the British society and takes actions against them, but still cannot fully detach himself of the British culture. Examples 26 and 27 illustrate this in detail:

> (26) In fact, the problem with Millat's subconscious was that he was basically split level. […] For there in lay the problem. Number four. Purging oneself of the West. (WT 444)

> (27) But the fact was Millat didn't need to go back home; he stood schizophrenic, one foot in Bengal and one in Willesden. In his mind he was as much there as he was here. He did not require a passport to live in two places at once, he needed no visa to live his brother's life and his own. (WT 219)

Whereas Samad saw himself being detached from both Bengali and British cultures, Millat sees the two cultures as being somewhat on the same line: he sees himself as much British as a Bengali. It is only after he realises his limited opportunities in life that he turns against the dominant British culture.

Millat realises that the rest of the society does not see him the same way he does; as an immigant, he has limited chances in life in Britain, as seen in the example below:

> (28) He knew that he, Millat, was a Paki no matter where he came from; that he smelt of curry; had no sexual identity; took other people's jobs; or had no job and bummed off the state; or gave all the jobs to his relatives; that he could be a dentist or a shop-owner or a curry-shifter, but not a footballer or a film-maker; that he could go back to his own country; or stay here and earn his bloody keep; that he worshipped elephants and wore turbans; that no one who looked like Millat, or spoke like Millat, or felt like Millat, was ever on the news unless they had recently been murdered. In short, he knew he had no face in this country, no voice in this country, until the week before last when suddenly people like Millat were on every channel and every radio and every newspaper and they were angry, and Millat recognised that anger, though it recognised him, and it grabbed him with both hands. (WT 234)

Millat's identy is thus limited because of his cultural heritage as a Bengali. These fundamental inequalities in the British society limit Millat's possibilities for constructing an identity for himself within the society. As cultural power relations are unequally distributed among societies, the articulation of possible identities is thus also unequal (Blommaert 2005; 207). The only identities possible for Millat within the British society are lower-status ones. He is either seen negatively by the majority population or altrnatively completely invisible. He is clearly categorised as 'the other'. In his own eyes, however, Millat is the 'oppressed other'.

And, surely, as the 'oppressed other', Millat has a goal:

> (29) Because Millat was here to finish it. To revenge it. To turn the history around. He liked to think he had a different attitude, a second generation attitude. (WT 506)

> (30) He's a Pandy deep down. And there is mutiny is his blood. (WT 526)

After realising the power relations within the postcolonial British society, Millat is determined to change the order of things. In these examples he sets himself apart from the earlier immigrant generations, creating a survivor- identity for himself which he calls 'the second generation attitude'. Instead of accepting his 'oppressed other' identity posed on him by the majority population, Millat takes matters into his own hands. He wants to be the rebel, the mutineer – like his great-grandfather. According to Hall (1999; 229) formation of identity happens in the negotiation of continuance and positioning. As can be seen in this example,

Millat both aligns and separates himself from the stories of the past, therefore creating a new identity as a second generation immigrant within the British society.

7. DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to examine how the characters' identities are portrayed in the novel. In addition, its purpose was also to consider the negotiation between the two cultures within the characters' identities. Indeed, I expected to find some kind of dialogue between the characters' cultural heritage and the current host culture. The results showed just this: a negotiation, or struggle, to find an identity suitable for both cultures. However, the result somewhat differed with each of the characters.

As the examples showed, both of the characters identified themselves with both cultures. The level of identification, nevertheless, varied according to time and place. At times they emphasised their cultural heritage, yet in other situations their 'Englishness' became foregrounded. In Samad's case, his 'Englishness' was in the background as he kept a strong opposition towards it. Example 4 suggests that Samad may not have always been religious; maybe his religiousness is a protest against this Anglicisation. Millat's 'Englishness' was apparent in his childhood, but in his early adulthood his rejected, or at least tried to, the British culture and joined a fundamentalist Islam movement. Yet, the 'Englishness' stayed in the background, as with his father too. Having spent such a long time in the country, it may be impossible to detach oneself completely from the host culture.

Cultural power relation within the British society can also be seen in the characters' discourses of identity. The possibilities to construct an identity are limited as the majority population categorises them into a certain mould automatically. The immigrant identity ascribed to them by others reflects the attitudes the others have of immigrant; for the most part they are not welcome and, thus, are made feel like second-rate citizens. The indexical nature of identity on a global level can be seen in Samad: although he educated himself as an engineer in the UK, he works as a waiter because he is not able to get work as an engineer. Millat realised his limited possibilities within the British society as well. However, the two differed in that Millat decided to do construct a new identity for himself, whereas Samad only yielded to the one ascribed to him.

Despite of these differences, identities of both were described as something in transition, as a varying construct. Samad's identity is portrayed as somewhere in between the two cultures: not 'here' in the UK, but not 'there' in Bengal either. In contrast, Millat is both 'here' and 'there', in the middle of both cultures. Though somewhat hybrid identities were constructed for both characters, they found it difficult to combine the two cultures in a reasonable way. Consequently, as an opposition to the restricting British culture, both of them foregrounded their cultural heritages as Bengalis, Samad through his religion and Millat with a more radical step towards fundamentalism.

A sense of displacement is apparent in Samad's discourse. He feels that he is somehow incomplete, in search of something which is not in his reach. One can only offer speculations of what it is Samad seeks, but, in my view, it is the sense of belonging somewhere, sense of affirmation of his place in the world. A similar kind of yearning could be found in Millat's discourse as well; his willingness to be a part of a group marks his whole life from childhood to early adulthood. This uncertainty of belonging to, or being seen as 'the same', within the British society, firstly drove him to the Raggastanis and then to KEVIN. As his identity as a British youngster and, after, as a Bengali is challenged, he creates a new identity for himself - one that will change his position within the British society. According to Hall (1999) it is just this sense of belonging to and preserving traditions of a culture that fosters a membership with in it. This supports Hall's (1999) and Blommaert's (2005) view that identity is not an essence, it is a process which is never fully complete. The effect of the two clashing cultural norms in the characters' identities results into hybrid identities which still seek their place within those societies. Hall (1999) addressed this notion of displacement when stating that colonised subjects are always 'somewhere else' than were they actually are.

Indeed, the lack of belonging was also in common in the characters' discourses; as Launimaa (2008) argues in his thesis, it is this sense of belonging to a specific place in earth that is challenged in the novel. The characters exhibited behaviour that could be, in Hall's (1999) terms, labelled as a 'rebirth' of ethnicity: as a rebellion towards globalisation, they began to emphasise their cultural backgrounds. Because they were not able to construct an intact identity where the two cultures could live harmoniously side by side, they chose, perhaps unwillingly, to articulate an identity that seems coherent to them – that is, a Bengali identity. Being excluded from the majority British society, thus excluding them also of belonging to

that culture, triggered a sense of yearning, a will to be a part of a group that led to the decisions made by the characters.

Nevertheless, no matter how illuminating the result of this thesis may be, one cannot make broad generalisations of the results. As the analysis consisted of only two of the novel's chapters and thus only part of the characters discourse, the results can only show a direction towards final conclusions. Further, culture is just one dimension of one's identity – examining other dimensions could bring a wider understanding of the characters' identities – to the cultural aspect as well. That is to say, cultural identity is not a vacuum; the different roles of identity (for example the role as a father or professional identity) are all interconnected and have an influence on each other. In this way, the point of view of this analysis is rather narrow, and further research needs to be done on the issue.

In addition, the concepts of culture and identity are such vast ones that one can only scratch the surface in the limited scope prescribed for a Bachelor's thesis. Hence, some short-cuts had to be taken in defining these concepts, and consequently also the analysis is of a narrow scope. With further research, identity and culture could be defined more thoroughly which would also enable a more comprehensive analysis of the characters' identities.

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