

**“We reportin you for racism, man, you going down”:** Representing  
**Male Youth in contemporary British Asian novels.**

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## Abstract

This thesis examines the debut novels of three contemporary British Asian authors and identifies the way they can be differentiated from earlier texts which consider Indian identity. I argue that these texts act as a repudiation of Rudyard Kipling's *Kim* (1901), as well as of many other early twenty-first-century novels concerning minority ethnicity communities in London. The chapters of this thesis follow a trajectory of characterisations in these novels which indicates an increasing demand for British Asian identity to be freed from mainstream audiences' desire for texts which depict the ethnic subject as an exotic Other.

In my examination of these texts I employ a methodology which works from a postcolonial theoretical basis, but I combine this analysis with a new formalist approach. Understandings of the ethnic subject produced by theories of hybridity and mimicry, particularly those theories articulated by Homi K. Bhabha, have begun a process of emancipation of this subject from essentialist and stereotypical depictions. But I argue that in some cases these approaches have themselves led to characterisations that are prone to predictable and restricting tropes and motifs. In my readings of Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990), Gautam Malkani's *Londonstani* (2006) and Nirpal Singh Dhaliwal's *Tourism* (2006), paratext and metatext are closely examined to reveal complex and ambivalent notions of ethnic identity. I argue that the formal techniques used by the contemporary authors examined here expose a tendency towards persistent and insidious racism in depictions of British Asians, depictions which have often been produced by minority ethnic authors themselves.

The representations of British Asian youth produced by Kureishi, Malkani and Dhaliwal either employ parody as an indication of the redundancy of stereotype in providing authentic portrayals of the ethnic subject, or rely on what are often confronting and offensive characterisations, which expose the mainstream reader's expectation of depictions of an assimilatory and worthy migrant figure. These novels mark a new direction in British Asian fiction, one in which there is a demand for portrayals that reject the exoticisation and essentialisation of the migrant figure, and also relate the inherent complexity and contradiction in writing ethnic minority characters. This demand is part of a broader social context in which gender, sexuality and class might be considered just as influential on social mobility as is ethnicity, and in which minority communities are empowered to assert their right to contribute to an ongoing redefining of Britishness.

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## Introduction

In Nirpal Singh Dhaliwal's debut novel *Tourism* (2006), protagonist Puppy describes hip London suburb Notting Hill as 'a miscegenist heaven: white women clung to well-wrought ethnic studs who pushed tricycle pushchairs laden with fat brown babies; demure young white men guided Asian girlfriends through stalls selling hookahs, avant-garde sneakers and sun-dried tomatoes' (Dhaliwal, *Tourism* 52). Puppy's somewhat cynical observations go to the heart of what I explore in this thesis. In examining the depiction of identity in contemporary British Asian literature, I identify the exoticisation and commodification of ethnicity, and the methods that some British Asian authors are employing in order to bring this to light. I trace the changing approach of British Asian authors who have portrayed young British Asian men, beginning with Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990), and then focusing on Dhaliwal's *Tourism*, as well as Gautam Malkani's *Londonstani* (2006). In order to set a foundation for this analysis I begin by examining Rudyard Kipling's depiction of Indianness in *Kim* (1901), and consider the way Kureishi rejects Kipling's characterisations and gives a voice to those who are not white. All four of these novels present identity as performance, and portray characters that choose elements from multiple cultural influences in order to construct their personas. While Kipling can only permit the white Kim to successfully inhabit hybridity, Kureishi, Malkani and Dhaliwal demonstrate the empowering, complex and sometimes flawed nature of the British Asian character as a culturally hybrid subject. These latter authors acknowledge the fetishisation of the ethnic minority protagonist. They employ irony and pastiche in their depictions of ethnicity, using formal devices to nudge the audience towards recognition of the way narratives of ethnicity often reinforce stereotype. *The Buddha of Suburbia*, and then sixteen years later, *Londonstani* and *Tourism*, alert their readers to the changing but persistently racist essentialisation of ethnicity in novels. These authors present new approaches to the depiction of ethnicity, and in doing so mark the old ways as redundant.

The surprising portrayals of British Indians in Kureishi, Malkani and Dhaliwal's novels were all unorthodox for their time. However, despite the innovative approaches of their authors, many readings of these novels have been made through established theoretical approaches of identity and postcolonial theory (on *The Buddha of Suburbia* see Schoene 1998, Ranasinha 2002; on *Londonstani* see Paganoni 2008, Liao 2015; on *Tourism* see Albertazzi). And when form has been considered it has often been through a consideration of these novels' potential investment in the genre of *Bildungsroman*, itself a traditionally Western genre. While the postcolonial approaches have provided some insight into the ways the authors have attempted to emancipate their characters

from stereotype, I argue that they do not allow for a more complex understanding of the ambivalent and unstable positioning of British Asian characterisation in contemporary novels. Consequently, this thesis approaches British Asian novels from a new perspective, one which builds on emerging work which 'insists on the materiality of the text as an object, a commodity, and an artifact, and reads the 'whole beast' from snout to tail: cover to cover, peritext and paratext' (Whitlock 6). Here I combine postcolonial approaches of hybridity and mimicry with new formalism, and in doing so illuminate the inadequacy of contemporary British Asian novels which provide narrow formulations of the ethnic subject. New Formalism has been described as a way of 'bring[ing] together structuralist technique and the historical concerns of critical theory from the last 50 years' (Felluga 195). Following the sentiment of Ellen Rooney, Susan Wolfson claims that reading for form 'is not the naive counterpart of theory but its interlocutor, its dark interpreter, its illuminating ally' (Wolfson 16). In my examination of the novels included here I employ formalism as an aid in interpretation, not independent from postcolonial theory, but working alongside it to enhance readings. In closely reading these texts, and placing emphasis on their formal strategies, I reveal the way that paratext and metatext provide illuminating perspectives on the societal forces that influence the formulation of identity in contemporary British Asian novels.

While paratextual or metafictional analysis is paramount in this thesis, Kipling's *Kim*, with its *Bildungsroman* structure, is also suited to a new formalist approach. The *Bildungsroman* genre provides an intertextual point of comparison for these novels, with each of them following a *Bildungsroman* form to varying extents. In Kipling's novel *Kim* formal aspects reflect *Bildungsroman* conventions as described by Franco Moretti: an ethnically white British boy leaves his adopted home of Lahore on a journey of discovery in which he finds a '*sense of belonging to a wider community*' which provides the '*comfort of civilisation*' (Moretti 19, 16, Moretti's italics). Through the novel *Kim* is educated in what it means to be British and he finds a way to synthesise this with his desire for the more traditionally Indian way of life with which he has grown up. Although his future is left unclear at the end of the novel, he has found a '*serene and trustful feeling-at-home*' and resolution of his sense of self (Moretti 23). Moretti claims that '*capitalist rationality cannot generate Bildung,*' suggesting that for Kureishi, Malkani and Dhaliwal's respective protagonists, Karim, Jas and Puppy, resolution is unlikely because they exist as part of a society in which capitalist forces perpetually demand further development and productive potential (26). *Kim* too is subject to the forces of capitalism and is a part of the capitalist endeavour that is colonialism, but he is not so overtly concerned with the consuming of products as a marker of his social mobility as are the other protagonists discussed here. While the closing pages of the three latter novels do explore a

tentative sense of resolution, the self-conscious acknowledgement of their status as postcolonial artefacts throughout the texts emphasises the continued mainstream consumption of the ethnic subject. In their varying resemblances to the traditional *Bildungsroman* form, these four novels evince a changing approach to the depiction of the ethnic subject, a subject that has been well-mined in the years since the publication of *The Buddha of Suburbia*.

*Kim* provides an important starting point for the analysis I undertake in this thesis. It might be considered a foundation to which the later novels I examine here react. This does not mean that Kipling's novel is an originary model of which the others are simply corruptions. Rather, these later authors demonstrate their dissatisfaction with Kipling's narrative of race, and provide their own unique versions. Kureishi provided one of the earliest British Asian reactions to Kipling's formulation of the ethnic subject, and many more were to follow. In order to set the scene which evolved following the success of Kureishi's debut and into which *Londonstani* and *Tourism* were published, I explore the broader publishing context surrounding these later texts, and the hunger for insight into London's minority communities, as evidenced by the large sales of novels such as Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* (1999) and Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* (2003). These novels have been read as attempting to '(re)define [the British] space as a hybrid location that is an inherent part of British contemporary society,' something which might be considered a positive development which 'challenge[s] the view of a homogenous British society' (Fernández 144). However, the success of these novels in reaching such a large audience has been identified by some as a result of their predictably essentialised portrayals of various ethnic groups, portrayals which might meet readers' expectations, but which fail to challenge the sometimes problematic preconceptions about minorities. They are part of a proliferation of writing by authors of minority descent during the 1990s and early 2000s, which explored the experience of growing up as part of a minority culture in a sometimes hostile, but often ultimately accepting, British society. Authors such as Meera Syal, Atima Srivastava, and Nikita Lalwani wrote novels that examined the phenomenon of inbetweenness and featured a young protagonist torn between the culture and customs of their parents and those of white British society. The British Asian novel was becoming a recognisable and marketable product. As Bourdieu observes, the 'enterprise moves closer to the "commercial" pole the more directly or completely the products it offers on the market respond to a *pre-existing demand*, and *in pre-established forms*' (142, Bourdieu's italics). The public developed a preconceived idea of what the British Asian novel consisted of – both in terms of the content and the book's cover – and these ideas were exploited by publishers. In contrast *Londonstani* and *Tourism* present surprising and often unlikeable versions of British Asianness, providing an opportunity for readers to consider their expectations concerning the

portrayal of British Asian characters. As products which might themselves capitalise on the contemporary hunger for tales of British Asian minorities, these novels indicate through prolific metafictional and paratextual intimations, the narrow conventions of the genre they might have belonged to, but whose rulebook they transform.

This argument builds upon critical work that has begun to question how the British Asian novel depicts its subjects and has criticised the unusually optimistic outcomes that some examples offered. *Brick Lane* does depict ethnic tensions in London's Tower Hamlets, however, the novel ends with protagonist Nazneen being told, on what might be considered a rather sanguine note, "This is England [...] You can do whatever you like" (Ali 492). Michael Perfect notes that, '*White Teeth* and *Brick Lane* could be accused of being somewhat teleological, seeming to announce that twenty-first-century London is a city in which multiculturalism has already *happened*' (152). As Daniel Soar observes, Smith's 'multicultural, teeming Willesden [the north-west London suburb in which the novel is set] is its own kind of fantasy' (30). Caryl Phillips recognises a tension in *White Teeth* that the characters try hard to hide: '*White Teeth* is full of false smiles and contrived faces, masks that are repeatedly donned in order to better hide the pain' (np). Smith herself is aware of the problematics involved in depicting minority communities: "I was expected to be some expert on multicultural affairs, as if multiculturalism is a genre of fiction or something, whereas it's just a fact of life – like there are people of different races on the planet" (Smith in Hattenstone np). She does acknowledge latent racism when she has an old lady on a bus remark that, "If you ask me [...] they should all go back to their own..." (163). Smith unsettles the power of this racism by relegating it to the bus floor with the rubbish: 'this, the oldest sentence in the world, found itself stifled by the ringing of bells and the stamping of feet, until it retreated under the seats with the chewing gum,' but there remains an underlying lack of resolution in the 'retreat' of this racist comment (Smith, *White Teeth* 163).

Other critics are concerned that depictions such as those in *White Teeth* and Syal's *Anita and Me* (1996) capitalise too readily on the consumer value of comic appeal. Wachinger claims that, '*White Teeth* showed that a writing career (and a fortune) can still be made with posed in-betweeness' with Smith's characters engaging 'in a plethora of burlesque' (196, 195). The danger is that Smith's humorous presentation of Indian and Afro-Caribbean characters risks perpetuating the reduction of ethnic minority characters to condescending caricature. Rajeev Balasubramanyam contends that, '[i]n multiculturalist propagandas, the cultural habits of black and brown people are frequently satirised, using caricature and stereotype in a light, amusing way' ('Rhetoric of Multiculturalism' 36).

Wachinger and Balasubramanyam reject the 'amusing comedy of manners,' as portrayed in novels such as *White Teeth* and *Anita and Me*, and refuse the suggestion that we should accept it as an improvement from a time when 'images of black and brown people are no longer as explicitly derogatory' (Balasubramanyam, 'Rhetoric of Multiculturalism' 36). Balasubramanyam observes that 'laughter arises because Asian or Black culture is presented as being inherently risible, and this is the same technique used in the explicitly racist comedies of the seventies and eighties, except that today, the actors or writers are themselves black and brown ('Rhetoric of Multiculturalism' 37). He takes a stand against British Asian authors who themselves perpetuate the reduction of characters from minority backgrounds. In their respective debut novels, Malkani and Dhaliwal can be read as similarly exposing this tendency and in doing so they mark a new development in British Asian fiction, one which exposes the latent racial tension present in many of the tropes which earlier examples by minority authors had grown to rely on.

Kureishi, Malkani and Dhaliwal can be seen to speak back to the racism inherent in both earlier versions of Indianness, such as that in *Kim*, and to more assimilatory tales of British Asian cultures, many of which can be read as offering oversimplified and unsatisfactory resolutions of racial instability and tension. The characterisations in *The Buddha of Suburbia*, *Londonstani* and *Tourism* are a rebuttal of those found in novels such as Syal's *Anita and Me*, and Srivastava's *Transmission* (1992) and *Looking For Maya* (1999), all of which employ humour and a gentle mocking of cultural habits. And they also reject the journey towards cross-cultural mixing and assimilation that are found in novels such as *White Teeth* (1999) and *Brick Lane* (2003). Malkani and Dhaliwal's characters are second-generation Londoners, not struggling with their cultural positioning as does Kureishi's Karim in 1970s suburbia, but rather dealing with the racism inherent in London society of the early 2000s, which still relies on essentialised versions of ethnicity and in which ethnicity is persistently considered a commodity. Malkani's *Londonstani* and Dhaliwal's *Tourism* are unsettling because they portray an unprecedented dissatisfaction with British society and a forthright and derisive attitude towards gaining equality. Kureishi's Karim challenges stereotypes in that he is a bisexual, drug-taking, school drop-out who wanders London with no fixed abode. In *Londonstani* this challenge to stereotype is taken further as members of the 'desi' crew are represented as racist, materialistic and hypermasculine, and showing little respect for British institutions and traditions. And Dhaliwal's Puppy is equally as subversive of the earlier British Asian archetype of the assimilated 'good immigrant,' visiting prostitutes, deliberately flunking his A-levels and existing on a diet of alcohol and drugs supplied by his wealthy white girlfriend.

*Londonstani* and *Tourism* present what are often provocative, and sometimes shocking, depictions of young British Asian men. *Londonstani's* gang of middle-class wannabe gangsters projects race and class prejudice, judging according to the way others dress and speak and the types of cars and mobile phones they own. They actively encourage tensions between ethnic groups and adhere to a narrow and, some might say, shallow version of 'desiness'. 'Desi', a term used by many South Asians, especially those in the diaspora, to describe themselves, derives from the Sanskrit word for land or country, and is usually translated to mean 'countryman'. However, for gang leader Hardjit, it appears that desiness is determined by style and swagger, by one's capacity to act in the consumer market and by outward symbols of adherence to religious practice. In *Tourism* discrimination according to race and class is equally present. Dhaliwal's British-Punjabi protagonist identifies the positions of privilege enjoyed by the wealthy and expresses vitriolic resentment for those who take this privilege for granted, seeing it as his right to claim 'a slice of Whitey's pie' (Dhaliwal, *Tourism* 236). Meanwhile, he equally rejects the lifestyle of working-class white Londoners who he believes are 'stupid and useless' (Dhaliwal, *Tourism* 115). Misogynistic attitudes are adopted alarmingly frequently by the young men in both of these novels. Women are perceived by these characters in terms of their appearance, and often as a means to prove virility or to gain social position. Hypermasculinity is revered by many of these British Asian characters, as they aim to dismantle the 'binary of the ultra-masculine white man and the effeminate native man' constructed by colonial discourse (Nayar 59). While Malkani and Dhaliwal might have been expected to contribute to what Sara Upstone observes some have labelled 'the glorious future of black British fiction,' in fact they break with convention in that their characters are largely unappealing and offensive ("Same Old, Same Old" 336). However, the disagreeable nature of these characters is potentially a powerful device in unsettling preconceived notions of ethnicity. Mark Stein has described novels such as *The Buddha of Suburbia* as novels of transformation which have 'a dual function: [they are] about the formation of [their] protagonists as well as the transformation of British society and cultural institutions' (22). *Londonstani* and *Tourism* mark a next stage in this transformation, building on the foundation set by Kureishi in refuting received notions of ethnicity, destabilising white narratives about minority communities, and providing an opportunity for British Asian characterisations to be interrogated.

Homi K Bhabha's groundbreaking work on mimicry and hybridity has informed my readings of the novels examined in this thesis, but I complicate these readings by examining the way that authorial paratext and metatext critique these approaches' emancipatory claims. Considering the emphasis on role play and performance in these four novels, theories of mimicry are useful in illuminating how

the characters' performances might be read. For Bhabha, mimicry signifies what is 'almost the same, *but not quite*' – where in its subtle differences from the original, mimicry of that original draws attention to its absurdity or injustice (123, Bhabha's italics). Mimicry becomes, as Bhabha describes, 'at once resemblance and menace' (123). This same formulation can be identified when pastiche is employed. According to Richard Dyer an author 'selects a number of traits and makes them the basis of the pastiche,' as Dhaliwal does when he creates a mother figure that is based on the essentialised characteristics that are most often present in stereotyped versions of the Indian matriarch (56). Dhaliwal's version of the Indian Other is so exaggerated that it is clear that he is creating, 'a kind of imitation that you are meant to know is an imitation' – one way in which Dyer defines pastiche (1). The subtle (or in the case of *Tourism* and *Londonstani*, often not so subtle) differences between the mimicked and the mimicker inform the reader that they 'are meant to know'. The imitation in all of the texts analysed in this thesis is there to highlight the untruth of that which is imitated. In Bhabha's words, the mimicked identity becomes 'rupture[d]' as its implausibility is exposed (123).

The concept of hybrid postcolonial identities is reflected in the multiple cultural influences the authors discussed here choose to depict in their characters. When Bhabha discusses hybridity, he emphasises the fluidity that is essential to the evolution of new identities, and the '*negotiation of contradictory and antagonistic instances*' (25). So, for example, the boys in *Londonstani* refuse to display solely traditional 'Indian' or 'British' markers of identity choosing to also incorporate influences from hip hop culture and from the video clips they watch on MTV Base. Just like Kureishi's Karim, Hardjit and his crew use their hybrid identities as a way of asserting themselves against definitions that others might make of them. Bhabha describes this process as 'the historical movement of hybridity as camouflage, as a contesting, antagonistic agency' (277). The boys employ hybridity in their claiming of their own type of Britishness. But, as is seen in *Londonstani*, hybridity is sometimes employed at a superficial level in clothing and other consumer goods, while deeper cultural beliefs follow more traditional lines.

Amar Acheraïou offers a critique of hybridity, reminding us of the limitations of relying on a singular theoretical approach. He claims that while, 'hybridity represents a crucial emancipatory tool releasing the representations of identity as well as culture from the assumptions of purity and supremacy that fuel colonialist, nationalist, and essentialist discourses,' there is a risk that 'hybridity is loaded with the unrealistic expectation of providing "utopianism"' (5-6, 6). In resting so heavily on hybridity as a counter to binaries of black and white, factors such as wealth and class, which also

influence identity, risk being neglected. Aijaz Ahmad also questions Bhabha's 'celebration of cultural hybridity,' and is concerned that 'in Bhabha's writing, the postcolonial who has access to such monumental and global pleasures is remarkably free of gender, class, identifiable political location' ('Politics' 13). Ella Shohat recognises that, '[i]t is largely diasporic Third World intellectuals in the First World, hybrids themselves, not coincidentally, who elaborate a framework which situates the Third World intellectual within a multiplicity of cultural positionalities and perspectives' (108). Shohat's intellectuals represent a privileged minority and are not reflective of the larger migrant community. For Vivek Chibber, postcolonial studies has, 'stepped quite consciously into the vacuum left by the decline of Marxism in both the industrialized West and its satellites,' leading to the neglect of examinations of the relationships between class, wealth and power (2). This all suggests that hybridity is not an appropriate or sufficient approach with which to describe the characteristics or experiences of the broad and heterogeneous diasporic communities which exist in the Western world. And such a conclusion is consolidated by the unstable and, at times, comical portrayals of hybridity in *Londonstani* and *Tourism*.

In Kureishi, Malkani and Dhaliwal's novels, the adoption of hybrid identities makes transition across social boundaries somewhat available to their protagonists; however, it does not remove all barriers to their social mobility. Malkani and Dhaliwal's characters defend narrow and shallow versions of ethnicity, which may contain some elements of hybridity but do not do so in a manner that makes for a congenial co-existence of minorities. In this way *Londonstani* and *Tourism* respond emphatically to the hailing of hybridity as a way of emancipating the migrant from essentialist notions of identity. Identities are portrayed in these novels not as innate and 'mysterious inner essences,' but instead '*causal explanations* of our social locations in a world that is shaped by such locations, by the way they are distributed and hierarchically organised' (Alcoff and Mohanty 6). These novels reflect the way that capitalism 'serves [...] as the structuring principle of global relations' (Dirlik 54). What separates Malkani and Dhaliwal from many earlier British Asian authors is that they employ literary devices in order to highlight the vulnerability of minority texts to the demands of a capitalist society which requires that ethnicity be described in particular ways. *Londonstani* and *Tourism* are examples of literature in which formal aspects of the novel are particularly illuminating in the formulation of broader and socially progressive readings. Layering theories of hybridity and mimicry with a close reading of these texts exposes a new direction in British Asian writing, one which rejects the demand for an exotic Other, and highlights the improbability of depicting what might be considered an authentic British Asian identity.

Wolfgang Funk suggests that ‘a foregrounding of formal aspects is an indispensable procedure for any cultural and literary analysis’ (64). I argue that for the novels examined in this thesis, formal analysis illuminates the critique they make of the British Asian novel. Caroline Levine asks whether a critic, on approaching a literary text, might ‘keep [their] formalism and [their] historicism analytically separate’ (15). I suggest that Levine’s consideration of the separation of the two approaches highlights the ways in which an analysis of form is often neglected, leading to less illuminating readings of novels, and I argue that a collaboration of the theoretical and the formal might be a fruitful endeavour in uncovering the complexity of the novels I examine here. Levine argues for a broad definition of form as something which ‘indicates an arrangement of elements— an ordering, patterning, or shaping,’ claiming that ‘hierarchies structure even the most politically progressive writing in literary studies, including postcolonial, Marxist, and feminist criticism’ (15-16; Levine after Bruce Robbins 94). Accepting this, the approach of this thesis is ‘not always to find a way beyond hierarchies, but to figure out how to work productively with them’ (Levine 94). In the varied senses by which Levine defines form, I claim that the formal devices within *The Buddha of Suburbia*, *Londonstani* and *Tourism*, such as their meta- and paratexts, and their self-consciousness as post-colonial texts, allows one to read the novels as a critique of hegemonic social forms, such as the exoticisation of ethnicity (which indicates a social hierarchy of consumer over consumed), and the privileging and assumed authority of white narratives.

The examination in this thesis of the formal aspects of the British Asian novel builds, in part, on the innovative work done by Mark Stein on humour in texts concerning minority communities, and also on the black *Bildungsroman*. In *Black British Literature: Novels of Transformation* (2004), Stein considers *The Buddha of Suburbia* as well as novels such as Syal’s *Anita and Me* and Diran Adebayo’s *Some Kind of Black* (1996) as ‘novels of transformation,’ a genre which he views as developing out of the *Bildungsroman* form but in which a protagonist might be more productive in influencing the society around them (31). Stein suggests that such novels of transformation ‘describe and purvey the transformation, the reformation, the repeated coming of age of British cultures under the influence of what I call “outsiders within”’ (36). In this way, novels such as *The Buddha of Suburbia* provoke a dialogical relationship with the society within which they are published: in depicting change in the perception of ethnic minorities, they have the potential to change real life situations. Stein examines the way that form, and the distortion of traditional form, is able to make a political critique. He goes so far as to see this as ‘using, if not hijacking, the novel as a machine of cultural representation and reproduction’ (42). His work establishes a basis on which this thesis expands –

that is, that postcolonial readings of contemporary minority-authored novels can be enhanced and deepened by an examination of those novels' structural devices.

In Stein and Susanne Reichl's collection of essays *Cheeky Fictions: Laughter and the Postcolonial* (2005), Helga Ramsey-Kurz observes the way humour has been employed by minority writers in order to avoid narratives which might be read as depicting an ungrateful migrant: 'humour provides a most effective means of forestalling the censoring without which, postcolonial writers know, their demonstrative siding with malcontent and rebellious elements of their societies might be considered offensive or even dangerous'(74). *Tourism* is one novel that might well have caused offense to some because it refuses to hide much of its rebellion behind humour (although, as this thesis highlights, it instead employs other formal strategies which deflect some of this rebellion). Ramsey-Kurz also observes that:

In typically postmodern defiance of the formal virtue of generic purity, they endorse a method of shifting freely and abruptly between diametrically opposed styles and genres, of moving unexpectedly from comedy to melodrama or from comedy to tragedy, thereby assaulting their texts' logic. (79)

While Ramsey-Kurz refers to texts which consider Islamic fundamentalism through a (sometimes) comedic frame, her observation could easily apply to the twist endings and juxtapositioning of violence and humour in *Londonstani*. She 'posit[s] humour both as a viable political stance and as powerful, if not even as the only antidote to dogma' and observes that humour is employed by the authors to avoid both a 'stereotyped interpretation' and an interpretation which would likely 'constrict the narratives' scope to a single trajectory' (85). So the employment of humour, a formal device, can lead to ambiguous and multiple interpretations of postcolonial texts, which question more conventional readings. In the Introduction to *Cheeky Fictions*, Reichl and Stein claim that their book 'not only works towards closing some methodological and conceptual gaps; it also adds new facets to postcolonial studies and humour theory' (3). It is my intention that this thesis make a similar contribution to postcolonial studies, in that it brings under the spotlight the potential of new formalist readings to broaden examinations of minority texts.

According to Dirlik, postcolonial theory assumes as its goal 'the abolition of all distinctions between centre and periphery, and all other "binarisms" that are allegedly a legacy of colonial(ist) ways of thinking,' (52). The examination contained in the following chapters demonstrates that a focus on

formalism can become part of such a postcolonial approach, complicating postcolonial readings, and indicating the complex nature of the ways in which ethnicity is depicted. According to Marjorie Levinson, a new formalist approach aims to 'reinstat[e] close reading both at the curricular center of our discipline and as the opening move, preliminary to any kind of critical consideration' (560). W.J.T. Mitchell sees a formalist approach as 'insist[ing] on paying attention to a way of being in the path rather than to where the path leads' (324). I would say of *Londonstani* and *Tourism* that paying attention to the nature of the path is imperative in reading its final destination. I attempt to employ a 'multilayered and integrative responsiveness to every element of the textual dimension,' which allows close analysis of the text to complicate the perspective provided by postcolonial theory (Levinson 560). My reading of the novels therefore reveals that:

complexity (a leitmotif throughout new formalism), which is attributed to the artwork and recoverable only through a learned submission to its myriad textual prompts, explains the deep challenge that the artwork poses to ideology, or to the flattening, routinizing, absorptive effects associated with ideological regimes. (Levinson 560)

*Londonstani* and *Tourism* can be read as not entirely rejecting, but rather as complicating the claimed emancipatory role of notions such as hybridity. Mitchell holds the 'conviction that a commitment to form is also finally a commitment to emancipatory, progressive political practices united with a scrupulous attention to ethical means' (324). I see an attention to form as an approach which allows for readings of *Londonstani* and *Tourism* which go beyond the assessment of minority characters as stable and reliable informants about diasporic cultures.

The employment of new formalism is most evident in this thesis in my focus on paratext and metatext as devices which alter readings of *Londonstani* and *Tourism*. Gerard Genette defines paratext such as that offered by Malkani and Dhaliwal as constituting:

a zone between text and off-text, a zone not only of transition but also of transaction: a privileged place of pragmatics and strategy, of an influence on the public, an influence that – whether well or poorly understood and achieved – is at the service of a better reception for the text and a more pertinent reading of it (more pertinent, of course, in the eyes of the author and his allies). (2)

Both authors are keen for their novels to be understood in particular ways; they disregard the fact that many readers might prefer to read without a commentary. Dhaliwal and Malkani both ignore 'the presumption of noncompetence, prohibiting authorial interpretation' and feel obliged to convey to the reader the ways in which they believe their respective texts should be read (Genette 369). Admittedly, and according to Genette, because the authors' commentary is 'materially independent of the text', it is 'offered but not imposed: the text and its paratext go their separate ways, and the reader of the former is not under any obligation to deal with the latter' (370). But the emphatic tone of Malkani and Dhaliwal's commentary on their texts and on social issues surrounding these texts, makes them, once read, hard to ignore especially considering these authors' presence as journalists in prominent British newspapers. Their paratexts contribute to what Matt Cohen would term a 'publication event,' which he defines as 'an embodied act of information exchange [...] which presumes that its participants are aware that an act of communication is intended' (7). Cohen's context is seventeenth-century New England, but when he identifies the 'complex narrative and political matrices of literature,' which contribute to reception of that literature, he could just as easily be talking about twenty-first-century Britain. I take Cohen's understanding of publication as a site at which 'each communication was understood as interpretable both at the level of a particular physical instantiation and in terms of its relation to simultaneous and past representations in other media,' and transfer it to a new context (7). In the case of the contemporary novels examined here, the publication event includes paratexts as well as the metatextual acknowledgement of other postcolonial texts, and of a capitalist system which considers Other as a product in the marketplace. An acknowledgement of publication as merely one part of a much bigger 'event' allows for broader understanding of the political implications of the text itself.

Unlike many of the British Asian authors who went before them, Malkani and Dhaliwal claim the authenticity of their portrayals of ethnicity via sources that are readily accessible in their twenty-first-century context, such as websites and newspaper articles. These two authors comment on the way their own novels might be read. They also use paratext as a way of performing 'self-construction and critique, and to explore the significance of authorship itself' (Brouillette, *Postcolonial Writers 2*). In aligning themselves with particular institutions or disassociating themselves from other authors, Malkani and Dhaliwal claim a superior ability to depict true and gritty pictures of ethnicity. Rather than the paratexts being concerned with, as Sarah Ilott suggests, 'creating an image that is worthy of subcultural capital,' I read them as seeking to assure the reader of the potential insight *by outsiders* into the particular British Asian subculture that each of their novels offers (103). As Sarah Brouillette observes, Malkani employs paratextual sources in order to

justify his 'fictional encapsulation of his ethnographic research on the interconnections between ethnicity and masculinity in the Desi community' ('Creative Class' 3). Malkani informs the reader on his website, and in a newspaper article, that his research was conducted while he attended Cambridge University as an undergraduate and was completing a dissertation on ethnicity as a proxy for 'the reassertion of masculinity' ('Mixing and Matching' np). In doing so he attaches himself to an 'established unit of meaning,' implying that the reader can expect a high quality, sagacious and authoritative text (Malkani, 'About Londonstani' np; Gray 29). Some of Dhaliwal's newspaper columns allude to his working-class upbringing, a testament to his claimed ability to write authentic depictions of a gritty urban existence. He describes his schooling in 'an all-boys comprehensive school in Ealing [where] the pupils were overwhelmingly black and Asian' ('My week' np; 'Wet white liberals' 5). In this way Dhaliwal implies the status of his novel as 'real' or as providing an authoritative portrayal of minority groups in London. In these ways both authors represent their novels as portraying a more legitimate-because-authentic picture of young British Asian men than do those authors who rely on narratives in which assimilation neatly overcomes racial or ethnic tension, or inequity.

Rather than suffering the 'anxiety' any writer might suffer because '[a]s their books reach a variety of audiences with conflicting tendencies and interests, writers are unable to determine how exactly the attachment between authorial persona and text is constructed or received,' Malkani and Dhaliwal make concerted efforts to shape perceptions about their relationships with their novels (Brouillette, *Postcolonial Writers* 4). While their paratexts don't always provide stable or consistent messages about how they should be considered in relation to their texts, and sometimes even amplify the ambiguity portrayed within their novels, these writers show no hesitation in making their presence felt as authors seeking a voice in the literary marketplace. We might ask of authors such as Kureishi, Malkani and Dhaliwal: 'how do postcolonial 'writers/thinkers' establish themselves as gatekeepers to any presumed authentic access, or, alternately, disavow the very requirement that they take on such roles?' (Brouillette, *Postcolonial Writers* 25). For Malkani and Dhaliwal there is no disavowal of such roles; rather, they seem to embrace opportunities to act as gatekeepers. Brouillette observes of authors that their:

gestures of selfconsciousness, spanning the spectrum from abject self-critique to triumphant self-authorization, arise in market conditions that are defined by significant political strain. It is precisely such conditions that make declarations of self-awareness so pressing, but also largely inadequate, or at least problematic. (*Postcolonial Writers* 4-5)

The status of the postcolonial novel as a valuable consumer product, more valuable because of its author's perceived exoticness, mean that the author's presence in the public sphere can contribute greatly to way their novel is perceived. But despite the demands placed on them to demonstrate their innate exoticness and ability to tell authentic tales of ethnicity, what they say in that public sphere is always subject to questioning and critique, largely by a metropolitan audience. Malkani and Dhaliwal present ambiguous messages in their paratexts, and these messages sometimes contradict the content of their novels. A new formalist analysis is indispensable in revealing the multiple contradictions present in these authors' self-conscious positioning.

Somewhat paradoxically Dhaliwal couples his paratextual attempts to communicate the authenticity of his novel with a persistent metatextual drawing of attention to its status as a text – a text which might prove untrustworthy. Patricia Waugh defines a metatext as 'fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact' (2). Dhaliwal creates instability as *Tourism* is presented as consisting of both a reliable version of the real life of a specific young British Asian Londoner, alongside a metatext which constantly reminds the audience of its novelistic, and therefore potentially unreal, nature. Funk describes the way that:

reconstructive texts use the formal technique of metareference, which can be imagined as tangling and invalidating traditional hierarchies within a given text, to generate ontological and epistemological paradoxes that are irresolvable within the logic of the text itself.

These paradoxes challenge and require the reader's response and responsibility to recreate a coherent act of literary communication. (6)

Funk describes a dynamic in which the reader must pay an attention to form in order to identify and reformulate metatextual references so that those references might reveal something meaningful. I argue that *Tourism* does exactly as Funk describes: in its self-conscious acknowledgement of itself as a postcolonial novel, it tangles the expectations of the genre and challenges the audience to read it in a different way. Funk conceives of the 'reconstructive text' as a text which inhabits 'an attitude of confidence in the power of sign systems to actually convey experience' (5). In the case of *Tourism*, its metatextual devices alert readers to Dhaliwal's understanding of the expectations of minority writing, prompting us to question his portrayals (and, as a logical progression of this, the portrayals of other authors). In doing so, Dhaliwal conveys the ambiguity inherent in depicting the ethnic minority subject.

For Funk, 'metareference constitutes an appropriate formal approach to authenticity' (64). Authenticity is at the core of Funk's concerns and he observes that 'authenticity is seen as both the ultimate goal and a major impediment to contemporary configurations of identity' (7). He determines that metareference might provide the best path towards uncovering authenticity, and that an ergodic text (that is a text which 'requires a certain amount of physical and mental struggle and agility on the part of readers to navigate their way through it') might open such a path (101). Funk concludes that, '[o]nly a metareferential fragmentation and refraction of form can eventually reunite form and matter and transform authenticity from a hermetic aesthetic exercise into an interactional process' (191). In the novels examined here, formal elements, especially metatextual elements, expose hermetic attempts at authenticity and leave space for new authenticities to transpire. If, as Werner Wolf suggests, '[n]arrative is a form of world building: it creates miniature worlds with modelling function,' then narrative provides the opportunity for versions of reality to be created that will help us to understand real world situations (260). Wolf claims that 'we can – and like to – experience narrative worlds because they appear to us as meaningful representations of concrete "slices of life" that address, through their modelling function, interesting aspects of reality' (Wolf 260). The risk of this is that, despite these narrative worlds being fictional, audiences interpret them as representative of reality. This is where a formal examination becomes crucial in producing a more transparent understanding of the text, an understanding that acknowledges the unreliability of texts in their attempts at authentic portrayals. As Funk claims: 'metareference constitutes the most appropriate aesthetic device for evoking, enacting or at least investigating authenticity' (64). Reading these texts through a combination of new formalist and postcolonial approaches allows for a broader conceptualisation of each novel's positioning, one which is free from the potentially restrictive nature of single-method approaches.

Postcolonialism's emphasis on the theoretical over the formal has sometimes led to narrow readings of these novels. The limitations of this approach are evident in attempts to make sense of Malkani's Jas as an unreliable white protagonist in what is ostensibly a novel about a British Asian gang, via optimistic understandings of his identity as a hybrid mimic. Reading Jas, and the gang into which he is only partially and temporarily accepted (as does Liao), as validation of the 'evidently [...] common, everyday practice for people to identify and interact with others across the borders of ethnicity, culture, and nationality,' fails to account for Jas's denial of his whiteness, his persistent questioning of the crew's cultural beliefs, and his subsequent ostracisation from the gang (Liao 40). Maria Cristina Paganoni and Roberto Pedretti describe *Londonstani* as 'the momentary point of arrival of a

coherent and fruitful description and interpretation of the processes of hybridisation Great Britain has experienced since the arrival of the first waves of immigrants' (435-6). But again, this reading of *Londonstani* does not allow for Jas's rejection of much of the gang's ideology, or for his ejection from the gang when this is revealed. Similarly, readings of *Tourism* which summarise it as 'a very politically incorrect but extremely "authentic" picture of reality' (it is not clear whether these inverted commas indicate a questioning of that authenticity) fail to allow for the complications that Dhaliwal's paratextual and metatextual content provide, and which a new formalist reading might illuminate (Albertazzi 175). Graham Huggan has said of postcolonial scholars that they have 'recognised the need to question 'theory' itself as an instrument of intellectual mastery and as a paradoxical medium for the maintenance of institutional hierarchies, even as it posits a challenge to critical standards and the academic *status quo*' (257). New formalism, I suggest, offers a way of combating the 'maintenance of institutional hierarchies' when postcolonial theoretical approaches alone, are employed.

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As much of the analysis I make here is concerned with the novel as a product and the reader as consumer, it is crucial to ask who that reader might be. As Brouillette observes, according to Graham Huggan's understanding of the exoticism of ethnicity, there is an implicit assumption of a 'global market reader' who, in their choice of reading material, is 'unwittingly reifying constructed categories' (*Postcolonial Writers* 15, 26). This is a reader who exoticises ethnicity and who hopes to learn something of society's minority communities via a kind of armchair ethnography. Such an assumption is clearly problematic in that it assumes a homogenous Western consumer. If we assume such a reader exists, then '[t]he strategies and techniques of some postcolonial texts are thus taken as designed to respond to the existence of a certain kind of consumer, and their very material is comprised of attempts to reorient and reeducate an unsophisticated reader' (Brouillette, *Postcolonial Writers* 26). While some authors might understand and capitalise on the exoticism of ethnicity, others take it upon themselves to challenge the preconceptions of Huggan's market reader, and this thesis argues that Malkani and Dhaliwal are doing this in challenging and unconventional ways.

Ilott suggests that novels such as *Londonstani* and *Tourism* are 'subcultural urban novels,' which 'critique the construction of multicultural Britain by focussing on the problematic topics of violence, hypermasculinity, gangs and misogyny that are often passed over by more utopian (political and literary) accounts of multiculturalism' (96). She then extends her argument to claim that these

subcultural urban novels are written for an audience which is a 'subcultural minority' (95). Ilott conceives earlier minority-authored novels such as *The Buddha of Suburbia* and *White Teeth* as written for a 'projected audience [that] is largely white, middle-class and mainstream' (95). But in her formulation, *Londonstani* and *Tourism* shift 'the conventional paradigm of postcolonial fiction, as rather than 'writing back' to the (former) colonial centre, it is produced for the consumption of a community of insiders' (95). Ilott observes that 'paratextual accompaniments are far from neutral supplements but instead frame and position the novel' (102). However, she claims that the marketing of *Londonstani* and *Tourism* 'does not mark them for consumption by a pre-dominantly white, middle-class audience' (103). 'The garish yellow cover, pink font and demotic title of Malkani's *Londonstani*,' she argues, 'suggests that it is aimed at a younger audience, self-consciously marketed as low-brow with street cred' (103). But, as Ilott herself admits, this is not the way *Londonstani* was initially marketed: according to Sarah Brouillette, the novel 'captured the feverish interest of Britain's largely white, middle-aged literati' ('Creative Class' 4). Although Malkani has claimed that, "I was trying to do an SE Hinton for Asian teenagers: a book anyone into urban youth culture, where you don't read books, might want to read," it seems unlikely that publishing house Fourth Estate would advance 'in excess of £300,000' for a novel that they intended for a minority audience (Malkani in O'Connell np; McCrum np). Fourth Estate clearly anticipated a wide mainstream audience and expected that, as Perfect notes: '*Londonstani* would follow in the footsteps of *Brick Lane* by offering the British literary mainstream a portrait of a minority community whose existence it was hazily aware of but whose customs it was very much unfamiliar' (138). It was only after the novel failed to meet sales expectations that the cover was changed to the one described above:

the paperback publication [issued a year after its initial publication] was not so much a re-launch as a re-branding [...] with a renewed digital campaign and carefully positioned advertising in *Time Out*, *The Times* and *The Guardian Guide* [...] In addition to a vivid new cover [...all of which was] clearly intended to develop a brand 'community' for the book. (Graham np)

So the new marketing approach (itself including advertising to a broad market) only occurred when the novel failed to find success in a mainstream audience, and a subcultural audience was not the initial 'imagined audience' at all.

Of Dhaliwal's novel's cover, Ilott claims: '*Tourism* has the kind of front cover that makes the novel embarrassing to read in public, comprising a close-up of a woman's breast exposed in a see-through blouse and an overlaid tag line in red, "sexy... shocking and touched with genius"' (103). Although this might be true, *Tourism's* cover is not the sole piece of paratext by which it was marketed. Ilott fails to address Dhaliwal's promotion of his novel in *The Times* and *The Sunday Times* – newspapers which, one would assume, would reach beyond a small, subcultural readership. Also, *Tourism's* cover bears some resemblance to that of several of the publications of Michel Houellebecq's novels such as *Platform* (2001), *Atomised* (2000) and *Lanzarote* (2002), which feature bikini-clad or barely-covered, topless women. Houellebecq had a large media profile in the mid-2000s and had found considerable success in the marketplace. As one reviewer in the *New York Times* states: 'Houellebecq's name is so rich with associations — it has become one of those names in the arts that are replete with meaning; everyone knows who he is and what he writes about' (Knausgaard np). If the intention was to associate Dhaliwal with Houellebecq, then the marketing was certainly not aimed at a small subculture, but instead at a much larger audience with a more populist taste, which was attracted to the often sensationalist content of novels such as Houellebecq's. I suggest that, in line with Brouillette's understanding of the way an author might attempt to 'reorient and re-educate' the reader, *Londonstani* and *Tourism* are very much written back to the colonial mindset. I read these novels as attempting to destabilise mainstream preconceived notions of ethnicity; they are written, therefore, not for a subcultural audience who likely already perceive the problematic exoticisation of ethnicity, but rather for the consumption of a much broader metropolitan audience.

Kureishi, Malkani and Dhaliwal are not the first British Asian authors to depict ethnic tensions and to question the positioning of young British Asian men within British society. Several other authors, such as Suhayl Saadi (*Psychoraag* 2004), Niven Govinden (*Graffiti My Soul* 2006) and Sarfraz Manzoor (*Greetings from Bury Park* 2007), focus on inter-racial relationships, drug use and the influence of contemporary popular music on their protagonists. Their characters display hybrid modes of speech and cultural influence, and are often cynical about their parents' religion and culture. Govinden portrays violent ethnic tensions between young British men, but his protagonist Veerapen, 'the only kosher Tamil in Surrey,' does not judge others purely by their race or ethnicity (Govinden 19). Nadeem Aslam's *Maps for Lost Lovers* (2004) portrays violence motivated by what is claimed to be a strict adherence to Islamic codes, but the novel balances the violence and prejudice in some characters with complex, nuanced characters who are determined to find stability within their isolated community. Unlike Malkani and Dhaliwal, these authors describe women in sensitive and subtle ways, and their protagonists' relationships with women are complex. Examples of racial

violence and prejudice towards white characters do exist in novels written by and depicting black British characters other than those who are Asian. Victor Headley's *Yardie* (1992) focuses on young Jamaican and British-born Afro-Caribbean men, who aim to gain money and status through their membership of drug-dealing gangs in London. Adebayo's *Some Kind of Black* follows the story of young Oxford student Dele, the descendant of Nigerian migrants to London, who experiences racism in both the way he is exoticised as 'undisputed number one negro' in the majority white Oxford where he 'indulge[s] their romance of the real nigga,' and when he and his sister become victims of a racist police force in London (Adebayo 19, 20). Dele admits, in a tone reminiscent of Dhaliwal's *Puppy* how, 'he wanted to fuck [white girlfriend] Helena, he wanted to fuck English history, like some horn of Africa' (Adebayo 38). In her two novels *Moss Side Massive* (1999) and *Full Crew* (2004), Karline Smith writes about gangs in Manchester and depicts the 'disenfranchisement and attendant alienation of migrant groups' although, according to Ilott the gang warfare it portrays 'is not carried out across ethnic lines' (118). Building on the nascent impulses of these texts, Malkani and Dhaliwal are the first to depict an assertive racial prejudice displayed by British Asian characters towards those of other ethnicities, and their novels are distinctive in the sustained and confronting misogyny that they attribute to the majority of their male characters.

*Londonstani* and *Tourism* explore the hypermasculine British Asian in a way that isn't seen in the minority novels listed above. The assertion of masculinity by Hardjit in *Londonstani* is motivated, according to Malkani, by a need to "'define himself as a man against the overbearing mother'" (in Graham np). But I read the hypermasculinity in *Londonstani* and *Tourism*, exemplified in the violence Hardjit's crew displays, and in *Puppy*'s misogyny and claims at sexual prowess, as a rejection of colonial representations of the Asian male. Historically, and in the context of colonialism, the Asian male has been aligned with the 'notion of the weak and passive Hindu, so perfectly suited to the discursive conditions of colonialism' (Teltscher 159). As Mrinalini Sinha discusses 'gender was an important axis along which colonial power was constructed' (11). Colonialists found ways to justify their hegemony, based on the production and development by the British of two figures: the 'manly Englishman' and the 'effeminate Bengali' (Sinha 1). This is evidenced in comments made by British colonialist Thomas Macaulay, that the Indian male's 'pursuits are sedentary, his limbs delicate, his movements languid. During many ages he has been trampled upon by men of bolder and hardy deeds. Courage, independence, veracity, are qualities to which his constitution and his situation are equally unfavourable' (in Gandhi 99). The Otherness of the Indian male is taken by the white colonialist and used to create a discourse of effeminacy in which that which is observed, or assumed, to be different becomes a sign of weakness. In this

discourse 'the native male [was] weak and consequently unable to take care of his woman – a lacuna that the masculine Englishman would fill' (Nayar 59). As a remedy to this historical racism, in his home suburb of Hounslow Malkani observes ethnic identities now being employed as 'tools or props for the bolstering of boys' gender identities', with a resulting 'new model of British Asianness that was much less vulnerable to emasculation by any racism in the dominant culture,' and this is reflected in characters such as Hardjit (Malkani, 'Mixing and Matching' np). I read Dhaliwal as also attempting to remediate discourses of the emasculated Asian male: Puppy's assertive courting of white women can be seen as a fervent response to Macaulay's 'lacuna,' and a reclaiming of the discourse around Asian sexuality. The refusal of the effeminate Asian male is part of these author's questioning of what 'authentic' portrayals of British Asian males might consist of and their offering of alternative models of British Asian identity.

Malkani and Dhaliwal take up Kipling and Kureishi's preoccupation with the theme of authenticity and the search for truth in novelistic depictions of ethnic minority communities. Despite the 'structurally ambiguous, paradoxical and oscillating' nature of authenticity, there is no end, it would seem, to readers' desire to discover it and authors' attempts to portray it (Funk 64). Examining the way these novels make claims to, or refute the possibility of, authentic portrayals of ethnicity reveals a shifting perspective in the way ethnicity is read by audiences. In *Kim*, Kipling portrays Kim's usefulness to the British spies who employ him as due to his ability to apparently authentically inhabit various Indian personas. And yet, Kim is ethnically white. In *The Buddha of Suburbia*, Kureishi explores the notion of what real Indianness might consist of and whether it may be performed by recreating stereotypical tropes. In employing irony to suggest that essentialised notions of Indian identity are racist, Kureishi opens the door for multiple and fluid versions of Indian identity to exist. *Londonstani* stretches the notion of the way ethnicity might be inhabited even further. It is revealed at the end of Malkani's novel that protagonist Jas is white, not British Asian as readers are led to believe for the majority of the novel. Malkani uses this device to explore the way ethnicity might be performed, and asks whether its authenticity can be reliant not on skin colour, but rather on assumed cultural markers and behaviours. *Tourism* focuses on exoticised versions of ethnicity and the way these preconceived forms of ethnicity, irrespective of their perhaps tenuous relationship with authenticity, are desirable products in the consumer marketplace. Even more controversially, *Tourism* considers the possibility of accessing an authentic Other via art or literature, and questions the trustworthiness of texts as providing insight into minority cultures.

The notion of authenticity is key to the criticisms that Dhaliwal makes about other minority British authors. He has openly stated his distaste for being associated with other British Asian and minority authors simply because of his ethnicity. He is explicit about his desire to make it 'in the big league, competing with everyone else,' rather than being subject to 'the condescending hand of bourgeois liberalism' ('Gosh' 25). Dhaliwal describes Meera Syal's television work as 'junk' which is 'naïf and unfunny' and not reflective of his own experience ('Gosh' 25). And, according to Dhaliwal, Zadie Smith is an 'unremarkable' writer, her success merely a product of the 'woolly sentimentalism of London's literati' ('Gosh' 25). Dhaliwal is equally as disparaging about Malkani, whose novel he reviews in London's *Evening Standard*, describing it as 'an inadvertently gay, stupidly written tale of teenage inanity' in which 'None of the characters has depth or complexity' ('Nitwits on Nokias' 35). Dhaliwal is cynical about the reasons behind *Londonstani's* publication:

I can imagine the orgasmic squeal that rang through the offices of Fourth Estate on procuring 30-year-old Gautam Malkani's debut novel, *Londonstani*. The moment for gushing, middle-class liberals to connect with the "real" Asian experience had arrived. Via a Cambridge graduate who is an editor at the *Financial Times*, that is. ('Nitwits on Nokias' 35)

Dhaliwal expresses cynicism about whether *Londonstani* might offer any insight into the particular desi subculture it explores. For Dhaliwal this appears to be connected with Malkani's affiliations with Cambridge University and the *Financial Times* which he suggests are an impediment to Malkani's ability to portray 'realness'. He claims that Malkani chose 'to write a tale that panders to cosseted middle-class notions of edginess' ('Nitwits on Nokias' 35). With this comment, Dhaliwal suggests that Malkani capitalises on the exoticisation of ethnicity. It is paratextual commentary such as this which indicates Dhaliwal's determination to uncover and loudly announce the problematic nature of the way he perceives ethnicity as being depicted.

Dhaliwal's argument can be situated alongside those of critics such as Graham Huggan, whose understanding of the dynamics surrounding the consumer market and ethnicity rests on an assumption of the 'distinctly fashionable' nature of all that might be considered postcolonial (1). Huggan writes that 'exoticism describes [...] a particular mode of aesthetic *perception*,' one which 'manufactures otherness' (13, Huggan's italics). Exoticism, then, is not inherent, but is instead a label formulated by those who don't categorise themselves as Other, and then applied to all they consider to be Other. As it is a quality imposed from the outside, Huggan considers that 'it may serve conflicting ideological interests, providing the rationale for projects of *rapprochement* and

reconciliation, but legitimising just as easily the need for plunder and violent conquest' (13). Here Huggan identifies the ambivalent and contradictory nature of the exoticism of ethnicity, and his observations reflect the problematic nature of the portrayal of ethnicity that Kipling, Kureishi, Malkani and Dhaliwal all employ. These authors employ a 'strategic exoticism' as they 'attempt to show that they understand the ways in which they are being asked to present the Third World or global South [or British ethnic minorities] to a presumably apolitical metropolitan audience' (Brouillette, *Postcolonial Writers* 5). But in their paratextual and metatextual responses to the exoticism of ethnicity, Malkani and Dhaliwal's texts express a compelling dissatisfaction with the exoticisation and fetishisation of ethnicity, while at the same time laying claim to their own version of it.

Huggan claims that postcolonial writers, 'make their *readers* aware of the constructedness of [...] cultural categories; their texts are metacommentaries on the politics of translation, on the power relations that inform cross-cultural perception and representation' (26, Huggan's italics). My reading of these texts through their respective author's employment of paratext and metatext, is closely aligned with Huggan's observation of them as metacommentaries. But I would take Huggan's observation further, and claim that Malkani and Dhaliwal appear to be railing against postcolonial writers who, instead of attempting to communicate to their audience the implausibility of narratives in which neat, essentialised ethnic categories exist, actually perpetuate these categories. In their determined employment of paratext and metatext, Malkani and Dhaliwal forgo subtle attempts at providing a metacommentary on portrayals of ethnicity. The vitriol and violence in *Londonstani* and *Tourism*, and these novels' bold depictions of homoerotic fetishism and graphic sex scenes, insistently assert the fact that the exoticism of ethnicity has not gone away. Their narratives of ethnicity suggest that the employment of hybridity and mimicry is not sufficient in emancipating minority characters from neo-Orientalist narratives. *Londonstani* parodies postcolonial theoretical approaches such as hybridity and mimicry, using exaggerated depictions of hybridity and ridiculously ineffectual attempts at mimicry to demonstrate the inadequacy of these approaches in portraying ethnic minorities. In *Tourism* characters such as Puppy's friend Michael mock the fetishisation of ethnicity, and capitalise on white middle-class tastes for the Other as Puppy ridicules politically correct attempts at 'empower[ing] the disenfranchised' (Dhaliwal, *Tourism* 72). Malkani and Dhaliwal resort to essentialised and offensive characterisations, employing humour to reveal uncomfortable truths about the seemingly inescapable exoticisation of ethnicity in contemporary British Asian novels.

*The Buddha of Suburbia*, *Londonstani* and *Tourism* all, to varying extents, play with the structure of the novel, utilising formal devices to reinforce their unsettling of the conventions of British Asian novels. As a repudiation of *Kim*, *The Buddha of Suburbia* is 'self-consciously post-colonial,' and makes clear its status as a reformation of Kipling's imperial narrative (Stein 115, Stein's italics). As Stein observes, 'the expectations of the field are neither rejected wholesale nor noiselessly imbibed. Instead, these expectations are embraced, parodied, and tampered with,' a process which draws attention to Kureishi's dissatisfaction with *Kim*'s characterisations (115). Kureishi's metatextual references to Kipling, and to *The Buddha of Suburbia* as a postcolonial artefact, alert the reader to his intention to disturb expectations of the form. Malkani employs an unreliable narrator, casting into doubt any sense of the reader gaining an authentic insight into desi culture. Jas self-consciously draws attention to his inability to coherently verbalise his experiences – a hint at his inherent untrustworthiness. In *Tourism*, Dhaliwal deliberately foregrounds his novel's status as a fictional work, leading the reader to consider the reliability of its portrayal of British Asianness. These literary devices assist Malkani and Dhaliwal in questioning assumptions about happy, multicultural communities and stories of successful, worthy migrants by complicating narratives which might suggest that the positioning of London's minority communities is stable and resolved. These authors focus the reader's attention on the incorrect assumptions that might have been drawn from novels about the positioning of British Asian communities in London, and they bring under the spotlight conceptions of ethnicity which express a muted or latent racism.

*Londonstani* and *Tourism* present ambiguous and sometimes contradictory versions of ethnicity, which are most clearly identifiable in the way that both novels, in their final pages, reveal what might be read as a restoration of Orientalist discourse. Orientalist discourse, according to Edward Said, assumes that 'the Orient was not (and is not) a free subject of thought or action,' but is, 'an idea that has a history and a tradition of thought, imagery, and vocabulary that have given it reality and presence in and for the West' (*Orientalism* 3, 5). *Londonstani* and *Tourism* both suggest that narratives written by the West continue to influence the ways in which ethnicity is read, by portraying their protagonists as ultimately adhering to a European discourse about ethnicity. The revelation that Jas is white means that all his apparent insights into Hardjit's gang are filtered through a white gaze. In hindsight, we can see that Hardjit's desiness has been represented to the reader as a 'contrasting image, idea, personality, experience,' against which Jas defines his own European self (Said, *Orientalism* 1-2). Early in his novel, Malkani has Jas complain that, '[p]eople're always tryin to stick a label on our scene' (*Londonstani* 5). Malkani suggests the embeddedness of this labelling when he reveals that Jas is white, and indeed an actor in the very hegemonic narrative

which he claims to reject. Dhaliwal also juxtaposes the assertive departure from received narratives of ethnicity that make up the majority of his novel, by concluding *Tourism* with an assimilatory twist ending. In the final pages of *Tourism* the formerly rebellious protagonist concedes to the previously refused narrative of the happy family, and reveals a longing to return to ‘Punjab and the village that [his] mother left’ (Dhaliwal, *Tourism* 245). Despite having only visited India once, and rejecting his mother’s devout Hindu beliefs, Puppy is depicted as not being able to deny his suggested innate connection to his spiritual homeland. This sudden apparent epiphany strikes the reader as false, an indication that Dhaliwal himself suggest that this is not a believable outcome for Puppy. So although these twist endings in *Londonstani* and *Tourism* might appear to indicate a ceding to traditional British Asian novelistic conventions, I argue that instead they indicate the unjustified dominance of white and assimilationist narratives and draw our attention to the unsatisfactory nature of such narratives. These endings are actually part of a process of ‘*unfixing* the discourse of empire, opening it up, and interpreting its history and its current efficacy’ (Stein 144, Stein’s italics). These novels’ formal devices unsettle received understandings about the portrayal of ethnicity and demand that new versions of ethnicity must emerge.

Huggan claims that, ‘[i]t has arguably become more fashionable to attack postcolonialism than to defend it – a sign perhaps, rather less of the conceptual inadequacies of postcolonial studies than of its increasing commodification as a marketable academic field’ (3). While this thesis might recognise the commodification of postcolonialism, it does not reject it outright. Rather, I examine the ways in which Kureishi to an extent, but Malkani and Dhaliwal far more forcefully, question the persistent commodification of ethnicity in novels. Malkani and Dhaliwal are aware that, ‘[w]ithin a fragmented market defined by the proliferation of choices, selling specific identities to distinct consumers facilitates the process of consumption’ (Brouillette, *Postcolonial Writers* 66). My reading of their novels, as well as their paratextual sources, reveals a discontentment with this dynamic. These authors are not content to allow the proliferation of ‘specific identities’ – that is essentialised and socially acceptable versions of minority ethnic British subjects, whether these subjects be the authors themselves, or their characters – to continue to be sold to specific groups of consumers. While marketing campaigns which present the author as an assurance of authenticity aim to “disguise the systematized commodification of literary production,” Malkani and Dhaliwal use their public profiles to unsettle notions of authenticity (Juliet Gardiner in Brouillette, *Postcolonial Writers* 66).

In the seventeen years since Huggan wrote *The Postcolonial Exotic*, the market for the minority novel has remained undiminished, but perhaps the nature of some of these novels has altered. In 1990, when *The Buddha of Suburbia* was published, it was considered by one reviewer to be 'sexually explicit, pointedly political and highly critical of both British racism and Muslim – or more generally, Indian – repressiveness' (Blaise 20). It was a novel whose audience, *The New York Times* assumed, would be 'the gay, the arty and the third world' (Blaise 20). Blaise didn't predict the wide readership which *The Buddha of Suburbia* would reach, or the long-lasting impression it would make. *Kirkus* closed their favourable review of Kureishi's debut with the rather ominous conclusion that the novel made 'a memorable contribution to that other English literature--that of the immigrant' (np). These reviews reveal that in 1990, *The Buddha of Suburbia* was considered part of a niche genre, something set apart from the mainstream, something Other. Little did the *Kirkus* reviewer know that the English literature of the immigrant would morph and adapt, finding appeal with a significant proportion of the British readership, especially, perhaps, with those considered to be part of the middle-class mainstream. In 2006 reviews of *Londonstani* and *Tourism* recognised the allure of the minority novel. Of *Londonstani* the *Independent* had this to say: '[t]oo often the latest groovy writer of South Asian origin comes to be worshipped by the (white) gatekeepers of the literary salons as a (bogus) cipher for colonial redemption' (Saadi np). *The Telegraph's* review of Dhaliwal's debut claimed that '[m]y objection to *Tourism* wasn't that it thrust unpalatable truths in my complacent middle-class face. It was that it was callow, derivative and not very well written' (Leith, Sam np). The reviewers of 2006 demonstrate an understanding of the complex and controversial nature of racial and class divides in early twenty-first-century London. However, just as reviewers of *The Buddha of Suburbia* did not grasp the potential for Kureishi's novel to promote change in the social positioning of British Asians, so reviewers of *Londonstani* and *Tourism* seem to miss the political critique of British society made by these novels. Whether there is potential for continued change, inspired by pioneering protagonists who, as Stein puts it, have a 'dual function' and are able to influence 'British society and cultural institutions' in ways that further emancipate the British Asian subject, will be evidenced in the types of British Asian novels that follow these 2006 publications (22).

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The chapters of this thesis trace a changing approach to depictions of Indians and British Asians. The authors examined here exist in a dialogical relationship with their audience. They create a product which they deem will appeal to the market at the particular time of production. But from another perspective, these novels become agents in the changing expectations of mainstream society

concerning the exoticism of ethnicity, and the question of who rightfully speaks for whom. This thesis examines several questions about the way the ethnic Other is depicted in novels. It asks whether the exoticism of ethnicity identifiable in Kipling's *Kim* remains as prevalent in the twenty-first century. It considers the genre that evolved after the publication of *The Buddha of Suburbia*, and asks whether the conventions of that genre aided or hindered the conveying of authentic versions of British Asian identity. And it questions readers' expectations of the genre, and ability to accept portrayals that lie outside preconceived ideas of worthy and exotically appealing migrants. In these chapters, I am interested in questioning the viability of postcolonial theory alone in emancipating the ethnic subject from stereotype and binaries of black versus white, and in highlighting ethnicity as an exotic product. I propose a new, hybrid approach, in which close readings deeply interrogate form and in doing so augment, broaden, and ultimately strengthen postcolonial analyses. This new perspective reflects the demands of an ever-changing British society, one which is continues to be involved in discussions about what might be considered Britishness.

The first chapter of this thesis examines Hanif Kureishi's novel of 1990, *The Buddha of Suburbia*, as a repudiation of Rudyard Kipling's *Kim*, published in 1901. Despite the nine decades between them, Kipling's novel is vital in my examination of Kureishi's text, as it provides a template for depictions of hybrid British/Indian characters. Kipling describes hybridity from a white perspective, a perspective that cannot imagine Indian identities as anything but fixed. I explore Kipling's depictions of late nineteenth-century India and Indians in the light of early twenty-first-century depictions of British Asians and ask what has changed about the way that ethnic Others are portrayed. Kureishi illuminates Kipling's essentialised depictions of Indianness, I argue, by mimicking *Kim*'s themes of performance, adopted identity and the exoticisation of ethnicity, but then rejecting wholeheartedly Kipling's racist schema. By portraying multiple and fluid ethnic identities, Kureishi brings to light Kipling's stereotyped depictions of ethnicity and rejects Kipling's Orientalist discourse. This chapter scrutinises *Kim* and *The Buddha of Suburbia* through the lens of Bhabha's concept of mimicry – one in which representations of 'almost but not quite' unsettle the status quo. In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha identifies the way that imperfect mimicry of those in powerful positions can unsettle the authority of that power. While in *Kim*, mimicry is only advantageous to white characters, in Kureishi's novel the Indian character Karim performs Indianness in a way that empowers him. In this way, *The Buddha of Suburbia* demonstrates how mimicry can be used subversively in a way that undermines Orientalist narratives. In Karim, Kureishi provides an 'almost

but not quite' rendering of Kim's experiences in *Kim*. This exposes Kipling's novel for what it is – a fetishised, white perspective of an India that Kipling failed to fully comprehend.

Chapter Two leaps forward from Kureishi's London of the late 1970s to Malkani's London of the early 2000s. *Londonstani* is examined as a rejection of the assimilation narrative which was told in many of the British Asian novels published during the 1990s and early 2000s. Malkani depicts Hounslow as the domain of British South Asians, presenting desi characters such as Hardjit and his crew as a permanent and powerful presence. In Malkani's novel, attitudes towards non-desis are hostile and sometimes violent, and mixing with those of another religion is forbidden. Mimicry is employed by the white Jas, who is determined to emulate an 'authentic' desi identity – one which he believes will earn him kudos and respect. Performance is a key theme in *Londonstani* and it frequently consists of elements borrowed or bought from multiple cultures, emphasising the ways that identity can be a product of consumerism. This chapter will examine hybridity through Bhabha's notion of identity as fluid phenomena, borrowing from multiple cultures. While Malkani's paratexts suggest his characters successfully inhabit such hybrid spaces, in fact Jas fails to employ hybridity successfully. Furthermore, any attempt at an emancipating hybridity for Hardjit and his crew is undercut by Jas's essentialist and Orientalist descriptions of these young, British Asian men. The revelation of Jas's whiteness at the end of the novel confirms his status as an outsider and an unreliable narrator. This novel is indicative of the unjustifiable but yet continued assumption of the superiority of white narratives.

Chapter Three extends my examination of the rejection of traditional British Asian narratives through consideration of Nirpal Singh Dhaliwal's novel, *Tourism*. I investigate working-class protagonist Puppy's racist and misogynist attitude, and his disdain for almost all of London's social classes and ethnic backgrounds. However, this attitude is complicated by Dhaliwal's use of frame narrative, and in the way that *Tourism* employs metafictional devices in order to refer to its own status as a postcolonial text. Dhaliwal communicates his own rejection of essentialised ethnic characterisations by employing pastiche in Puppy's descriptions of various ethnic groups. These descriptions are often superficial and stereotyped, drawing attention to Dhaliwal's awareness of the racism still present in depictions of South Asian migrants in contemporary novels. I argue that consumer culture dominates in Dhaliwal's London with characters portrayed as capitalising on white Londoners' fetishisation of ethnicity and politically correct positive discrimination. Puppy and Michael manipulate the exoticisation by others of their ethnicities, finding ways to use their cultural backgrounds to improve their social position and wealth. The work of critics Graham Huggan and

Tobias A. Wachinger, who both focus on the commodification of ethnicity, aids in my examination of the exoticisation of the Other in this novel. This chapter also identifies Puppy's treatment of women as another facet of his compulsive consumption. I consider whether there is inevitability in Dhaliwal closing *Tourism* with a happy ending, and whether this is indicative of the impossibility of escaping narratives of assimilation, or instead, whether this novel is something of a call to arms in a battle against dominant white narratives surrounding ethnicity.

These chapters show a trajectory in the characterisations of British Asians, which marks a rejection of the essentialised ethnic subject. But this thesis illuminates a far more complex picture than one in which racist portrayals have been simply pushed aside in favour of more emancipating and egalitarian narratives of ethnic minorities. The vast differences in depictions of ethnicity between those contained in *Kim* in 1901, and those made in 2006 and beyond, indicate the constantly evolving nature of portrayals of London's minority communities. However, even the most recent of the novels examined here allude to the presence of persistent racist narratives. The years which have seen the publications of these four novels make up merely one small part of a much longer and constantly vacillating process in which multiple positionings of ethnicity and race occur, and the novels examined here in no way mark a beginning or an end of this process, but merely a momentary snapshot. However, this snapshot reveals a potential for change, and space for reconfigured notions of the way in which the ethnic subject might be portrayed.