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Zásady pro vypracování

Tématem diplomové práce je formování identity a různorodost, s jakou je tento proces zobrazen v moderní britské literatuře. Práce bude obsahovat analýzu teorie identit a vlivu různých kulturních prostředí, historického prostředí a individuálních perspektiv na formování identity vybraných literárních postav.

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Storry, Mike, and Peter Childs. *British Cultural Identities.* 6th ed. London: Routledge, 2020.

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ANNOTATION

This diploma thesis focuses on the construction of identity in contemporary British literature by analyzing three works: *My Beautiful Laundrette* by Hanif Kureishi, *White Teeth* by Zadie Smith, and *Hotel World* by Ali Smith. The theoretical part defines the concept of identity, presents Erikson's theory of psychosocial development, outlines different types of identity, and describes the development of contemporary British literature, including the significance of multiculturalism. The practical part analyzes the representation of ethnic, sexual, and social identities in the chosen literary works.

KEYWORDS

British literature, ethnic identity, psychosocial development, sexual identity, social identity

ANOTACE

Tato diplomová práce se zabývá konstrukcí identity v současné britské literatuře prostřednictvím analýzy tří děl, kterými jsou *My Beautiful Laundrette* od Hanifa Kureishiho, *White Teeth* od Zadie Smith a *Hotel World* od Ali Smith. Teoretická část vymezuje pojem identity, představuje Eriksonovu teorii psychosociálního vývoje, přibližuje různé typy identit a popisuje vývoj současné britské literatury včetně významu multikulturalismu. Praktická část se zaměřuje na analýzu etnické, sexuální a sociální identity ve vybraných dílech.

KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA

britská literatura, etnická identita, psychosociální vývoj, sexuální identita, sociální identita

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INTRODUCTION

What comes to mind when the word identity is mentioned? For many, it is associated with ethnicity, culture, sexuality, family, religion, gender, social status, or politics. These labels are valid, but the most important part of identity lies within people. Everyone has a unique identity and throughout life, identity shifts, grows, and reshapes itself. It defines how a person sees themselves, how they connect with others and the world around them, and how others and the world, in turn, respond to that presence.

America Ferrera captures it beautifully and powerfully in her TED Talk when she says: "My identity is not my obstacle. My identity is my superpower. I, for one, am ready to stop resisting and to start existing as my full and authentic self."[1] Identity is not something to hide or reject. It is something to live.

The theoretical part focuses on defining the term identity from various sociological perspectives, followed by Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development, which is elaborated upon, with each stage explained in detail. The thesis then explores different types of identity, highlighting three that are key for the later analysis. Moreover, it is followed by an overview of the development of modern British fiction, including the decade from which it is considered contemporary and the literary characteristics typical of the periods during which the analyzed works were written. One chapter is also dedicated to multiculturalism, what it means, and the role it has played in Britain, which is essential for understanding the historical context of two of the analyzed works.

The practical part centers around the main research question: How is identity constructed in contemporary British literature? The analysis focuses on three main aspects of identity: ethnic, sexual, and social. The author explains these identity types in her own words, combining insights from the theoretical section with her personal interpretation. For the analysis, the author examines three works: *My Beautiful Laundrette* by Hanif Kureishi, *White Teeth* by Zadie Smith, and *Hotel World* by Ali Smith.

My Beautiful Laundrette explores the fragmented ethnic identity of a young British man with Pakistani roots and how his identity is shaped by his family and the world around him. At the

[1] TED, "My identity is a superpower -- not an obstacle by America Ferrera," posted June 21, 2019, YouTube video, 14:02, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RjquHTj4HlY.

same time, the protagonist hides his homosexual identity and finds a safe haven in the laundrette, which gives him the freedom to be himself.

In *White Teeth*, Zadie Smith once again addresses multiculturalism in Britain and the challenges it brings. The novel tells the story of three families of different ethnic backgrounds living in multicultural London, each struggling with questions of identity, history, and generational conflict. The book examines how history, religion, and immigration shape both individual lives and interpersonal relationships.

The third novel, *Hotel World* by Ali Smith, approaches identity from a completely different angle. It looks at how identity is formed after death from the perspective of the deceased as well as those left behind, whether family members or people connected to the same place, in this case, the hotel. Smith delves into themes of death, time, and memory.

It is important to explain why the author chose these three works. The reason is quite simple: each author falls under the classification of contemporary British fiction, and each of them places a strong emphasis on identity formation, though from very different perspectives. Ali Smith is known for her focus on human identity, while Zadie Smith and Kureishi are recognized for writing about issues facing ethnic minorities. Each work offers a unique contribution to the topic of identity development.

Finally, the analysis of the different types of identity is summarized, and the conclusion compares which identities are most prominent across the works and how they are formed.

1. IDENTITY AND ERIKSON'S THEORY OF IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

There is no universal definition of what identity truly is. Everyone sees it differently, and for each person, it means something else. One thing, however, is certain and that is without identity, a person would not be complete. That is why it is important to look into the thoughts and perspectives of sociologists and other researchers who have explored identity in their work. The following paragraphs summarize key perspectives of sociologists who have attempted to define identity.

As Lawler suggests, the term identity is challenging, most people have a general understanding of what it means, yet its exact definition remains unclear and complicated to settle on. She adds that, in popular culture, identity is usually mentioned only when it is perceived as problematic or under threat. This is why discussions about "identity crises" often arise, where people are uncertain about who they truly are. She notes that identity often only becomes apparent through its perceived absence or instability. In essence, it is most noticeable when it is missing. Focusing on identity only in moments of crisis or instability presents a significant limitation, as it tends to overshadow the everyday, routine processes through which identity is constantly formed and reformed. When identity is examined solely through the lens of loss, confusion, or insecurity, those aspects of identity that appear stable, coherent, or unproblematic are often left unexamined and theoretically neglected. These taken-for-granted identities may then function as a silent norm, a baseline against which more visibly complex or "troubled" identities are measured. Such an approach reinforces the idea that only visibly fractured or contested identities are worthy of analysis, while "ordinary" identities remain invisible. In contrast, Lawler builds on the idea that all forms of identity, including the most familiar, routine, and seemingly stable ones, deserve critical attention. Everyday identity practices, though often overlooked, are equally central to understanding how individuals position themselves and are positioned within social structures.[2]

Julios views identity as a concept shaped by various contexts, whether expressed in private or public, within a minority or dominant ethnic group, or through one language or many. It is fundamentally understood as a form of self-identification with a particular group. Put simply, a person's sense of identity is shaped by the meanings they and those around them attach to it. Perception plays a crucial role in this process, shaping how individuals see themselves, how they interpret others, and how they are perceived in return. Julios illustrates this with an

[2] Steph Lawler, *Identity: sociological perspectives* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2014), 1–2.

example that is relevant for later analysis: a second-generation, English-speaking Bangladeshi child raised in London may fully consider themselves British, yet the majority white British population may still not view them as "one of their own". To fully grasp the complexity of identity, it is essential to examine the multiple interpretations it carries, along with the social, cultural, and political forces that influence how identity is defined and categorized.[3]

According to Nancy's view, identity is not something a person simply steps into or puts on like clothing, and it cannot be adopted without also influencing or reshaping it in the process. Even the act of identifying with an identity alters it in some way. Identities are neither completely fixed nor entirely flexible. They exist in a constant state of tension and change, a condition described as metastability. This metastable nature means that identity does not gain strength by endlessly replicating itself or staying the same. In fact, identity is not a fixed form at all. It is something far more subtle, fragile, and elusive. Its power comes from its ability to shift, to move between forms, and to transform over time.[4]

Selby asserts that while the self is often explored by asking questions like "Who am I?", identity is better understood by asking "What am I?". This question can lead to multiple answers for a single person, often linked to the specific roles they occupy: being a child, an employee, a partner, a member of a faith, or even a pet owner. What shapes identity, then, are the roles, relationships, and commitments a person actively chooses and maintains. Studying and explaining identity is a complex, interdisciplinary task that has long attracted interest from psychologists, sociologists, and philosophers alike. It is widely acknowledged that identity is shaped, at least in part, through social interactions. These interactions not only expose individuals to the norms and values of the groups they belong to, such as family, school, religion, or sports communities, but also influence how people perceive which parts of their identity are welcomed and which are discouraged. Such feedback plays a key role in determining which aspects of identity individuals choose to emphasize and invest in and which they may try to suppress or alter. As a result, identity is constantly evolving. Who someone is today may differ significantly from who they were as a child or who they will become later in life. This continuous change stems from new experiences, personal interpretations of those experiences, the reactions of others to one's behavior and beliefs, and the natural process of

[3] Christina Julios, *Contemporary British Identity English Language, Migrants and Public Discourse* (London: Routledge, 2008), 9.
[4] Jean-Luc Nancy, *Identity: Fragments, Frankness* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), 10–11.

growing older. While identity certainly involves self-perception, it is primarily expressed in how one presents oneself to the outside world.[5]

Hall introduces a particular interpretation of the term identity that is not widely accepted and may be difficult to grasp. He uses identity to describe the meeting point, or what he calls the "point of suture", between two forces. On one side, the discourses and social practices that attempt to position individuals as specific types of social subjects (through a process known as interpellation), and on the other side, the internal processes that shape personal subjectivities, making individuals capable of being addressed or "spoken". From this perspective, identities are not fixed essences but rather temporary attachments to subject positions created by discourse. They emerge when individuals are successfully "linked" into a specific discourse, a process Stephen Heath referred to as an "intersection" in his influential essay on the suture. In other words, ideology does not start from the individual but should be understood in terms of how individuals are "stitched into" systems of meaning. Thus, identity is not a perfect reflection of who someone is. Instead, it refers to roles or positions that a person is compelled to adopt, all while being aware (or semi-aware) that these positions are constructed representations. And because representation always involves some level of absence, fragmentation, or external framing from the position of the Other, identity can never fully match the internal processes or sense of self it attempts to express.[6]

The theorists agree that identity is not fixed or universal but fluid and shaped by social context. Lawler criticizes the tendency to focus on identity only in times of crisis and highlights the significance of every day. These stable identities often go unnoticed yet play a key role in shaping an individual's societal position. Julios emphasizes that identity is not formed solely by the individual but also by the surrounding society, considering the social and cultural factors that influence this process. Nancy argues that identity exists in a state of metastability, neither fully fixed nor entirely fluid, and continues to evolve throughout a person's life. Selby views identity as shaped by the roles individuals assume and the social interactions that influence their self-perception. Hall, meanwhile, understands identity as something that emerges at the "point of suture" between external discourses and inner subjectivity, never fully reflecting the true self.

What makes individuals who they are? The complex and multifaceted question of identity is a central and enduring theme in many psychological frameworks, exploring how personal, social,

[5] Christine L. B. Selby, *Who Am I? Understanding Identity and the Many Ways We Define Ourselves* (Santa Barbara: Greenwood, 2022), 3–5.
[6] Stuart Hall, and Paul du Gay, eds., *Questions of Cultural Identity* (London: SAGE Publications, 1996), 5–6.

and cultural factors shape one's sense of self. Another key to understanding identity is knowing how it is formed: the stages of identity development. This paragraph will explore one of the most significant approaches to this topic: Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development. Erikson, building upon and extending many of Sigmund Freud's ideas, developed a theory that explicitly focuses on the lifelong development of identity. This approach is often classified as post-Freudian.

Erikson suggested that human development unfolds through eight distinct stages throughout a lifetime, forming the foundation of what he referred to as "psychosocial development". These stages, spanning from infancy to late adulthood, adhere to Erikson's epigenetic principle, a concept borrowed from biology that posits a fixed sequence and pace of development. Each of Erikson's eight stages involves a dynamic tension between opposing forces. One set of forces promotes growth and development, while the other hinders it.[7] The central idea of this theory is the development of ego-identity, with the process of exploring identity becoming a defining feature of adolescence. While the nature of an individual's identity may vary across cultures, the process of achieving this developmental milestone shares universal elements. Forming a genuine sense of personal identity serves as a psychological bridge between childhood and adulthood.[8]

The first stage, known as infancy, takes place during the first year of life and involves the balance between basic trust and mistrust. This balance is shaped by how well an infant's needs are met by caregivers. The primary issue revolves around the level of trust versus mistrust. Fostering trust is crucial, as it lays the foundation for hope, the belief in a positive future. Insufficient trust can result in withdrawal, where the child becomes emotionally detached from their surroundings.[9]

Stage two, covering the second and third years of life, represents the early childhood phase, during which the child experiences a conflict between autonomy and feelings of shame and doubt.[10] The core strength developed in this stage is will, while the negative core weakness is compulsion. Parents must be patient, but they also need to establish clear rules and boundaries.

[7] Selby, *Who Am I?,* 35–36.
[8] Rolf E. Muuss, Eli Velder, and Harriet Porton, *Theories of Adolescence*, 6th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1996), 43.
[9] Selby, *Who Am I?*, 36–37.
[10] Selby, *Who Am I?,* 37.

It is important for children to understand "no", but excessive control can hinder their autonomy and lead to feelings of shame.[11]

The third stage, referred to as the play age, occurs from three to five years of age. Preschoolers expand their social horizons during this stage, facing the conflict between initiative and guilt. They begin to understand the consequences of their actions and develop a sense of purpose and direction. They aim to please their parents and feel guilt when they disobey. If they are not allowed to make choices or face constant punishment, they may struggle to navigate this stage.[12]

During Erikson's stage four, individuals face the conflict between industry and inferiority between the ages of 6 and 12. This pivotal period, marked by the beginning of formal schooling, significantly expands social horizons, introducing individuals to a world of peers and authority figures. The process of gaining a sense of industry involves completing tasks, cooperating with others, and identifying one's own strengths. In contrast, feelings of inferiority result from failure to meet goals or unfavorable comparisons with peers. Successfully resolving this stage leads to the strength of competence, allowing individuals to manage challenges effectively. Failure, however, results in inertia, a state of psychological stagnation.[13]

Adolescence, the fifth stage of development, typically extends from puberty to approximately age 18. Erikson emphasized adolescence as a crucial period for developing a strong sense of personal identity, a process that involves exploring and integrating various aspects of oneself while navigating the risks of role confusion and identity diffusion. Achieving a stable identity requires individuals to assess their strengths and weaknesses and make well-considered decisions about their future. There are several fundamental questions adolescents must answer, such as "Where did I come from?" and "Who am I?". Developing a strong sense of identity, characterized by a consistent sense of self, is an active and ongoing process that cannot be solely attributed to societal or biological influences.[14] Adolescents experience identity confusion when they navigate the tension between accepting or rejecting the values of parents, elders, and peers. Although confusion is necessary for growth, too much can interfere with the development of a strong sense of self. The goal of successful exploration is to gain fidelity, a strong commitment

[11] James S. Fleming, "*Erikson's Psychosocial Developmental Stages*," Baltimore Polytechnic Institute Foundation & Alumni Association, accessed January 10, 2025, https://www.bpi.edu/ourpages/auto/2018/11/21/57748242/ch%209%20erikson.pdf.
[12] Wendy K. Killam, and Suzanne Degges-White, *College Student Development Applying Theory to Practice on the Diverse Campus* (New York: Springer Publishing Company, 2017), 37.
[13] Selby, *Who Am I?,* 38.
[14] Muuss et al., *Theories of Adolescence*, 51.

to one's beliefs, and the ability to make decisions independently. A lack of it may result in role repudiation, leading to uncertainty, dependence on others for direction, or defiance of authority.[15]

The sixth stage, early adulthood, focuses on the conflict between intimacy and isolation. During this period, individuals grapple with the desire for deep, committed relationships while simultaneously fearing loneliness and rejection. Successfully forming genuine connections leads to the virtues of love and affiliation. Culturally and biologically, humans are driven to find a partner and start a family. However, this stage can be challenging, as emotional investments in relationships may not always fulfill expectations.[16] Erikson argued that genuine intimacy in a relationship can only be achieved when both partners have established a strong and independent sense of identity.[17]

Between ages 31 and 60, adults face the psychosocial conflict of generativity versus stagnation. Generativity involves a concern for the well-being of future generations, expressed through acts of giving back to society, such as raising children, philanthropy, or contributing to meaningful causes. In contrast, stagnation refers to self-absorption, where a person becomes so focused on themselves that they stop growing and contributing to others. Successfully moving through this stage means finding a balance between personal reflection and meaningful engagement with the world. This balance helps cultivate care, a deep and genuine concern for others that comes from living a purposeful and fulfilling life. Insufficient development of care can lead to rejectivity, characterized by an inability to connect with or care for others.[18]

The final stage of life, often marked by old age and retirement, creates a deep internal conflict between a sense of ego integrity and feelings of despair. During this time, people tend to look back on their lives. If they feel they lived with purpose and stayed true to themselves, they are more likely to experience peace and acceptance. But if they are left with unresolved regrets or missed opportunities, that reflection can turn into bitterness or fear. A positive outcome in this stage means being able to accept one's life as it was, without regret, and facing the end with a

[15] Selby, *Who Am I?*, 39.
[16] Killam et al., *College Student Development,* 39.
[17] James S. Fleming, "*Erikson's Psychosocial Developmental Stages*."
[18] Selby, *Who Am I?*, 41.

sense of completeness, independence, and emotional maturity rather than slipping into fear or dependency.[19]

To sum up, Erikson's theory of psychosocial development sees identity as something that takes shape gradually over a lifetime. Rather than being fixed, it develops through eight stages, each defined by a specific challenge and shaped by the social relationships a person experiences along the way. From the early development of trust to the final reflections of old age, each stage presents both opportunities for growth and potential struggles. What makes this theory so compelling is its focus on the human experience. In the first stage, called infancy, the central conflict revolves around trust versus mistrust. In the second stage, the tension shifts to autonomy versus shame and doubt. The third stage, when the child is still very young, introduces the conflict between initiative and guilt. The fourth stage brings industry versus inferiority into focus. The fifth stage, crucial for the development of identity, is where Erikson places identity versus role confusion. In early adulthood, which is the sixth stage, the key challenge becomes intimacy versus isolation. And finally, the seventh stage centers on generativity versus stagnation.

[19] Muuss et al., *Theories of Adolescence*, 43.

2. TYPES OF IDENTITY

Sociologists recognize many types of identity, and this thesis focuses on a few key ones, how they are defined, and what shapes them. The first type worth exploring is personal identity, essential for individual growth.

To begin with, personal identity is a complex concept. Personal identity is an individual's self-concept, that is, how they see and define themselves at a given time, including their sense of uniqueness. It includes things like personality, values, and beliefs.

The idea of personal identity has been central to Western philosophy for centuries, with key philosophers offering significant contributions to its discussion.[20] Though it may seem like a simple concept, it has proven difficult to define precisely, puzzling both philosophers and psychologists.[21] Selby also points out that claiming someone is the exact same person they were as a young child might be misleading. The course of a person's life brings many experiences, substantial bodily changes, and the potential evolution of values and beliefs. Whether these changes represent a fundamental identity transformation remains a subject of debate. Some argue that such shifts occur, others disagree, while some adopt a more nuanced perspective. In essence, personal identity is typically seen as the definition of self and the way one would characterize oneself at a particular point in time.[22]

Drummond builds on this claim by asserting that personal identity arises from the substance of an individual's experiences, particularly their core beliefs and emotions, the commitments reflected in their actions, and the practical sense of self that these commitments and actions help construct.[23] Trepte and Loy argue that personal identity remains largely unaffected by group associations.[24] Moreover, it is important to note that personal identity is concerned with questions of individual identification, such as "Who am I?", "Who are you?", and "Who is he/she?".[25]

Selby offers an insightful perspective, suggesting that personal identity can be understood as self-concept, the beliefs one holds about oneself, shaped by both internal experiences and

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[20] Eric Olson, "Personal Identity," in *Science Fiction and Philosophy: From Time Travel to Superintelligence*, ed. Susan Schneider (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 97.
[21] Selby, *Who Am I?,* 15.
[22] Selby, *Who Am I?,* 15–16.
[23] John J. Drummond, "Self-identity and personal identity," *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 20, no. 2 (August 2021): 235.
[24] Sabine Trepte, and Leonard S. Loy, "Social Identity Theory and Self-Categorization Theory", in *The international encyclopedia of media effects*, ed. Patrick Rössler (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2017), 1.
[25] Drummond, "Self-identity," 237.

external responses. However, this self-image may not always align with reality, as individuals might attribute to themselves qualities they do not actually possess. This highlights the challenge of defining identity and assessing the reliability of self-perception, especially when both self-descriptions and external judgments can be inaccurate.[26]

In summary, personal identity has been a long-standing topic of debate in Western philosophy. It is a complicated and evolving concept shaped by internal beliefs, experiences, and actions, as well as by external influences and relationships.

Another prominent type of identity is cultural identity. It relates to how people see themselves and how others see them through shared cultural elements such as language, traditions, history, or values. However, it is not fixed or permanent as it continues to evolve.

According to Thomas and Schwarzbaum, cultural identity is deeply connected to personal identity, as culture plays one of the most important roles in shaping who a person is. Their perspective also emphasizes the relevance of cognitive development in shaping cultural identity and individuals' cultural self-perceptions.[27] Conversely, Childs and Storry take a slightly different approach to cultural identity. They point out that it is, in many respects, a matter of representation, which can be interpreted in two ways. First, representation can mean portrayal, how certain people or "heroes" come to stand for a particular cultural identity. Second, there is representation in the *political or constitutional* sense, where an individual or group acts on behalf of, or speaks for, an entire nation or community.[28]

Selby describes this kind of identity as the feeling of belonging to a group with shared values, traditions, and ways of life. While it is often tied to things like nationality or ethnicity, it can also involve religion, social class, sports teams, family, or even a generation. Cultural identity comes through in how people speak, where they live, what they eat, wear, or celebrate. Moreover, everyone has a cultural identity, even if it is not always as visible as race or ethnicity. Understanding it means looking at the groups someone belongs to and asking whether they genuinely feel connected to them. People might live somewhere their whole life and still not feel like they belong. Ultimately, what matters most is not just membership but the sense of identity that comes with it.[29]

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[26] Selby, *Who Am I?,* 16.
[27] Anita Jones Thomas, and Sara E. Schwarzbaum, *Culture and Identity: Life Stories for Counselors and Therapists,* 3rd ed. (Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, 2016), 23–24.
[28] Mike Storry, and Peter Childs, *British Cultural Identities*, 6th ed. (London: Routledge, 2022), 22.
[29] Selby, *Who Am I?,* 20.

On top of that, Selby also ties cultural identity to the idea of acculturation, which is the process of adopting the beliefs and values of another culture, usually the dominant one. It is often mentioned in the context of immigrants adjusting to life in a new country, but it can apply to anyone trying to fit into a new group or community. Historically, when people were not able to fully adapt, it often led to isolation, difficulties fitting in, and a lack of support. In today's global world, this idea has expanded into what is called global acculturation, meaning how people adjust to and interact with different cultures around them. [30]

In short, according to Thomas and Schwarzbaum, cultural identity is shaped by cognitive development. For Childs and Storry, it is a matter of representation. Either symbolically through cultural icons or politically. Selby describes cultural identity as a sense of belonging from shared values, traditions, and everyday practices. She also connects it to acculturation, the process by which individuals adjust when entering a new or dominant culture.

The third type of identity that deserves its own definition is sexual identity, as it plays a significant role in the analytical part of this thesis. It refers to how individuals perceive themselves in terms of their attraction to the same or opposite sex, shaped by their personal experiences.

Selby states that sexual identity is about a person's sexual orientation, meaning who they are attracted to. In practice, this means that a person identifies as heterosexual, homosexual such as gay or lesbian, bisexual, or asexual. [31] According to Marquez et al., sexual identity is not only about sexual attraction, as Selby suggests, but also about how someone understands and defines their own emotional and romantic attraction toward others.[32]

No matter how someone identifies, their sexual identity does not always align with their sexual behaviour. In other words, the person someone has intercourse with might not actually reflect who they are genuinely attracted to. Many people have likely come across situations where someone's actions suggest one sexual orientation, but deep down, that person might be hiding how they really feel. A typical example is someone who is gay but has not fully accepted it or is afraid of how others might react. As a result, they might only have relationships with the

[30] Selby, *Who Am I?,* 21.
[31] Selby, *Who Am I?,* 30.
[32] José Marquez, Neil Humphrey, Louise Black, Megan Cutts, and Devi Khanna, "Gender and sexual identity-based inequalities in adolescent wellbeing: findings from the #BeeWell Study," *BMC Public Health* 23, no. 2211 (November 2023): 2.

opposite sex to appear heterosexual, both to themselves and to others. Selby adds that sexual identity is closely tied to the process of coming out, which is the act of revealing one's non-heterosexual identity, such as being gay, lesbian, or bisexual. Since society often assumes people are heterosexual, those who do not usually have to make a conscious choice to share that part of themselves. It is not a one-time event but a personal journey. Some choose to tell only close partners or friends, while others are more open. How and when someone comes out is entirely up to them, and it should happen on their own terms.[33]

In recent years, the focus has shifted from just understanding why sexual identity forms to helping people, especially those in marginalized groups, navigate their sexuality in healthy ways. Back in the 1960s, researchers observed that people in oppressed groups often internalized negative beliefs held by the dominant group, leading to shame and self-doubt. While society has made progress, stigma still exists and can seriously affect mental health. Since then, around twenty different theories have tried to explain sexual identity development. Some were criticized for being too rigid, making people feel like they were "doing it wrong" if their experience did not fit the model. As a result, newer approaches call for more flexible frameworks that reflect the complexity of identity. Key themes include exploration, confusion, coming out, managing stigma, and seeking authenticity. Recognizing that each person's journey is different helps create a more inclusive and compassionate understanding.[34]

To summarize, sexual identity is not only about sexual orientation but also includes emotional attraction. It does not always align with a person's sexual behavior and is often connected to the process of coming out. Modern approaches to studying sexual identity focus on social integration and the importance of authenticity.

Another key type of identity is ethnic identity, which, like sexual identity, plays an important role in the analytical part of this thesis. Ethnic identity is about how people see themselves as part of a particular ethnic group that is shaped by the values they share with that group. The following paragraphs provide insight into what ethnicity means and what this concept encompasses.

Ethnicity is a complex and often debated concept that can be difficult to define clearly. It brings together shared traditions, cultural habits, and sometimes political ties that make people feel

[33] Selby, *Who Am I?,* 30.
[34] Selby, *Who Am I?,* 31.

part of a distinct group within a broader society. [35] Moreover, Wakefield and Hudley describe ethnicity as either something people are born into or something they identify with themselves based on family background, cultural traditions, or national roots. [36] Jivraj and Simpson build on earlier ideas and refer to Bulmer, suggesting that an ethnic group is a group of people within a larger population who share a sense of identity. This identity might come from things like family ties, religion, language, where they come from, nationality, or even physical traits. What influences a person's sense of ethnic identity can vary a lot; what matters more to one person might not matter as much to another. In multicultural places like Britain, these lines often blur. People from minority communities, living alongside others, usually mix elements from both their own cultures and the mainstream one, creating new and blended identities.[37]

Storry and Childs point out that ethnic identity can take different ways, but language is often one of the strongest markers. Language carries the symbols, ideas, and beliefs that matter to an ethnic group, and it often becomes something deeply valued, something that is worth protecting. As a result, ethnic identity is frequently tied to debates around language, accents, dialects, and the status they hold in society.[38] Umaña-Taylor approaches ethnic identity from a social and developmental psychology perspective, describing it as both an emotional connection to one's ethnic group, like feelings of pride, belonging, or affection, and a personal journey of exploring and understanding what that ethnic background means in everyday life. It is not just about where someone comes from, but how deeply they engage with that part of themselves and what role it plays in shaping who they are.[39]

Selby, when analyzing ethnic identity, refers to the Minority Identity Development Model developed by Donald Atkinson, George Morten, and Derald Sue. This model offers a broader framework that applies to all racial and ethnic minority groups. It outlines five stages: starting with conformity, where individuals reject their minority identity and favor the dominant group; followed by dissonance, which brings internal conflict about their identity; then resistance and immersion, where they strongly align with their minority group while distancing from the

[35] Storry et al., *British Cultural Identities*, 205.
[36] David Wakefield, and Cynthia Hudley, "Ethnic and Racial Identity and Adolescent Well-Being," *Theory Into Practice* 46, no. 2 (Ocotber 2007): 148.
[37] Stephen Jivraj, and Ludi Simpson, "Introduction: the dynamics of diversity," in *Ethnic Identity and Inequalities in Britain*, ed. Stephen Jivraj, and Ludi Simpson (Bristol: Policy Press, 2015), 2.
[38] Storry et al., *British Cultural Identities*, 206.
[39] Adriana J. Umaña-Taylor, "Ethnic Identity Research: How Far Have We Come?," in *Studying Ethnic Identity: Methodological and Conceptual Approaches Across Disciplines*, ed. Carlos E. Santos, and Adriana J. Umaña-Taylor (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2015), 11.

majority; introspection, involving deeper reflection on group relations; and finally, synergetic awareness, where they develop a balanced appreciation for their own group as well as others.[40]

To recap, various factors, such as shared traditions, cultural practices, family ties, religion, nationality, origin, or language, shape ethnic identity. Everyone experiences their ethnic identity differently. What feels essential to one person, like religion, may be entirely different for someone else. In multicultural societies, minority and majority identities often blend, which leads to new, mixed forms of identity. Models like the Minority Identity Development Model show how complex the process of accepting one's ethnic identity can be.

The final type of identity discussed in the practical part is social identity, which is also examined in the analytical part of this thesis and, therefore, needs to be clearly defined. Social identity shapes how individuals see their connection to the groups they belong to, and it is a fundamental part of a person's overall identity.

Craib explains that people have several social identities, each influencing how they relate to others and interact within society.[41] Social Identity Theory explains that people have different social identities based on the groups they belong to. However, not all of them are equally present all the time. Which identity stands out depends on the situation and what feels most relevant or visible in that moment.[42]

Social Identity Theory, developed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner in the late 1970s, suggests that a person's sense of self is closely tied to the social groups they belong to. These groups can range from friend circles and families to clubs or professional organizations. People gain a sense of belonging and a clearer picture of who they are by identifying with them. Often, individuals align themselves with groups that make them feel good or that they believe will be viewed positively by others. A key part of this process involves comparing one's own group (the in-group) to others (the out-groups). People naturally want to feel that their group is better or more favorable in some way. If their group falls short or does not seem as valued, they might try to improve its image or consider leaving it for one that is seen in a more positive light. Ultimately, people are drawn to groups that reflect well on them and tend to distance themselves from those

[40] Selby, *Who Am I?,* 24.
[41] Ian Craib, *Experiencing Identity* (London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 1998), 4.
[42] Parisa Dashtipour, *Social Identity in Question:Construction, Subjectivity and Critique* (London: Routledge, 2012), 3.

that do not. It is not just about being part of a group by chance; what matters is whether someone chooses to identify with that group and sees it as part of who they are.[43]

Moreover, Selby points out that social identity is shaped by three interconnected processes: social categorization, social identification, and social comparison. Social categorization is about recognizing the different groups a person might belong to, which naturally leads to dividing people into "us" (in-groups) and "them" (out-groups). Social identification is the degree to which someone connects with a specific group, and this includes becoming aware of being part of it, thinking about what that membership means personally, and how it makes them feel. The third part, social comparison, reflects the common human tendency to measure oneself against others in areas like intelligence, popularity, or appearance. These comparisons help people better understand themselves and how they are similar to or different from others. Within groups, this often results in expecting similar behavior from fellow members and viewing them more positively than those outside the group.[44]

To sum up, social identity reflects how a person relates to the groups they belong to. Researchers agree that individuals have multiple social identities, which come to the surface depending on who they are interacting with at a given moment. There are two types of groups: the in-group and the out-group. People identify with the in-group because it reinforces their self-image, while they tend to distance themselves from the out-group. Selby highlights that social identity develops through three interconnected processes such as social categorization, social identification, and social comparison.

[43] Selby, *Who Am I?,* 31–32.
[44] Selby, *Who Am I?,*32–33.

3. DEVELOPMENT OF MODERN BRITISH FICTION

Since the analytical part of this thesis focuses on exploring identity formation in works of contemporary British fiction, it is essential first to clarify what is meant by "contemporary". While some scholars trace its beginnings back to the 1950s, others argue that the contemporary era in British literature truly began in the 1970s. The author of this thesis adopts the latter perspective.

Tew notes a growing interest in the new wave of British fiction that has emerged since the mid 1970s.[45] Bentley expands on this idea by pointing out that the label "contemporary literature" is not always easy to define. In everyday use, "contemporary" tends to mean the present moment, yet once a book is published, it becomes part of literary history. In his view, however, contemporary British fiction refers to literature written from around 1975 onward. This periodization is not entirely fixed, but it has become common in recent literary studies. One reason for choosing 1975 is its significance in British political and cultural history, namely, the election of Margaret Thatcher as leader of the Conservative Party, which marked the beginning of significant social and ideological shifts. Bentley also argues that the older label "post-war literature" has become too broad to be useful, especially as it once referred only to the period following the Second World War, but Britain has since experienced many other defining moments.[46]

Both authors place the beginning of modern British fiction in the 1970s. Bentley narrows it down further to 1975, marking the election of Margaret Thatcher as leader of the Conservative Party and the start of a new cultural era.

Since *My Beautiful Laundrette* was released in the 1980s, and *White Teeth* and *Hotel World* came out in the early 2000s, this chapter will focus on how modern British fiction developed during these particular decades.

The 1980s were largely shaped by the influence of one political leader, Margaret Thatcher, and the ideology that came to be known as Thatcherism. However, many writers and critics challenged Thatcher's ideology through satire and parody. They often criticized her harsh

[45] Philip Tew, *The Contemporary British Novel* (London: Continuum, 2004), ix.
[46] Nick Bentley, *Contemporary British Fiction* (Edinburgh: University Press, 2017), 1–2.

economic measures and polarizing politics, especially when compared to the more cooperative post-war era that had focused on welfare, steady jobs, and general prosperity.[47]

Another key aspect of the 1980s was the unique political and social climate of Thatcher-era Britain, especially the serious challenges faced by immigrant and minority communities. British writers did not just respond to broad cultural changes; they were also reacting to a national context where race had become heavily politicized under Thatcher's leadership, prompting a shift in cultural expression and identity. Also, the 1980s brought deep socio-economic hardship, particularly for the working class and Black communities.[48] In the 1980s, Black British authors began to embrace a socially shaped view of Black identity, which led to a more diverse yet grounded and context-aware, body of Black British literature. Writers like Rushdie, Emecheta, and Kureishi explored this "new ethnic" perspective, offering portrayals of Black British identity that reflect the specific histories and experiences of Indian-Pakistani, Nigerian, and Jamaican migrant communities.[49]

It is also important to mention that the 1980s marked the time when a visible and distinct gay community began to take shape and gain recognition.[50]

In conclusion, understanding the context in which contemporary British fiction developed is key to exploring how identity is portrayed in the works discussed. The 1980s marked a turning point in Britain's cultural and political life, especially when Margaret Thatcher came to power as Prime Minister. Many writers responded to the impact of Thatcherism by using literature as a space for critique and reflection. During this time, stories also began to more deeply explore the experiences of marginalized groups, particularly within Black British and queer communities, leading to richer and more nuanced representations of identity.

The new millennium brought a fresh wave of themes and styles into literature, opening new directions for writers to explore.

O'Donnell argues that many contemporary authors treat postmodern experimental techniques as tools they can pick and choose from. Their writing blends refreshed forms of realism with linguistic playfulness, simultaneously respecting traditional genre conventions and creatively

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[47] Philip Tew, Emily Horton, and Leigh Wilson, "Critical Introduction," in *The 1980s: A Decade of Contemporary British Fiction*, ed. Philip Tew, Emily Horton, and Leigh Wilson (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), 1–2.
[48] Philip Tew et al., "Critical Introduction," 11.
[49] Philip Tew et al., "Critical Introduction," 13.
[50] Alison Hennegan, "Coming Out: The Emergence of Gay Literature" in *British Literature in Transition, 1960–1980: Flower Power*, ed. Kate McLoughlin (Cambridge: University Press, 2019), 134.

disrupting them through parody and hybridization. It might seem like this suggests these authors have somehow moved beyond postmodernism, but claiming this would be just as misguided as stating they have moved beyond modernism. Instead, for many contemporary writers, categorizing themselves within specific literary movements or explicitly distancing themselves from earlier periods no longer feels relevant or necessary. As O'Donnell emphasizes, contemporary British fiction writers actively draw from postmodern themes like identity formation, history, and the interplay between aesthetics and politics, yet also seek fresh approaches to genre, identity, and language. Additionally, these authors explore contemporary issues such as environmental concerns, globalization, technology, literary quality, and authenticity, reflecting the distinct historical context of the new millennium.[51]

Germanà argues that some see the year 2000 as the start of a new cultural era, while others, like Brian McHale, believe 2001 marks a more meaningful shift in the cultural atmosphere of the Western world. McHale points explicitly to 2001 as the moment postmodernism gave way to what he calls "post-postmodernism", borrowing the term from Jeffrey T. Nealon. This new phase builds on postmodernism, repeating some of its ideas but with a fresh perspective. Few British authors reflect this transition as clearly as Ali Smith. Her work often embraces both a connection to postmodernism and a move beyond it, primarily through the way she blurs the line between reality and imagination, something that postmodernism itself was deeply concerned with.[52]

Gerzina states that Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*, published in 2000, made a major impression on the literary world at the start of the new century. Through its rich mix of cultures, languages, ethnicities, and social backgrounds, the novel captured the reality of a modern London that had been deeply shaped by immigration and multicultural influences.[53]

To conclude, for authors writing in the new millennium, starting around the year 2000, it has become common to incorporate postmodern techniques and themes into their work, such as diverse forms of identity construction, linguistic play, and creative disruption of genre conventions. In addition, these writers often engage directly with contemporary issues. In contrast, Germanà, referencing McHale, argues that 2001 marks a turning point with the

[51] Patrick O'Donnell, "New British Fiction," *MFS Modern Fiction Studies* 58, no. 3 (September 2012): 429–432.
[52] Monica Germanà, "Ali Smith: Strangers and Intrusions," in *The Contemporary British Novel Since 2000*, ed. James Acheson (Edinburgh: University Press, 2017), 99.
[53] Gretchen Gerzina, "Zadie Smith: The Geographies of Marriage," in *The Contemporary British Novel Since 2000*, ed. James Acheson (Edinburgh: University Press, 2017), 48.

emergence of what is known as post-postmodernism, a phase in which authors revisit and express ideas from a different perspective. She highlights Ali Smith as a key example, praising her original and brilliant writing style, which blends reality with imagination and offers an entirely new take on identity distinct from other writers in her literary circle.

4. MULTICULTURALISM IN BRITAIN

The final chapter needs to address the concept of multiculturalism and how it is shaped in the British context. Without this theoretical background, the analysis would not be complete, mainly because two of the books analyzed in this thesis focus directly on this theme through the lens of identity formation.

Multiculturalism describes the political, legal, and philosophical approaches that developed after World War II to address and embrace increasing social diversity. For a long time, it gained broad support and recognition, but in more recent years, that general agreement has started to face criticism from politicians and public commentators.[54]

According to Farrar, multiculturalism as a way of thinking started to take shape in Britain during the 1960s, alongside efforts to introduce practical policies aimed at ending racial discrimination and encouraging the integration of ethnic minorities. By the 1980s, the term "multiculturalism" had become widely used as a hopeful vision for society. As a political mindset, it promoted the idea that people from the majority ethnic group should respectfully acknowledge and accept the different cultures that make up the wider community. In addition, he claims that the term "multicultural" refers to a society made up of many different cultures, usually associated with ethnicity or race. However, "multiculturalism" goes beyond simply describing this diversity. It often reflects a positive attitude towards it, promoting the idea that the presence of various cultural groups within a society should be valued and embraced.[55]

Parekh defines multicultural society as one where multiple cultural groups live together. There are generally two ways such a society can approach this diversity. It can choose to embrace it, making diversity a key part of its identity and respecting the cultural needs of each group. Or, it might try to assimilate these communities into the dominant culture, either completely or to a large extent.[56]

In brief, multiculturalism began to develop after World War II, and diversity was strongly supported. However, recent years have brought criticism. The term refers to a society made up

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[54] Richard T. Ashcroft, and Mark Bevir, "What is Postwar Multiculturalism in Theory and Practice?," in *Multiculturalism in the British Commonwealth: Comparative Perspectives on Theory and Practice,* ed. Richard T. Ashcroft, and Mark Bevir (California: University of California Press, 2019), 1.
[55] Max Farrar, "Multiculturalism in the UK: A Contested Discourse," in *Islam in the West: Key Issues in Multiculturalism,* ed. Max Farrar, Simon Robinson, Yasmin Valli, and Paul Wetherly (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 7.
[56] Bhiku Parekh, *Rethinking Multiculturalism: Cultural Diversity and Political Theory*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 6.

of people from different ethnic backgrounds. In the 1980s, the term became linked with the idea that the majority population should respect and acknowledge minority ethnic groups.

Multiculturalism stands out as a crucial concept in exploring how identity is shaped in modern British literature. Historical experiences, such as colonialism and waves of post-war migration, have contributed to the emergence of deeply diverse and culturally layered societies, which literature often reflects.

Modern Britain is a multicultural society. Since the end of the Second World War, immigration has significantly transformed the country. What was once a primarily white, ethnically British, and Christian population has become a mix of beliefs, cultures, and communities from across the world. This level of diversity, which was hard to imagine just a few decades ago, is now a natural and undeniable part of everyday life in the UK.[57]

While this shift was initially shaped by immigration from former British colonies, the nature of diversity in the UK has continued to evolve. For many years, immigration policies and public perception focused primarily on well-established African-Caribbean and South Asian communities (such as those from India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh). However, today's demographic and social landscape is far more complex, giving rise to what is now described as super-diversity, a level of cultural complexity that Britain has never experienced before.[58]

These communities began arriving in the UK between the 1950s and 1970s, at first with relatively open entry rights that were later limited mainly to family reunification. Many became citizens through post-colonial agreements and went on to build strong, close-knit communities centered around cultural and religious institutions.[59] By the early 1970s, most new arrivals were family members joining relatives who had already made their lives in Britain. Since then, migration patterns have changed significantly. Although British citizens have continued to return home, back in 1971, people arriving from both the Old and New Commonwealth each made up about a third of all newcomers.[60]

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[57] Richard T. Ashcroft, and Mark Bevir, "Multiculturalism in Contemporary Britain: Policy, Law and Theory," *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* 21, no. 1 (November 2017): 1. doi:10.1080/13698230.2017.1398443. 1-21.
[58] Steven Vertovec, "Super-Diversity and Its Implications," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 30, no. 6 (September 2007): 1024.
[59] Vertovec, "Super-Diversity," 1027.
[60] Vertovec, "Super-Diversity," 1029

In closing, migration mainly from former British colonies after the Second World War transformed what was once a predominantly white and ethnically homogeneous Britain into a multicultural society made up of various ethnic and religious communities. Between the 1950s and 1970s, these communities began settling across the UK. Britain has been described as “super-diverse” in recent years due to its increasingly complex demographic structure.

5. ANALYSIS OF SELECTED BOOKS

This chapter addresses the central research question that guides this thesis: How is identity constructed in contemporary British literature? In order to explore this question, the analysis draws on three literary works: *My Beautiful Laundrette* by Hanif Kureishi, *White Teeth* by Zadie Smith, and *Hotel World* by Ali Smith. The analysis focuses on three main aspects of identity: ethnic, sexual, and social.

In order to carry out the analysis, it is first necessary to clarify how the author of this thesis understands the different types of identity. The definitions of social, ethnic, and sexual identity are based on a thorough study of theoretical concepts but have been rephrased to reflect the author's own perspective. They thus represent a personal interpretation.

The author understands ethnic identity, on the one hand, as something given, an experience of belonging and loyalty to a group to which an individual believes they belong based on their origin, and, on the other hand, as a complex set of elements in which family background, cultural traditions and expectations, and languages are closely intertwined. It also evolves through personal negotiation within the social environment. Next, she defines sexual identity as a person's emotional, romantic, and physical attraction to the same or opposite sex. It is not necessarily fixed and can be fluid, shaped by internal awareness and external social influences. Last but not least, the author of this thesis sees social identity as multilayered, context-dependent, and often fragmented. According to her, it is formed through memberships in various social groups, whether it is family, friends, or colleagues. It encompasses how individuals see themselves and are seen by others. However, people behave differently in each of these settings, which means not all aspects of their social identity are visible at once. The social groups individuals belong to help them build a sense of "positive face", a self-image that allows them to feel accepted and good about themselves. Through these groups, they can also feel free to be their true selves.

Together, the works provide a rich and nuanced view of how different identities are shaped and intertwined. The concepts used to approach these forms of identity were outlined earlier in the theoretical section. These three works were selected because they represent a diverse range of authors with different cultural backgrounds and experiences, writing across different time periods. Each of them places a strong emphasis on the theme of identity, approaching it from unique angles. Together, they offer a broad and varied perspective on identity in contemporary British fiction, reflecting the richness and complexity of modern British society.

The first work to be analyzed, *My Beautiful Laundrette* by Hanif Kureishi, a writer of Pakistani-British origin, reflects a diverse range of ethnic, sexual, and social identities. Set in 1980s London, the story captures the social and political atmosphere of the time and opens up essential questions about ethnic identity in a rapidly changing society.

As mentioned earlier in the theoretical part, Peplow points out that this period revealed the harsh realities faced by many minority ethnic communities, including widespread racial discrimination and systemic inequality. They were seen as outsiders and exploited for cheap labor, threatening the economic security of white British workers.[61]

Before diving into the analysis of ethnic, sexual, and social identity, it is crucial to acknowledge Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development, which was introduced earlier in this work. Two stages from Erikson's model, stage five (identity vs. role confusion) and stage six (intimacy vs. isolation), are especially relevant to *My Beautiful Laundrette* and offer deeper insight into Omar's character.

Although Omar's exact age is not stated, he appears to be around 18 or in his early twenties, which places him in Erikson's fifth developmental stage. This is a crucial period for forming identity, as individuals start to explore who they are and where they belong. It is also a period of questioning values inherited from parents, culture, and peers. While some confusion is natural and even necessary, too much can disrupt the development of a stable sense of self.

Omar's experience closely mirrors this stage. He struggles to define where he belongs as he feels British in some ways, yet his Pakistani family and community are pressuring him to stay connected to his heritage. These competing expectations and the social pressures around him make his identity formation especially difficult and unstable. His attempts to navigate ethnic, social, and sexual identity are all part of this broader process of self-discovery.

Stage six, which centers on the conflict between intimacy and isolation, also applies. At this point, individuals long for close, meaningful relationships but may fear rejection. According to Erikson, true intimacy can only be achieved when both partners have a clear and mature sense of self. This is where Omar continues to struggle because he has not fully figured out who he is, especially in terms of his sexuality; he finds it hard to be open and vulnerable. He hides his homosexuality from those around him, which prevents him from forming fully intimate relationships and keeps him in a state of emotional isolation.

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[61] Simon Peplow, *Race and riots in Thatcher's Britain* (Manchester: University Press, 2019), 1.

The analysis begins with ethnic identity, as it is the most dominant theme throughout the play. It runs through the narrative from beginning to end and stands out as the most significant of the three types of identity explored. Moreover, the discussion also considers how identity is shaped not only by personal choices but by external forces such as racism, economic hardship, and intergenerational conflict. *My Beautiful Laundrette* delves into the complexities of ethnic identity during Thatcher-era Britain and focuses on themes like assimilation, belonging, and how immigrant communities see themselves.

The main protagonist, Omar, is the son of a Pakistani father and a British mother, born and raised in Britain. That description alone is enough to show that his personal ethnic journey reflects the broader cultural tensions between the two identities and the struggle to find a balance between them.

Right from the very beginning, it is interesting to notice that Omar's Pakistani ethnic identity is shaped more by those around him, especially his father, than by Omar himself. In the following passage, ethnic identity is portrayed as something assigned based on origin, influenced by external factors like family expectations and cultural traditions:

> PAPA: I'm fixing you with a job. With your uncle … PAPA: (Into phone) Can't you give Omar some work in your garage for a few weeks, yaar? The bugger's your nephew after all.[62]

Omar's father does not just find him a job. He specifically arranges it with his brother Nasser, but this decision is not really practical and reflects clear pressure from the family. By reminding Nasser that Omar is his nephew, the father indirectly reinforces the idea that Omar belongs within their Pakistani community. This highlights a form of assigned ethnic identity, one that Omar might not actively choose for himself but is expected to accept. In this context, his father is pushing him to stay "among his own people," which strengthens Omar's connection to his Pakistani roots while leaving little space for the development of a British identity. Cultural continuity plays a key role here as well. For Omar's father, preserving Pakistani identity means more than just staying within the ethnic community. It is also about keeping the language alive. This is, for example, evident in his casual use of the Urdu word *yaar*, which means "friend".

Kureishi also draws attention to ethnic identity through the names of his characters, which clearly do not sound like typical British names. This choice hints at their connection to a specific

[62] Hanif Kureishi, *My Beautiful Laundrette* (Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam, 1999), 21–22.

cultural community. Therefore, the names are not just simple labels for the characters. They play a meaningful role in the narrative.

As Girma states in her article, personal names often carry a deeper meaning, reflecting a person's ethnic or religious background. They serve as valuable social and cultural markers and capture broader historical and societal dynamics. In different contexts, names can act as a form of cultural capital, something that gives a person a sense of identity and belonging, but they can also reinforce marginalisation and inequality. In the United States, for example, uniquely African American names and names tied to immigrant cultures have sparked ongoing debate. While "Black names" often represent a powerful, creative expression of identity, they can also carry negative stereotypes. These names are sometimes unfairly linked to poverty, lack of education, or even moral judgment, which places those who bear them at a disadvantage.[63]

Although Girma focuses on African American naming practices in the U.S., her ideas can easily be applied to the British context as well. The protagonist bears the name Omar, which is common in muslim culture. Other characters, like Salim, Nasser, Bilquis, and Hussein, also carry names that reflect their cultural and ethnic roots. Even if some of these characters were born in Britain, their names still connect them to their Pakistani heritage and traditions. At the same time, their names set them apart from the white British majority, who often view them as outsiders.

Girma then adds that for immigrants and their descendants, first names can reveal how much they have adapted to a new culture. Traditionally, assimilation theories suggested that the more integrated families become, the less likely they are to choose ethnically distinct names for their children. However, newer theories argue that ethnic identity does not have to disappear. Instead, it can persist or even reemerge. This more recent view, often called "segmented assimilation", acknowledges that host societies are not uniform, and immigrant families may choose to preserve their cultural roots or integrate into different parts of society rather than fully conform to the mainstream.[64]

In *My Beautiful Laundrette*, the story reflects the second case when names from ethnic minority backgrounds remain present and meaningful. A character like Omar has a name that points to his South Asian, specifically Pakistani, heritage. This name shows that, despite living in British

[63] Hewan Girma, "Black Names, Immigrant Names: Navigating Race and Ethnicity Through Personal Names," *Journal of Black Studies* 51, no. 1 (November 2019): 16–17.
[64] Girma, "Black Names," 20.

society, his cultural roots are still very much alive. This continued use of ethnic names highlights how identity can be preserved across generations. In addition, although Omar's mother was British, it is clear that his father made a deliberate choice to protect their ethnic background by giving his son a name that reflects his Pakistani roots.

One of the key moments that highlights the complexity of ethnic identity in *My Beautiful Laundrette* occurs during a conversation at Nasser's house. Omar is introduced to other members of the Pakistani community and begins a conversation with Cherry, Salim's Anglo-Indian wife, which reveals the tensions and contradictions of living between cultures. Their interaction reflects the broader theme of what it means to belong in a multicultural, postcolonial Britain. Cherry tells Omar that she knows his entire family in Karachi. When he asks her if she has ever been there, she responds:

> CHERRY: You stupid, what a stupid, it's my home. Could anyone in their right mind call this silly little island off Europe their home? Every day in Karachi, every day your other uncles and cousins are at our house for bridge, booze and VCR. BILQUIS: Cherry, my little nephew knows nothing of that life there. CHERRY: Oh God, I'm so sick of hearing about these in-betweens. People should make up their minds where they are.[65]

This exchange highlights the mixed and layered nature of ethnic identity. Omar is described as Anglo-Pakistani, yet he has very little personal connection to Pakistan beyond his family and the community he is surrounded by. Cherry, on the other hand, speaks about Britain with evident frustration, calling it "this silly little island", which reflects the sense of exclusion and inequality many minorities face. Still, even though she dismisses Britain as her home, she still lives there. It shows just how complicated identity and belonging can be. Her comment about "in-betweens" is especially ironic. She criticises Omar for being caught between two cultures, yet she herself is a clear example of that same in-between space. The tension in this moment captures a larger issue faced by people living in the diaspora. There is pressure to choose one cultural identity over another, even though their real-life experience does not fit neatly into either.

Salim's frustration with Omar's inability to identify as someone with Pakistani roots is another example of how Kureishi explores Omar's hybrid ethnic identity:

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[65] Kureishi, *MBL*, 37.

> SALIM: Nasser tells me you're ambitious to do something. But twice you failed your exams. You've done nothing with the laundrette and now you bugger me up. You've got too much white blood. It's made you weak like those pale-faced adolescents that call us wog. You know what I do to them? I take out this. (He takes out a pound note. He tears it to pieces.) I say: your English pound is worthless. It's worthless like you, Omar, are worthless. Your whole great family – rich and powerful over there – is let down by you. (OMAR gets up slowly.) Now fuck off.[66]

Salim's monologue is emotionally explicit and expresses his deep frustration with Omar's behavior and his unclear sense of ethnic identity. He accuses Omar of having "white blood", which is a metaphor that suggests Omar is acting more British than Pakistani, as if he has abandoned his roots. To Salim, this feels like a betrayal. He sees Omar as someone who has turned his back on his community in an effort to fit into a society that openly discriminates against people like them. He even brings up the slur "wogs" to remind Omar of how the English view and treat them. Salim continues by describing how he reacts to being called that slur. He takes out a one-pound note and tears it apart. For him, the pound represents everything about Britain. The system, people, and all the things he despises about the society he lives in. By destroying it, he shows just how strongly he rejects it all. It is his way of saying he will never see himself as part of that community. In the end, Salim accuses Omar of being no better than the society that looks down on them, claiming that Omar has turned his back on his Pakistani roots.

To show just how deeply offensive the term "wog" is, Hughes explains that it originally appeared in British English as a racial slur, mainly targeting Black people and often used by white colonisers. Over time, it became a broader insult aimed at anyone seen as a foreigner. Unlike the n-word, which in some cases has been reappropriated by the Black community, "wog" has never been reclaimed by those it was meant to insult. It remains a purely derogatory and hurtful term.[67]

In this excerpt, Omar tells his father that he has reunited with Johnny after many years. His father reacts very negatively and criticises him for embracing his British identity at the expense

[66] Kureishi, *MBL*, 54.
[67] Geoffrey Hughes, *An Encyclopedia of Swearing The Social History of Oaths, Profanity, Foul Language, and Ethnic Slurs in the English-speaking World* (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 2006), 148.

of his Pakistani roots. As a strong opponent of the British system, he wants Omar to reconnect with his Pakistani heritage:

> OMAR: (Pulling up Papa's bottoms) You know who I met? Johnny. Johnny. PAPA: The boy who came here one day dressed as a fascist with a quarter inch of hair? OMAR: He was a friend once. For years. PAPA: There were days when he didn't deserve your admiration so much. OMAR: Christ, I've known him since I was five. PAPA: He went too far. They hate us in England. And all you do is kiss their arses and think of yourself as a little Britisher![68]

This passage gives another powerful glimpse into the feelings of exploitation and exclusion experienced by minority communities. Papa sees himself as part of a group that does not truly belong in British society. His comment, "All you do is kiss their arses," shows how he sees Omar as trying too hard to fit into the majority culture at the cost of forgetting where he comes from. Papa clarifies that he believes the British will never fully accept anyone outside their own as equals. That is why he is so strongly against Omar forming close ties with white Britons, let alone trying to become one of them. At its core, his anger reflects a more profound fear. The fear is that their ethnic identity will slowly disappear under the pressure to conform to the dominant culture.

Kureishi also explores ethnic identity through the contrasting lifestyles of Nasser and his brother, Papa. Both were born in Pakistan, but each represents their ethnic background very differently. Papa is portrayed as someone who has not successfully integrated into British society. He is unemployed, isolated, and struggles with alcoholism. He no longer functions as an active member of society. But he was not always like this. As the reader eventually learns, Papa was once a successful journalist before moving to Britain:

> NASSER: The exact bastard. My blue brother was also a famous journalist in Bombay and great drinker. He was to the bottle what Louis Armstrong is to the trumpet. ZAKI: (To NASSER) Your brother was the clever one. You used to carry his typewriter. DICK O'DONNELL: Isn't he coming tonight? SALIM (To NASSER) Whatever happened to him? OMAR: Papa's lying down. SALIM: I meant his career. NASSER: That's lying down too. What chance would the Englishman give a leftist communist Pakistani on newspapers?[69]

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[68] Kureishi, *MBL*, 48.
[69] Kureishi, *MBL*, 39–40.

This dialogue shows how Papa was unable to succeed as a journalist in Britain. Despite his intelligence and past accomplishments, his identity and political views left him with little chance in a system that had no room for someone like him. On top of that, he had no genuine desire to adapt, especially after seeing how minorities like himself were treated by British society. For Papa, Britain was never truly a home, just a temporary place where he continued to hold onto his Pakistani identity, regardless of the cultural environment in which he was raising his son. On the other hand, his brother Nasser managed to establish himself in Britain and had no issue embracing a British identity alongside his Pakistani one. His willingness to integrate into British society is also reflected in a moment with Rachel, his mistress:

> NASSER: What am I, Rachel, your trampoline? RACHEL: Yes, oh, je vous aime beaucoup, trampoline. NASSER: Speak my language, dammit.[70]

When she speaks to him in French, he tells her to speak "his language," which means English. Although he was not born in England and English is technically his second language, he still considers it his own, which shows how fully he has embraced the culture of the country he now calls home.

Kureishi brings up racism several times throughout the play, showing how minorities in Britain are often confronted with discrimination. This directly impacts how or even whether they choose to form a British identity. After all, it is difficult to identify with a society that oppresses individuals who do not share the same ethnic background. As a result, many characters may distance themselves from Britishness and instead take even more pride in their Pakistani identity, which offers a sense of belonging and dignity they do not feel in the majority culture:

> ZAKI: What chance has the racist Englishman given us that we haven't torn from him with our hands? ENGLISHMAN: Maybe Omar's father didn't make chances for himself. Look at you, Salim, five times richer and more powerful than me. SALIM: Five times? Ten, at least. ENGLISHMAN: In my country! The only prejudice in England is against the useless. SALIM: It's rather tilted in favour of the useless I would think. The only positive discrimination they have here.[71]

The conversation begins with a bold statement from Zaki, who openly calls out the racism deeply embedded in British society. He argues that minorities are given no real chance to

[70] Kureishi, *MBL*, 29.
[71] Kureishi, MBL, 40–41.

become part of the country. As they have had to build their lives entirely on their own, without any real support from a system that should be helping them but instead keeps pushing them to the margins. In response, the Englishman reacts rudely and dismissively. He refers to Britain as "my country," as if it only belongs to white Britons, and completely denies the existence of racism. According to him, the only thing people are judged on in England is success or failure, no matter their ethnic background. This reflects a typical attitude in the majority culture, which is refusing to acknowledge the real, systemic barriers that minorities face. By pointing to Salim's financial success, he suggests that if others have not succeeded, it is their fault, not the system's. By that remark, he refers to Omar's father as a failure because of his shortcomings rather than the structural inequalities working against him.

To sum up, as the analysis has shown, ethnic identity is a central theme in *My Beautiful Laundrette,* present throughout the entire narrative. Through Omar's journey, Hanif Kureishi illustrates that identity is not something one chooses freely. It is shaped by external forces like family, cultural expectations, and the society one lives in. In Omar's case, his Pakistani identity is not something he actively embraces; rather, it is shaped by those around him, especially his father and the community he works in. While Omar does not place much personal value on his Pakistani heritage, he cannot escape it either. It still affects his life.

On the other hand, Omar's father represents someone deeply rooted in his Pakistani identity. For him, culture and tradition are crucial. He has never been able or willing to integrate into British society, and he strongly disapproves of Omar's attempts to do so. This generational and cultural conflict underlines the difficulty of navigating two seemingly incompatible worlds. Kureishi also explores ethnic identity through the names of his characters. By choosing distinctly muslim names, he pushes back against the idea of blending in thoroughly with British culture. These names are not just labels; they are a way of keeping cultural roots visible and reminding both the characters and the audience of where they come from, even as they navigate life in a different society.

Lastly, Omar struggles to identify with either culture fully. He does not feel entirely at home in British society, but he also does not fully belong to the Pakistani community. Kureishi uses this in-between space to reflect the challenges of growing up between two cultures. He also uses the theme of ethnic identity to highlight the impact of racism on minorities, how it shapes their experiences, limits their opportunities, and damages their sense of self.

The second identity explored is sexual identity, in this case, homosexuality, which appears at times quite explicitly in the play. While it is not developed as extensively as ethnic identity, it still plays a meaningful role in the narrative. Kureishi captures the fluid nature of human sexuality, particularly in how it interacts with social expectations and pressures. It is worth noting that Omar's sexuality is constantly left open to interpretation. From the start, the reader knows very little about his romantic life, or maybe more accurately, the lack of any clear romantic storyline speaks volumes on its own. Omar never expresses interest in women, nor is he ever shown in a relationship with one.

In contrast, the men around him have clearly defined heterosexual roles: his father and uncle Nasser both have wives, children, and, in Nasser's case, even a mistress. Salim is also shown with a girlfriend. This contrast throws Omar's ambiguous sexual identity into sharper focus and lays the groundwork for how it unfolds later in the story. It is also important to remember that the story is set in the 1980s, a time when society was far less accepting of queer identities. That context makes Omar's silence and struggle to express himself even more meaningful.

As Tatchell points out, homophobia grew sharply during the 1980s, driven by powerful forces like the government, the church, the police, and the media. Queer people were openly targeted and pushed to the margins of society. Under Margaret Thatcher, the Conservative government actively worked against the LGBT community. Her administration promoted a series of so-called "moral crusades" based on "family values" and "Victorian ideals," which carried strong homophobic and sexist undertones. Labour councils that offered support to local LGBT groups through funding or by providing spaces for events were publicly attacked by the Conservatives. The LGBT community became a political scapegoat. The Tories stirred up homophobia to win over bigoted voters, and it paid off. On top of all this, the AIDS crisis was weaponized. Branded as the "gay plague," it became a tool for spreading fear, assigning blame, and justifying even harsher repression of LGBT people.[72]

The first hint of sexual identity that the reader encounters comes not from Omar himself but paradoxically from his father, who asks his brother to find a girlfriend for his son:

[72] "1980s: A Decade of State-Sanctioned Homophobia," Peter Tatchell Foundation, accessed May 5 2025, https://www.petertatchellfoundation.org/1980s-a-decade-of-state-sanctioned-homophobia/.

> PAPA: If his arse gets lazy – kick it. I'll send a certificate giving permission. And one thing more. Try and fix him with a nice girl. I'm not sure if his penis is in full working order.[73]

This scene highlights the strong cultural expectations around marriage, where the parents often take charge of finding a suitable partner. In many muslim communities, it is still common for parents to arrange relationships. That is why Papa's final comment stands out. It can be read in a few different ways. On one hand, he seems to be questioning Omar's masculinity or his ability to meet heteronormative expectations, like forming a relationship with a woman. This could also be interpreted as a hint that he suspects Omar might be gay, something he never says explicitly but possibly suspects, especially since Omar has never shown interest in women. At the same time, his comment reflects a kind of cultural pressure. It comes from a social background where non-heterosexual identities are not accepted or even openly acknowledged. As a result, Omar finds himself caught not only in a society that is hostile towards queer people but also in a family environment where his sexuality is questioned and constrained. These combined pressures from the outside world and within his home push him to hide or suppress a key part of who he is.

An interesting twist occurs in the first half of the play when Omar visits his uncle and meets his daughter Tania. This moment also marks a notable turn in Omar's sexual identity, as Tania suddenly makes a move on him and starts touching him in an affectionate way. The conversation and interaction that follow hint at Omar's shift away from a strictly heterosexual orientation:

> TANIA: It's been years. And you're looking good now. I bet we understand each other, eh? (He can't easily respond to her enthusiasm. Unoffended, she swings away from him. He looks at photographs of his Papa and Bhutto on the wall.) Are they being cruel to you in their typical men's way? (He shrugs.) You don't mind? OMAR: I think I should harden myself. TANIA: (Patting seat next to her) Wow, what are you into? OMAR: Your father's done well. (He sits. She kisses him on the lips. They hold each other.)[74]

The excerpt makes it clear that Tania and Omar kissed and then held each other, which might at first suggest a heterosexual attraction. However, on closer inspection, the reader may start to notice some subtle clues, such as that all the initiative comes from Tania. She is the one who kisses Omar, while there is no mention of him kissing her back or showing any emotional or

[73] Kureishi, *MBL*, 23.
[74] Kureishi, *MBL*, 42.

physical affection in return. It can mean that Omar may be hiding his true sexual identity, which at this point in the story remains unspoken. Also telling is the fact that Omar completely misses Tania's flirtatious hints and instead chooses to look at photographs, which can be understood as an indirect suggestion of his lack of interest in women.

Shortly after the encounter with Tania, Omar and Johnny first cross paths when Omar is driving Salim and Cherry home, and they are suddenly spotted by a group of skinheads. Despite the tension, Omar steps out of the car and walks straight toward them. Johnny is among the group members, though he is not actively involved in hostility. Omar offers his hand, Johnny takes it, and they start talking:

> OMAR: It's me. JOHNNY: I know who it is. OMAR: How are yer? Working? What you doing now then?... OMAR: Ring us then. JOHNNY: I will. (Indicates car.) Leave 'em there. We can do something. Now. Just us. OMAR: Can't. (OMAR touches JOHNNY's arm and runs back to the car.)[75]

At this point, the reader might start to sense that something deeper is beginning to unfold in terms of Omar's sexual identity, even if there is no clear emotional or romantic connection between these two just yet. The signals are subtle but very much evident. Moreover, the very fact that a white skinhead starts talking to someone his group openly despises and even shakes his hand in front of them suggests a level of closeness that goes beyond what the reader has been explicitly shown so far.

As the story unfolds, Omar's feelings for Johnny become more and more obvious. One telling moment is when Johnny calls him. Omar cannot help but smile when he hears his voice, even while his father yells at him in the background. He completely ignores the shouting as he is clearly focused on Johnny and their conversation:

> OMAR: Hallo. (Pause.) Johnny. PAPA: (Shouts over) I'll throw you out of this bloody flat, you're nothing but a bum liability! (But OMAR is smiling into the phone and talking to JOHNNY, a finger in one ear.)[76]

Eventually, these two meet again at the laundrette. Omar is preparing to open it and asks Johnny to join him and help run it. But their conversation about how the laundrette should look quickly shifts into something entirely different as they begin kissing. This moment creates a strong

[75] Kureishi, *MBL*, 45–46.
[76] Kureishi, *MBL*, 56.

contrast with the earlier scene with Tania, where she kissed Omar, but nothing happened afterward. He did not respond or continue the moment. In this case, though, it is clear from the use of the pronoun "they" that Omar is fully involved. He kisses Johnny back, which reveals that he feels a genuine attraction to him:

> JOHNNY puts his arm round OMAR. OMAR turns to him and they kiss on the mouth. They kiss passionately and hold each other.[77]

Through this next scene, the reader starts to get a clearer sense of Omar's sexual identity, which gradually takes shape as the story unfolds. Omar and Johnny are making love, but their moment is interrupted when Nasser suddenly walks in, clearly not expecting what he sees. He walked in not during the act itself but while they were getting dressed. One can tell from his reaction that he suspects something is going on, but after that, he never brings it up again:

> OMAR and JOHNNY are making love vigorously, enjoying themselves thoroughly. Suddenly OMAR stops a moment, looks up, sees NASSER and RACHEL waltzing across the laundrette. OMAR jumps up. OMAR and JOHNNY are quickly getting dressed. NASSER bursts into the room. NASSER: What the hell are you doing? Sunbathing? OMAR: Asleep, Uncle. We were shagged out. Where's Papa?[78]

In addition, there is an apparent inner conflict in Omar's sexual identity as he is not entirely at peace with it himself. He knows he can be open with Johnny, but he hides this part of himself from everyone else. As mentioned earlier, there are several reasons for this secret, mainly the pressure from his family and the conservative time period he is living in.

On top of that, these examples make it clear why Omar was never interested in Tania or returned her kiss. Because he was in love with Johnny, and it was with him that he shared real intimacy, hidden behind the closed doors of the laundrette. At this point in the story, the laundrette becomes their private space, a place where they can express their sexual identities freely. The laundrette turns into a private place of freedom, where they can escape the outside world and simply be themselves without being judged.

Unfortunately for Omar, his pursuit of romantic happiness still remains complicated by his family. He keeps his sexual orientation hidden and continues to go along with the heteronormative roles they expect him to play. Nasser even suggests that Omar should marry

[77] Kureishi, *MBL*, 71.
[78] Kureishi, *MBL*, 84.

his daughter Tania, once again bringing up the idea of his "functional" penis, which was already mentioned by his father in the beginning of the play:

> NASSER: (To OMAR) Then marry her. (OMAR looks at him.) What's wrong with her? If I say marry her then you damn well do it! NASSER: (To OMAR) Your penis works, doesn't it?[79]

What makes the situation even more significant is that it happens shortly after Nasser "caught" Omar with Johnny. So when Nasser makes the comment about Omar's penis "clearly working", it can also be seen as a direct reference to his (homo)sexuality. Nasser's behaviour is paradoxical because he does not ask Omar whether he actually wants to marry Tania. He simply tells him he will. This attitude likely reflects the traditional cultural norms of their community, where marriage and starting a family are seen as essential life steps, especially for men. Omar is expected to follow this heteronormative path without question. Yet he remains silent and goes along with it. It is not because he agrees but because he fears rejection and a lack of understanding. In doing so, he is forced to suppress his true sexual identity to avoid conflict and maintain the image his family expects of him.

Omar's sexual identity, however, is not shaped solely through his physical relationship with Johnny, which Kureishi explicitly mentions several times, but also through their conversations. Whether they speak directly to each other or talk about one another to someone else, these moments reveal their emotional closeness and further hint at the depth of their connection:

> JOHNNY: Just to get us through, Omo. It's for both of us. If we're going to go on. You want that, don't you? OMAR: Yes. I want you.[80]

In this example, when Salim shows up at the laundrette and asks Johnny if he should wait for Omar to come back, Johnny replies:

> SALIM: I want to talk to Omo about business. JOHNNY: I dunno where he is. SALIM: Is it worth waiting? JOHNNY: In my experience it's always worth waiting for Omo.[81]

Kureishi plays with double meaning here when it comes to waiting for Omar. On the surface, Johnny's line sounds like he is just telling Salim to wait. But in the context, it carries a deeper

[79] Kureishi, *MBL*, 87.

[80] Kureishi, *MBL*, 103.
[81] Kureishi, *MBL*, 120.

message, one that only the reader picks up on. As is evident in earlier scenes, Omar and Johnny have already waited years to find their way back to each other. Of course, no one around them knows this, and in making this subtle remark, Johnny is once again hiding his true sexual identity.

In conclusion, Omar's sexual identity undergoes a significant transformation throughout the story, mainly shaped by external pressures from his family but also by the era in which the story takes place, even though the time period is never explicitly mentioned. As this analysis has shown, the 1980s were a hostile time for the LGBT community, so it is no surprise that Omar is reluctant to express his true sexual identity openly. Kureishi avoids putting clear labels on Omar and instead lets his sexuality unfold gradually through several interactions, emotional moments, and dialogues. Omar never openly acknowledges his sexual orientation. There is no scene where he reflects on it or admits to being attracted to men. Instead, the story gives readers plenty of space to interpret his sexual identity through his actions, words, and the emotional undercurrents between characters.

The title of the play, *My Beautiful Laundrette*, carries symbolic meaning as well. On the one hand, the laundrette is the one place where Omar and Johnny are free to express their sexuality without fear, and it becomes a safe space for them. On the other hand, the title can be read more metaphorically. The label "beautiful laundrette" could refer to Johnny from Omar's perspective or Omar from Johnny's. Even the pronoun "my" in the title can be seen as a double meaning. It highlights their personal connection and sense of belonging to one another as if the laundrette represents not just a business or location but their shared world.

Additionally, Omar's silence, uncertainty, and his tendency to follow what is expected of him all point to a deeper internal struggle. His journey is about more than just love or sexuality. It is about navigating identity in a world that offers little room for authenticity. Through Omar, Kureishi captures the quiet, often hidden struggle of queer identity in a time and place where being seen could put oneself in danger.

The third and final type of identity present in the play is social identity. Throughout the play, it is not just Omar's social identity that evolves, but Johnny's does, too, as they try to find their place in the world and climb the social ladder.

At the beginning of the story, Omar and Johnny appear to come from similar social backgrounds. Both are young, unemployed, and living on the fringes of society. The key difference is that Omar has a roof over his head, while Johnny is homeless. Still, their shared

experience of marginalisation is what first connects them. As the story unfolds, though, their lives take very different turns. Omar begins to climb the social ladder through his work and ambition, while Johnny remains stuck in place, unsure of where he fits. Their contrasting journeys show that social identity is not fixed. It shifts based on opportunity, choices, and the systems around them. By the end, both of their lives change dramatically from where they began.

At the very start of the novel, the reader encounters Johnny as a squatter, lying frozen in a dilapidated building:

> GENGHIS and JOHNNY are living in a room in the squat. It is freezing cold, with broken windows. GENGHIS is asleep on a mattress, wrapped up. He has the flu. JOHNNY is lying frozen in a deck chair, with blankets over him. He has just woken up.[82]

This moment offers a raw and powerful glimpse into Johnny's social status. As a squatter living in poverty, without stable work or housing, he stands at the very margins of society. His circumstances place him at the lowest end of the social ladder, which underscores how excluded and overlooked he has become.

Immediately following the squat scene, the narrative shifts to the flat where Papa and Omar live. At the start of the story, Omar's social identity is shaped almost entirely by his role at home, where he takes care of his weak, alcoholic father. As a result, he has little room to grow or develop beyond this limited environment. His social circle is virtually nonexistent, as there is no mention of friends or hobbies, and his life seems completely tied to his responsibilities at home.

As the plot unfolds, the reader learns that Omar is unemployed and living on the dole as Papa says:

> PAPA: He's on dole like everyone else in England. What's he doing home? Just roaming and moaning.[83]

[82] Kureishi, *MBL*, 16.
[83] Kureishi, *MBL*, 22.

This detail reflects more than just his personal situation. It points to a broader sense of economic hardship and social stagnation, both in his household and across the country. As discussed earlier, the political climate of 1980s Britain, especially under Conservative rule, had a significant impact on the lives of people like Omar and his father. Their circumstances are not just about individual failure or bad luck but are part of a much larger system that shapes their social identity as people pushed to the margins of society.

Nasser's character clearly contrasts Omar, Johnny, and Papa in terms of social identity. As a successful businessman who runs a private garage catering to wealthy clients, Nasser represents financial stability and a degree of acceptance within the capitalist system. This sets him apart from the other male characters, who are all struggling on the margins. Unlike his brother Papa, Nasser has found a way to adapt and thrive in British society despite coming from the same background. While Papa remains stuck, unable to settle or feel a sense of belonging, Nasser has managed to navigate the system and come out on top.

The contrast between the two brothers highlights how social identity is shaped by more than just individual talent. Papa left his home and community behind to start a new life in Britain, but despite marrying a white British woman and being a gifted journalist, he never found his place. He ends up living in poverty and disappointment. Meanwhile, Nasser has adapted to his new environment and built a successful life as a wealthy businessman. Just like with Omar and Johnny, this shows that social identity depends not only on personal skills but also on how well someone can adapt, take advantage of opportunities, and work within the system they are part of.

Nasser's behaviour can feel contradictory at times, especially in the scene where he takes Omar to a high-end club and says:

> NASSER: (Indicating the club) Have you been to a high-class place like this before? I suppose you stay in that black-hole flat all the time. OMAR: If I picked Papa up, uncle – NASSER: (To RACHEL) He's one of those underprivileged types.[84]

This scene makes it clear that Nasser defines his social identity through wealth and status. He sees material success and access to exclusive spaces as proof of having "made it", which serves

[84] Kureishi, *MBL*, 31.

as a sharp contrast to Omar, who still lives with his father in a run-down flat and remains far removed from that world.

The irony, though, is that Nasser comes from the same marginalised background as Omar and their wider community. When he refers to Omar as an "underprivileged type", he distances himself from his roots and aligns more closely with the privileged class that typically looks down on people like them. This moment shows how climbing the social ladder can create distance economically, emotionally, and culturally. Those who succeed in the system sometimes adopt the same biases that once held them back.

The line Nasser says to Omar serves as a turning point:

> *NASSER:* In this damn country which we hate and love, you can get anything you want. It's all spread out and available. That's why I believe in England. You just have to know how to squeeze the tits of the system.[85]

Here, Nasser openly admits that he has mixed feelings about Britain. On one hand, he loves the opportunities it has given him. On the other, he also resents how it treats people from minority backgrounds. Still, he recognises that the same country has allowed him to build a successful life. In his eyes, getting ahead means learning how to work the system and knowing which strings to pull. In saying this, he is also sending a message to Omar that if he wants to move up in the world, especially as someone from a minority background, he has to be clever and willing to play by the system's rules, even if he does not fully belong to it.

Johnny's social identity also begins to shift through his ties with a group of skinheads known for targeting immigrants with both verbal and physical abuse. While the play never clearly shows him taking part in these attacks, the fact that he spends time with them hints at a complicated sense of loyalty or confusion about where he really belongs. His connection to this group suggests he may be torn between different worlds, unsure of how to entirely distance himself from a past that does not align with who he is becoming.

As Johnny reconnects with Omar, there is a noticeable change in both his behavior and his social identity. He distances himself from the group of skinheads, starts working with Omar at the laundrette, and becomes involved in a secret romantic relationship with him. It seems like

[85] 32

Johnny is moving away from a past shaped by anger and defiance and, instead, is searching for a sense of belonging and perhaps even a more stable life.

This transformation is clearly reflected in the line:

> OMAR: Take them out. You know where to sell this stuff. Yes? Don't you? JOHNNY: I wouldn't be working for you now if I wanted to go on being a bad boy.[86]

At this moment, Johnny pulls away from his old life. When Omar finds some drugs and suggests they sell them, Johnny turns him down. His refusal shows that he is trying to live a more disciplined life. It is a small but meaningful sign of his social growth. However, it highlights how different his path is becoming from Omar's, whose own social identity is still shifting in more uncertain ways.

Omar, who started as a lost young man taking care of his alcoholic father, gradually begins to show signs of ambition and self-assurance. This growth becomes clear in the following example:

> NASSER: (To OMAR) Get started. There's the broom. Move it! OMAR: I don't only want to sweep up. NASSER: What are you now, Labour Party? OMAR: I want to be manager of this place. I think I can do it.[87]

At this moment, Omar makes it clear that he wants more from life. He is no longer satisfied doing small jobs and instead wants to take on real responsibility. Nasser makes a sarcastic comment about Omar's sudden confidence. Still, the exchange signals a shift in how Omar sees himself. He is no longer just going along with what others expect, he is starting to take control of the world around him.

The final scene shows a powerful exchange between Johnny and Omar, highlighting just how much Omar has changed. It marks a key moment in his transformation as he is no longer the uncertain boy from the beginning but someone who has found his place and started to shape his own social identity:

[86] Kureishi, *MBL*, 60.
[87] Kureishi, *MBL*, 50.

> JOHNNY: You're getting greedy. OMAR: I want big money. I'm not gonna be beat down by this country. When we were at school, you and your lot kicked me all round the place. And what are you doing now? Washing my floor. That's how I like it. Now get to work. Get to work I said. Or you're fired![88]

This scene marks a turning point in Omar's social identity. For the first time, he openly expresses his ambition to be rich and powerful. Those are things he has never had but wants. It is a sharp contrast to the life he has known so far. There is also a clear shift in power between him and Johnny. Omar brings up how Johnny and his friends used to bully him in school, but now the tables have turned. He is the one in control, and Johnny has to follow his lead. The moment shows how social identity can be shaped by past experiences, especially by a desire to break free from powerlessness and finally be seen.

In summary, Omar and Johnny start as young men living on the margins of society, both unemployed and with no clear future. Their shared sense of exclusion brings them together, even though their backgrounds are quite different. As the story unfolds, Omar begins to rise socially thanks to his ambition and his connection with Nasser, while Johnny remains stuck, initially influenced by a group of skinheads. Their different paths show that social identity is not fixed. It shifts depending on opportunity, personal choices, and the ability to adapt. A turning point comes when Johnny lets go of his past and joins Omar not just in business but emotionally, too. Through the evolution of both characters, Kureishi shows how social identity is shaped by outside pressure, individual ambition, and the complex dynamics of human relationships.

White Teeth is a novel by Anglo-Jamican author Zadie Smith, published in 2000. It spans a period of 25 years and explores the lives of two very different characters: Samad Iqbal, a Bangladeshi man, and Archie Jones, an Englishman, along with their multicultural families. Across 20 chapters, Smith delves into the characters' everyday lives and personal histories and vividly portrays how identity is formed and shaped over time. Although the book was published in 2000, Smith does not engage with the new millennium in her narrative. Instead, her work spans the period from 1857 to 1999, with most of the story taking place after 1975. Moreover, Smith explores more than one race, background, and religion. Her novel is a mix of all these

[88] Kureishi, *MBL*, 95–96.

elements, aiming to portray how people from completely different backgrounds and beliefs can live together in one shared space in England and what that means for their identities.

Like in the previous work, Erikson's model of identity formation, specifically his fifth stage, adolescence, is highly relevant here. The children of the two main characters, Irie and Millat, are both going through the process of discovering who they are. Although they were born in Britain, they face both social and ethnic pressures from their families and are forced to choose which identity they will embrace as their own.

For example, Millat and Irie struggle with the tension between their cultural heritage (such as Bangladeshi or Jamaican roots) and the British environment they are growing up in. This inner conflict reflects Erikson's idea of identity as something shaped through interaction with society and tested through crises that force individuals to question who they are and who they want to become. Through these characters, Smith illustrates how difficult it can be to develop a stable sense of identity in a multicultural society.

Archie's and Samad's identities can also be analyzed using Erikson's theory, though they are not in the adolescent phase. Instead, they fit into Erikson's sixth stage, where adults face the psychosocial conflict of generativity versus stagnation. Smith uses these two characters to show opposite ends of the spectrum.

Archie is portrayed as someone who never truly defines himself through his own choices; he passively floats through life. His identity is built around adapting to others and seeking acceptance rather than engaging in self-reflection. In Erikson's terms, Archie struggles with a sense of purpose. Yet Smith still presents him as a kind-hearted person who, despite his uncertainty, can form meaningful relationships.

Samad, on the other hand, is actively struggling with his identity. He feels caught between his religious and cultural traditions and the reality of living in British society. Much of his frustration comes from feeling like he has lost control over his life, values, and family. In a desperate attempt to regain some sense of dignity and direction, he clings to the idea of tradition, like when he sends his son back to Bangladesh in hopes of preserving their roots.

The first part of the analysis is dedicated to sexual identity, specifically homosexual identity. While this theme plays a central role in *My Beautiful Laundrette* by Hanif Kureishi, it is not a major focus in *White Teeth*, where Zadie Smith only briefly touches on it. This contrast

highlights how differently both authors approach the topic. In *White Teeth*, homosexual identity appears more subtly, particularly in a conversation between Irie, Maxine, and Neena. One key moment is when they discuss why Millat has never kissed Irie:

> "And in that time he's snogged everyone, everyone apart from you. He's even snogged me, and I'm his first cousin, for fuck's sake." "And me," said Maxine, "and I'm not that way inclined."[89]

Here, Maxine openly reveals that she is not heterosexual, which is the first time homosexual identity is explicitly acknowledged out loud in the novel. Neena confirms this in a humorous tone:

> "Trust her, she's a raving dyke," said Neena, ruffling Maxine's hair affectionately and giving her a kiss.[90]

According to an online dictionary, dyke is a slang term for a lesbian. While dyke is often used in a derogatory or offensive way, it has also been reclaimed as an empowering self-identifier by younger or more radical lesbians, as well as within academic circles.[91] In this scene, the use of the word dyke is placed within a context of intimacy and affection between Neena and Maxine. It is accompanied by a gentle ruffling of Maxine's hair and a kiss, which further softens the word and helps normalize lesbian identity within the narrative. Since the story takes place in the 1990s, a time when homosexuality was still not entirely accepted by mainstream society, though activism and queer visibility were growing, this moment feels significant. Despite the social climate, Smith portrays two characters who are not hiding their sexuality from the world and are even able to speak about it openly. This stands in contrast to Kureishi's *My Beautiful Laundrette*, where homosexuality is present but never directly spoken aloud.

Then Alsana appears at the door, clearly suspicious, and tries to get Irie into the kitchen. Neena responds with a joke:

> "Don't panic, Auntie. We're not enlisting her into the cult of Sappho."[92]

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[89] Zadie Smith, *White Teeth* (London: Penguin Books, 2001), 284.
[90] Smith, *WT*, 285
[91] "Dyke", Dictionary.com, accessed May 4, 2025, https://www.dictionary.com/browse/dyke.
[92] Smith, *WT*, 285.

This is a clear allusion to the Ancient Greek poet Sappho, whose poetry openly expressed romantic and emotional affection between women, which was considered daring in Ancient Greece, a society where women were generally expected to remain quiet and out of sight.[93]

Neena responds to Alsana's suspicion with humor, using it to defuse the situation while also casually affirming her sexual identity. Her joke lightens the mood and makes it clear that being a lesbian is nothing to be ashamed or afraid of. The moment also highlights a generational contrast in how homosexuality is perceived, as well as differences shaped by religious background.

In the meantime, the conversation moves back and forth between Alsana and Samad:

> "I cannot believe homosexuality is that much fun. Heterosexuality certainly is not." "I don't think I want to hear that word in this house again," said Samad deadpan, stepping in from the garden and laying his weeding gloves on the table. "Which one?" "Either. I am trying my level best to run a godly house."[94]

This passage highlights the complex layers of sexual identity, along with the intergenerational tensions and cultural expectations within an immigrant family. Once again, Smith shows the contrast between the older generation, which is represented by Alsana and Samad, who either misunderstand or disapprove of homosexuality and the younger characters, who treat it with humor and a sense of normalcy. A similar dynamic appears in *My Beautiful Laundrette*, where religious and cultural beliefs create barriers to accepting non-heterosexual identities.

To sum up, Smith does not place homosexuality at the center of the novel, but she still includes it as part of the storyline. The story is set in the 1990s, a time when homosexuality was still often met with social resistance, even though queer visibility was growing. Smith contrasts the openness of the younger generation with the reactions of older characters like Alsana and Samad, who respond with suspicion, disapproval, or a desire to maintain a "godly household". Overall, Smith does not ignore homosexuality. She shows it in a subtle, everyday way, focusing less on big declarations and more on how it fits naturally into the characters' lives, their relationships, and the cultural pressures they face.

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[93] "Sappho, Smut, and Secret Societies: Uncovering the Feminist Cult That Never Was," Medium, accessed May 6, 2025, https://medium.com/@banebelladonna/sappho-smut-and-secret-societies-uncovering-the-feminist-cult-that-never-was-468ff1e488ea.
[94] Smith, *WT*, 285–286.

Social identity plays a much more prominent role in the novel than homosexual identity. It is reflected in several characters throughout the story and influences how they see themselves, how they relate to others, and how they move through the world. Factors like race, class, religion, and immigration status all shape their identities and how those around them view them.

Smith dedicates the first chapter to the character of Archibald Jones, and almost from the very first page, she hints at Archie's social status:

> It made sense that Archibald should die on this nasty urban street where he had ended up, living alone at the age of forty-seven, in a one-bedroom flat above a deserted chip shop. He wasn't the type to make elaborate plans – suicide notes and funeral instructions – he wasn't the type for anything fancy.[95]

Archie's social identity is shown mostly through his surroundings and sense of isolation. He lives in poor conditions, on the edge of society, disconnected from the world around him. With no close family or supportive community, he feels socially abandoned. He sees himself as having no worth in the eyes of society, which eventually pushes him to consider suicide. Archie holds a passive place in the social hierarchy. He has no real ambition, does not see any chance for change, and makes little effort to improve his situation. He represents someone who has been pushed out of society's spaces.

Archie's social identity is also shaped by his emotional struggles in relationships with women. He did not trust them and could not truly love them unless they were idealized or unless they "wore haloes". He spent thirty years married to a woman he never really loved, as their relationship was more of a routine than a real connection. And even though he had always kept an emotional distance, he could not cope when she eventually left him.

After the divorce, Archie starts revisiting her house, using the excuse of collecting old, broken things to fix. Through this behaviour, he tries to hold on to the past in his quiet way. But this behavior points to something more profound: a need for validation and a sense of purpose. Archie is symbolically trying to piece himself back together by repairing broken objects. His need to fix things becomes a metaphor for his own fractured identity. It represents a way to prove, both to himself and the world, that he still matters despite the feeling of being invisible. This is captured in the following lines:

[95] Smith, *WT*, 3–4.

> "Meester Jones, why do you come here when it make you so unhappy? Be reasonable. What can you want with it?" "If it was broken, it was coming with him. All broken things were coming with him. He was going to fix every damn broken thing in this house, if only to show that he was good for something."[96]

In this moment, Archie's social identity is shaped by failure, repair, and a quiet desperation to feel like he matters not to the world but to himself. His obsession with fixing broken things reflects his feelings of being damaged and pushed to the margins. He becomes someone whose sense of worth depends on his ability to restore what has been lost, even if only in a symbolic way. This part of Archie's story shows that his identity is not just about where he stands in society but also about his deep need for recognition and a sense of purpose.

As Verkuyten argues, people gain their social identity from group membership and thus seek recognition and acceptance for their group. When this identity is devalued or lacks distinctiveness, it becomes threatened, prompting individuals to adopt various strategies to protect or restore it.[97] For Archie, fixing broken objects becomes a way of coping as a quiet strategy for piecing together his damaged sense of self and proving his worth.

Archie's social identity takes a sharp turn that completely changes the direction of his life. His unexpected survival, thanks to Mo Hussein-Ishmael, who saves him not out of concern but because Archie's car is blocking the delivery area of his butcher shop, is the first of two chance events that shift everything. The second is his stumbling upon a house party. Although the New Year's celebration is technically over, Archie is welcomed in, and the experience brings a sudden sense of energy and purpose into his otherwise stagnant life. Surrounded by young people and a feeling of belonging, he meets nineteen-year-old Clara, and just weeks later, they get married. This sequence of random but meaningful events moves Archie from isolation into connection, giving him a new social role and a renewed sense of identity through companionships and relationships.

Smith gradually reveals another layer of Archie's social identity, the one he developed during World War II when he fought alongside Samad Iqbal, a Bengali muslim. As the novel puts it:

> In short, it was precisely the kind of friendship an Englishman makes on holiday, that he can make only on holiday. A friendship that crosses class and colour, a friendship that

[96] Smith, WT, 9–10.
[97] Maykel Verkuyten, "Multicultural Recognition and Ethnic Minority Rights: A Social Identity Perspective," *European Review of Social Psychology* 17, no. 1 (July 2010): 151.

> takes as its basis physical proximity and survives because the Englishman assumes the physical proximity will not continue.[98]

This excerpt offers a look at social identity, particularly regarding race and class. The friendship between Samad and Archie stands out because it maintains two significant aspects, which are class and skin colour. Archie and Samad's friendship grows during the war, but it is clear it is only meant to last as long as the war continues. Once the war ends, the familiar social and cultural barriers return. Through this, Smith critiques a society where cross-racial friendships are only tolerated when they remain temporary and do not threaten the existing social order.

Smith also explores the formation of Archie and Samad's social identities through their time at O'Connell's Pool House, a pub run by an Iraqi family. Despite this ethnic background, Archie, as a white British man, is welcomed there. Through this, Smith suggests that race does not necessarily determine friendship and highlights moments where shared spaces allow for connection across cultural differences:

> O'Connell's is the kind of place family men come to for a different kind of family. Unlike blood relations, it is necessary here to earn one's position in the community. For now, suffice to say this is Archie's and Samad's home from home.[99]

O'Connell's pub is shown as a space where people, especially men, build a different kind of community, separate from their families. It is a place with its own set of rules, where belonging is not a given but something one has to earn. Everyone has to find a way to fit in and be accepted. This dynamic reflects a core part of social identity, the need to belong to a group and to have that belonging acknowledged by others. For Archie and Samad, O'Connell's becomes a kind of "home away from home". Through this, Zadie Smith implies that social identity, as discussed in the theoretical section, is not fixed but constantly evolving.

Another critical aspect of social identity is presented through Millat Iqbal, Samad's son, who joins a religious group because his identity is split between two very different worlds, and he does not know which one to choose. Millat feels lost, unseen, and pushed to the margins:

> "We need to make our mark in this bloody country. What was the name, again, of your lot?" "I am from the Kilburn branch of the Keepers of the Eternal and Victorious Islamic Nation," said Hifan proudly. "You could have what I have, instead of this terrible

[98] Smith, *WT*, 96.
[99] Smith, WT, 183–184.

confusion you are in, instead of this reliance on a drug specifically imported by governments to subdue the black and Asian community, to lessen our powers."[100]

KEVIN offers him simple rules, clear boundaries, and a sense of exclusivity. In the chaos of adolescence and the uncertainty of a multicultural upbringing, this structure gives him something solid to hold on to. KEVIN gives him a sense of belonging, a community that sees him, values him, and gives his life meaning. It becomes a way to escape the pressures of the outside world. Through this, Smith shows how complex the search for identity can be for young people growing up between cultures. Millat symbolizes the inner conflict between cultures, religions, and expectations.

In a nutshell, Smith shows that the formation of social identity is a complex and layered process shaped by various factors. Through the character of Archibald, she illustrates how someone who once felt socially excluded can gradually transform into someone who finds connection, builds a relationship, and starts a family. His friendship with Samad also suggests that cross-cultural relationships can be genuine and meaningful, even within a society that often draws lines between people. For the younger generation, represented by Millat Iqbal, the search for identity is even more difficult. Millat is caught between two cultural worlds without feeling entirely accepted by either. His decision to join the group KEVIN seems like a desperate attempt to find a place where he is seen, valued, and given a sense of purpose. Through this, Smith highlights that the need for belonging and acceptance is a fundamental part of human identity, especially in environments shaped by cultural, religious, and social pressures that create deep inner conflict.

Given that *White Teeth* deals with multiculturalism in Britain, ethnic identity naturally plays an important role. To avoid focusing solely on the two leading male characters, Smith also explores ethnic identity through her female characters and, most notably, through Clara. Throughout the novel, Clara's ethnic background is strongly expressed through linguistic stylisation, especially in her use of Jamaican Patois:

"Hush yo mout! You're nat dat ol'. I seen older."[101]

"Bwoy, me kyant do nuttin' right today–"[102]

[100] Smith, *WT*, 295–296.
[101] Smith, *WT*, 25.
[102] Smith, *WT*, 36.

Clara's Jamaican heritage is instantly recognizable in how she speaks, reflecting her ethnic background. The way she uses language sets her apart from standard British English and reflects how she does not fully belong to the mainstream culture. But at the same time, her continued use of patois is a way of staying true to herself; it shows she has not let go of her heritage but instead chooses to speak in a dialect that holds meaning and connection within her community.

However, Smith shows how Clara's ethnic identity takes a complete turn and highlights her effort to fit into British society after she marries Archie, a white Englishman:

> "Now, isn't that strange, Archie?" said Clara, filling in all her consonants. She was already some way to losing her accent and she liked to work on it at every opportunity.[103]

Clara once had a strong Jamaican accent that reflected her cultural roots. But after moving in with Archie, she deliberately softens her speech. For Clara, changing how she talks becomes a conscious act of assimilation. Her way to gain acceptance in white British society. However, through this shift, Smith reveals the personal cost of assimilation as the gradual loss of one's identity in the pursuit of acceptance.

The period of the 1970s was significant for the black community, as ongoing racial discrimination affected many areas of black life, including frequent police targeting of black youth, incitement from far-right fascist groups, and widespread racism on both individual and institutional levels.[104]

Since some parts of the novel are set in the 1970s, Zadie Smith uses this passage to show the casual, everyday racism that was common at the time. Maureen, a white British woman, does not openly insult Archie for marrying a Black woman, but she thinks it is odd that he acts like it is not a big deal. For her, not making race into a big issue is the issue. On the other hand, Archie is shown as someone who does not overthink cultural differences. He gets along with Pakistanis and Caribbeans naturally, without prejudice, which makes him stand out from the people around him. Through him, Smith presents an open-minded British man who does not approach other cultures with prejudice and does not see race as something that really matters. He does not fit the stereotype of a white Brit from that time; while most of society saw racism as something normal, he comes across more as an exception:

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[103] Smith, *WT*, 65.
[104] "Black Liberation Organisations in Britain: The 1970s and 1980s," Libcom, accessed May 8, 2025, https://libcom.org/article/black-liberation-organisations-britain-1970s-and-1980s.

> "Oh, Archie, you are funny," said Maureen sadly, for she had always fancied Archie a bit but never more than a bit because of this strange way he had about him, always talking to Pakistanis and Caribbeans like he didn't even notice and now he'd gone and married one and hadn't even thought it worth mentioning what colour she was until the office dinner when she turned up black as anything and Maureen almost choked on her prawn cocktail.[105]

Maureen's shock at seeing Clara's skin colour "black as anything" during an office dinner and her physical reaction "almost choked on her prawn cocktail" is satirically exaggerated to highlight the deep racial discomfort that still existed in supposedly "polite" society. Through this, Smith critiques the invisible boundaries of whiteness and Britishness, suggesting that in 1970s Britain, interracial relationships were still seen as transgressive by many.

In this next scene, Zadie Smith critiques the idea of surface-level multiculturalism, showing how mainstream society often blurs different ethnic identities together and fails to see their real depth or complexity:

> "Because you know, I'm really interested in Indian culture." "I'm not actually from India, you know," said Samad… Poppy Burt-Jones looked surprised and disappointed. "You're not?" "No. I'm from Bangladesh." "Bangladesh…" "Previously Pakistan. Previous to that, Bengal." "Oh, right. Same sort of ball-park, then." … "But they say dark skin wrinkles less, don't they?"[106]

Poppy's comment about skin wrinkling is a clear example of an inappropriate racial stereotype, showing the kind of casual racialisation that was common in Britain during the 1970s and 80s. Samad constantly has to correct people about where he is from, which shows how tiring and frustrating it is to be misidentified repeatedly. His experience highlights a deeper issue, what could be called ethnic invisibility, where his real cultural identity is overlooked and replaced by oversimplified, externally imposed labels.

As Summers explains, race is visible and typically associated with physical traits like skin color. In contrast, ethnicity may not be immediately apparent to an observer, making its impact harder to recognize and more likely to be overlooked. It is essential to highlight that ethnicity does not vanish through migration or even as individuals adapt to a new culture in the second generation. Cultural beliefs, values, ways of life, attitudes, and traditions are frequently handed down

[105] Smith, *WT*, 69.
[106] Smith, *WT*, 133–136.

through generations, continuing to shape the lives of people long after they have been separated from the original cultural context of their ethnic background.[107]

In the dialogue between Samad and Shiva, ethnic and social identities intertwine, once again highlighting the theme of marginalisation:

> "I wish to live as I was always meant to! I wish to return to the East!" "Ah, well… we all do, don't we?" murmured Shiva. "Fuck knows I haven't made anything of this country. But who's got the money for the air fare?"... Samad continued to pace. "I should never have come here – that's where every problem has come from."[108]

Samad talks about wanting to return to his homeland because England does not feel like home. He cannot fully live by his cultural and religious values. With this, he pushes back against the idea of assimilation, which sets him apart from characters like Clara, who tries to polish her English and leave behind her Jamaican accent. For Samad, moving to Britain has meant a loss of values and a fractured sense of identity.

Shiva agrees with him, and his comment reflects a different kind of struggle, one shaped by economic hardship and a sense of failure. As an immigrant, he has been unable to build a successful life or land a well-paying job. Both men share the feeling of being stuck between two worlds, not quite fitting in back home but never entirely accepted in Britain either.

In contrast to Samad's rejection of assimilation, his son Magid takes the opposite approach. He deliberately uses a different name, presenting himself in a way that fits more easily into British society:

> "Mark? No Mark here," Alsana had said. "You have the wrong house." But before she had finished the sentence, Magid had dashed to the door, ushering his mother out of view. "Hi, guys." "Hi, Mark." "I GIVE YOU A GLORIOUS NAME LIKE MAGID MAHFOOZ MURSHED MUBTASIM IQBAL!" Samadhad yelled after Magid.[109]

By distancing himself from his roots, Magid hopes to be more easily accepted by his peers, but this feels like a betrayal for Samad. He sees a name as something sacred, something that carries culture, ancestry, and identity. Samad strongly disapproves of his son's choice and firmly rejects the idea of blending in at the cost of erasing one's heritage. In this scene, Smith shows that

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[107] Frank Summers, "Ethnic invisibility, identity, and the analytic process," *Psychoanalytic Psychology* 31, no. 3 (July 2014): 411.
[108] Smith, *WT*, 145.
[109] Smith, *WT*, 151.

ethnic identity is not fixed, especially for children of migrants. It changes and adapts under social and cultural pressure and often leads to tension and disconnect within families.

In conclusion, throughout the novel, Zadie Smith explores the many ways in which ethnic identity can develop and transform. She examines this theme through several characters, such as Clara, who has Jamaican roots and speaks in a strong Jamaican patois. After marrying Archie, a white Englishman, Clara begins to deliberately change her speech in an effort to fit into the majority society. This reveals the extent to which she is willing to go in order to assimilate into a country that is often hostile toward minorities. The novel also critiques shallow multiculturalism and racial stereotyping, particularly through the character of Samad, who struggles with ethnic invisibility and longs to return to his cultural roots. In contrast, his son Magid chooses to assimilate more fully by adopting an English name, which creates a deep generational conflict between them.

The third and final analyzed book is by Ali Smith, who, unlike the previous authors, is not of mixed race but comes from Scotland. This may be one of the reasons why she explores an entirely different identity theme compared to Kureishi and Zadie Smith. *Hotel World*, published in 2001, stands apart as a very different work from the other two works discussed. In *Hotel World*, identity takes on a new dimension.

Germanà argues that although Smith's work draws on postmodern themes, styles, and ideas, it also moves beyond them. Her writing showcases fresh and inventive storytelling methods while blending this creativity with a deep moral engagement with issues that feel urgent and relevant today. At its core, her fiction often reflects on the fractured state of modern human life, made even more powerful by a strong awareness of how temporary one's existence really is.[110]

Since *Hotel World* differs greatly in both narrative style and its approach to identity, it is difficult to apply Erikson's model of identity development directly to the story, especially considering that Sara is already dead and, in a sense, no longer possesses an identity, but still longs for one. Although she never speaks as a living person, one can assume that during her life she was in Erikson's fifth developmental stage, grappling with questions of identity. This is evident, for instance, when she reflects on how she once believed she would be attracted to boys, only to later fall in love with a girl. Smith intentionally disrupts the traditional pattern of identity

[110] Germanà, "Ali Smith: Strangers and Intrusions," 100.

formation and makes it impossible to place Sara neatly within any clear developmental category.

Right from the very first pages, Smith captures identity in a completely different way than one usually reads in novels. She presents it as something alive, something one should truly value. It is the voice of Sara's ghost, speaking to the reader, that sets the tone. Sara, who died in a dumbwaiter accident at a hotel, reflects on what it means to feel again, to be alive again. And through her longing to experience something, anything, once more, it becomes clear that identity is an inseparable part of human life:

> And tonight what I want more than anything in the world is to have a stone in my shoe…I could lick it o with my tongue, if I had a tongue again, if my tongue was wet, and I could taste it for what it is. Beautiful dirt, grey and vintage…Because now that I'm nearly gone, I'm more here than I ever was. Now that I'm nothing but air, all I want is to breathe it. Now that I can't just reach out and touch, it's all I want, is to.[111]

Sara longs for actions she can no longer take, and through that longing, she begins to understand what it truly means to be alive. She suggests that her conscious sense of self is most intense now when her body is gone. Through death, she finally sees the value in life and in the small, everyday things most people do not even notice. Rather than focusing on how others define us, Smith shifts the attention to what it feels like to exist, to be present, and to lose that presence suddenly. Identity becomes something rooted in memory and desire, shaped just as much by what is missing as by what once was. It is a version of identity that feels deeply human and fragile, something people often only recognize once it is lost.

This passage shows that identity is not just about what individuals know about themselves or what others see in them. It is also about what they experience through the body, the mouth, and the simple act of being in the world. And only when all that is gone do they realize how much it was a part of who they were.

Sara's ghost watches her family at her funeral, then follows them home and continues to live with them. Not physically, but emotionally and socially:

> I looked at him sadly, then shyly, then he saw me. He dropped the plastic bag. It rustled down on to the broken agstones. His mouth opened. No sound came out (I could still

[111] Ali Smith, *Hotel World* (London: Penguin Books, 2002), 3–6.

> hear perfectly then). I waved my swimming trophy at him. He paled. He smiled. He shook his head and looked through me, and then I was gone again.[112]

There is still a strong sense of social identity and a deep desire to belong to a group. Smith shows that social identity can go beyond physical existence. Even after death, a person can remain part of their family. Sara's spirit still longs to belong, and her family longs for her in return. The moment her father briefly sees her is powerful. It means their bond is still alive as if Sara is still alive. Social identity is so deeply rooted in human relationships that it becomes almost impossible to lose it truly. In addition, Sara's ghost also appears to her mother and sister, and each of them perceives her identity differently. For the mother, the contact is too painful because seeing Sara again only deepens the grief. For the sister, on the other hand, the contact is never enough. She constantly begs to be with her. Through this, Smith again shows that social identity can be maintained by others even after a person's death and that relational identity continues to exist as long as someone still cares. A person's social identity lives on in the minds and hearts of those around them.

Sara's identity is split between two worlds. One that exists among the living and one that belongs to the dead. At the same time, her sense of self fractures even further as she speaks to her own decaying body underground, trying to piece together what happened to her. How she died, how she fell, and how she once fell in love with the girl at the watch shop:

> Who? she said. What? Fuck off. Leave me alone. I'm dead, for God's sake. I need to know something, I said. Can you remember the fall? Can you remember how long it took us? Can you remember what happened before it? Please. Silence. (But I knew she could hear me.) I won't leave, I said, until you tell me. I won't go till I get it.[113]

As her time in the world fades, so does her language. She begins to lose words, forget names, and becomes unable to express what she remembers. Through this, Smith reveals just how fragile identity is and how deeply it is tied to language. When language disappears, so does the sense of presence, the past, and the thread that holds it together. The self begins to dissolve. Sara's identity, quite literally, unravels with each word she loses:

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[112] Smith, *HW*, 12.
[113] Smith, *HW*, 15.

> I will miss the, the. What's the word? Lost, I've, the word. The word for. You know. I don't mean a house. I don't mean a room. I mean the way of the . Dead to the . Out of this . Word.[114]

At the end of the first chapter, Sara's ghost describes what seem to be three different women, but the reader eventually realizes that all three exist in the exact moment, in the same space. Each woman represents a distinct social position and, with that, a different identity. But one thing connects them all: the constant transformation of identity. Life changes, and with it, so does identity:

> Here's a woman being swallowed by the doors. She is welldressed. On her back she carries nothing. Her life could be about to change. Here's another one inside, wearing the uniform of the hotel and working behind its desk. She is ill and she doesn't know it yet. Life, about change. Here's a girl, next to me, dressed in blankets, sitting along from the hotel doors right here, on the pavement. Her life, change.[115]

In the next chapter, Smith introduces Else, whose identity has been shaped by her experience of homelessness. She spends her days outside the hotel where Sara used to work, placing her in a marginalized group, living on the edges of society:

> Someone is passing, and is acting like she's noticed Else but decided to ignore her; most people don't see Else there at all. People go past. They don't see Else, or decide not to. Else watches them.[116]

This passage can be seen as a powerful commentary on how society treats people on the margins. Else's identity is shaped by the absence of recognition, which ties into a core idea in social identity theory. One needs to be seen in order to exist as social beings. Through just a few lines, Smith shows that identity is not only formed by being part of society but can also be erased through deliberate or passive exclusion.

The Global Hotel plays a crucial role in Hotel World as it serves as a connecting thread between all the characters in the novel. Even when they do not realize it, their paths intersect within or around this space. For example, Sara is on shift with Lise, who works at the hotel reception. Lise later interacts with Else, who sits outside the hotel asking for spare change. Penny, a

[114] Smith, *HW*, 30.
[115] Smith, *HW*, 30.
[116] Smith, *HW*, 36–39.

journalist staying at the hotel, encounters Lise, Else, and a mysterious girl dressed in a hotel uniform, who turns out to be Clare, Sara's sister. Clare comes to the hotel to find the dumbwaiter shaft where Sara died.

These characters are often unknowingly interwoven through the hotel space, and this interconnectedness becomes a key part of their social identity. The Global Hotel is not just a setting. It is a structure that shapes their stories, placing them about one another. Through these fleeting or silent interactions, Smith suggests that identity is not formed in isolation but through shared environments, proximity, and even unspoken presence. The hotel becomes a stage where personal grief, memory, routine, and survival all overlap. It is a physical building and a metaphor for how individuals unknowingly shape each other's lives. In this way, the hotel itself becomes a vessel of collective identity.

In the chapter, from Clare's point of view, it becomes clear how Smith shapes social identity. Clare speaks to her sister as if she were still right beside her. She continues to feel Sara's presence and refuses to accept that she is gone entirely. The reader sees the formation of social identity through a sibling bond:

> I am going fucking mad talking to a dead person a person who's dead & can't hear anything & here I am talking to it telling it jokes for fuck sake…it is kind of amazing to talk to her like that amazing because I talk to her all the time now we never used to talk at all hardly ever but now all the time I can't get my head round it if someone is dead they can be more alive than they are when they're actually like alive[117]

Clare even says that when Sara was alive, they barely spoke, but now she talks to her all the time. A new social space emerges, where the identity of their relationship is rebuilt retrospectively, painfully, yet with intensity. Sara's identity lives on because she remains a constant part of Clare's everyday world.

The entire chapter unfolds as one long monologue, during which Clare's identity shifts. It is shaped by grief, a sense of searching, and a deep need for answers. In this passage, Smith strongly suggests that social identity depends not solely on the presence of others but also on their absence. Clare begins to form a new version of herself through the loss of her sister. Their relationship is rewritten, deepened, and transformed, and in that process, so is Clare.

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[117] Smith, *HW*, 210.

This novel also includes sexual identity, again homosexual, but it is portrayed in a very different way than in the previous two works. Through another version of Sara's ghost, who talks to the original ghost, the reader learns that when Sara was still alive, she fell in love with a young woman who worked at a watch shop. Sara had brought in a broken watch, and the moment she saw the sales assistant, she fell in love. In her monologue, she says:

> I fell in love. I fell pretty hard. It caught me out. It made me happy, then it made me miserable. What to do? I had expected all my life to fall for some boy, or some man or other, and I had been waiting and watching for him. Then one day my watch stopped.[118]
>
> When I saw her brow furrow as she thumbed and turned and shook my watch, when I saw the moment of concentration pass across her face as she held its face in her hands, I couldn't help it. I fell.[119]

Sara also says that she had always assumed she would fall in love with a man, but fate brought a woman into her life, and she fell in love at first sight. Unlike in Kureishi's work, where Omar has to hide his identity and sexuality is portrayed as something problematic, Smith presents it here as an authentic, powerful human experience. Sara herself admits that it caught her off guard. She had been waiting for a man, but this emotion came without warning and struck her unexpectedly. Through this, Smith suggests that sexuality is fluid. But Sara does not label herself, like some characters do in *White Teeth*. She describes the moment, the physical details, and the way she experienced identity differently, more instinctively.

To summarize, Ali Smith approaches identity in a deeply original and emotional way. Rather than framing it through linear development or fixed labels, she presents identity as something fluid, fragile, and shaped by memory, absence, and human connection. Through Sara's ghost, who reflects on life after death, Smith explores how identity can become most visible in its loss. Smith also touches on sexual identity, portraying Sara's love for another girl not as something to hide but as a natural, unexpected human experience.

[118] Smith, *HW*, 17.
[119] Smith, *HW*, 17–18.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this thesis was to explore how identity is constructed in works of contemporary British literature. The analyses have revealed several interesting insights. Three main types of identity were examined: ethnic, sexual, and social, and each of the selected works offered a rich and diverse perspective on how these identities are portrayed.

The analysis shows that in *My Beautiful Laundrette*, ethnic identity is a central theme running throughout the play, influencing nearly every decision the characters make. Given that the events take place during the Thatcher era of the 1980s, it is expected that ethnic identity would be shown primarily through the lens of minority struggles with assimilation and racism. Through the main character, Omar, and those around him, Hanif Kureishi reveals that ethnic identity is not simply a matter of personal choice but rather the result of constant external pressures, including family, cultural traditions, social expectations, and direct experiences of racism and discrimination.

Kureishi shapes Omar's ethnic identity primarily through these outside influences. For example, when Omar's father arranges a job for him within their Pakistani community, specifically with his uncle Nasser, he reinforces Omar's minority identity. This choice pushes Omar closer to a heritage he does not actively embrace. Although he was born in Britain and expresses himself in ways that align more closely with British cultural norms, his ethnic background is continually imposed on him by others. His connection to Pakistani identity is, in many ways, symbolic rather than lived.

Even Omar's name plays a role in this construction. Kureishi gives the character a traditional muslim name, emphasizing his Pakistani heritage and setting him apart from characters with typically British names. Yet aside from his name, the community he works in, and his familial ties, particularly through Papa, there is little about Omar that directly reflects a strong identification with Pakistani ethnicity. His identity exists somewhere in between, caught between what he feels internally and what others expect of him.

Kureishi frequently explores this tension through characters who were not born in Britain but immigrated from South Asia. These characters like Papa and Nasser tend to view their South Asian background as their primary ethnic identity, while younger characters like Omar experience a more hybrid sense of self. Through this generational contrast, Kureishi reveals how perceptions of ethnicity shift over time and between generations.

Importantly, Kureishi also highlights how Omar's perceived Britishness causes friction within his own community. While his father has already been mentioned, Salim, too, criticizes Omar for not being sufficiently connected to his Pakistani heritage. These unsolicited remarks and expectations shape Omar's identity in powerful ways, whether he wants them to or not. Unsure of which identity to fully claim, he leans toward Britishness, the culture he knows and lives, while Pakistani identity is something repeatedly projected onto him by others.

Kureishi does not focus solely on Omar, however. He also contrasts the ethnic identity of Papa and his brother Nasser, showing two different approaches to cultural belonging. Papa clings strongly to his Pakistani identity and struggles to accept British values, mainly because he views Britain as a racist society where minorities suffer. Nasser, on the other hand, has done the opposite: he has suppressed his Pakistani heritage in favor of a more British image, which allows him to succeed as a businessman.

Through these contrasts, Kureishi presents ethnic identity as a complex and often conflicting negotiation, particularly in 1980s Britain, where racism was institutionalized and visible. His characters are shaped by their environment, and the question of whether to preserve or adapt their ethnic background is not merely personal but deeply political.

Next, Kureishi explores sexual identity through the main character, Omar, and his longtime friend, Johnny. While ethnic identity runs through the entire narrative from the very beginning, Omar's sexual identity is revealed more gradually. At first, the reader has no idea that Omar is gay, which shows how Kureishi deliberately builds up the development of Omar's homosexuality step by step.

The 1980s play a key role here not only in how minority groups were perceived by the majority but also in how homophobia was on the rise. Through this, Kureishi highlights how difficult it is for a queer character to fully come to terms with who they are. Omar is under pressure not just from a homophobic society but also from the male figures in his family, who are clearly heterosexual and expect him to be with a woman.

Just like with Omar's ethnic identity, Kureishi shows how Omar struggles to define himself. He does not fully fit into any category and seems unsure of who he is. One can see this clearly when Omar has a romantic encounter with a woman, and his detachment reveals that deep down, he knows this is not what he truly wants.

Omar's real sexual identity starts to come through when he reconnects with Johnny. From smiling while talking to him on the phone to kissing him and, eventually, to their sexual relationship, Kureishi gradually lets Omar's true self come to the surface. But Omar's and Johnny's homosexuality remains strictly confined to the walls of the laundrette, which becomes the only place where they can fully express their relationship without fear of judgment. Just like his ethnic identity, Omar's sexuality is shaped more by the world around him than by an inner sense of certainty. He cannot fully identify with it or live it openly, and he is constantly negotiating it in a hostile environment that forces him into hiding.

Kureishi also explores social identity through several characters, mostly Omar and Johnny, who undergo the most significant transformation. Both start on the margins of society, though in very different ways. Omar is initially portrayed as passive and lacking ambition, unemployed at first and later simply carrying out tasks for his uncle. Johnny, on the other hand, is introduced as a former skinhead squatter closely tied to a group known for harassing minorities. But as the story unfolds, everything begins to shift. Kureishi shows that social identity is not fixed. It changes over time and, in this case, evolves from something destructive to something more constructive. Omar and Johnny eventually become business partners, running their own laundrette and living lives that are completely different from how they started.

Moreover, Kureishi contrasts the social trajectories of Papa and Nasser. Papa goes from being a successful journalist in Pakistan to someone who is socially and economically marginalised in Britain someone, who does not fit in. In contrast, Nasser manages to climb the social ladder by embracing capitalism and defining himself through business success. The contrast between these two brothers further shows that social identity depends not just on background or personal qualities but on one's ability to navigate and adapt to the systems around them.

In *White Teeth*, Smith mentions sexual identity only briefly. It appears on just a few pages and does not drive the plot in the way it does in Kureishi's *My Beautiful Laundrette*. Moreover, homosexuality is presented as something the characters talk about openly and are not ashamed to express physically in front of others. Smith also places this type of identity in a generational contrast: the older, more religious generation refuses to acknowledge any identity outside of heterosexuality, while the younger generation has no problem being open about their sexuality.

Next, Like Kureishi, Smith presents social identity as something fluid, shaped by both internal struggles and external circumstances. Archie's character mirrors aspects of Omar and Johnny. He starts as isolated, passive, and emotionally lost, living in poverty with no real sense of

belonging. His attempt to fix broken things symbolizes a more profound desire to repair his own fractured identity. This changes when he marries Clara reconnects with Samad and gradually builds a life rooted in new relationships and stability. The pub becomes a symbolic space where Archie and Samad shape their identities outside of family structures. Millat Iqbal, by contrast, struggles with conflicting identities and ultimately joins a radical group to gain a sense of purpose and belonging in a world that does not fully accept him.

In *White Teeth*, Zadie Smith emphasizes ethnic identity as a key part of Britain's multicultural reality. Like Kureishi, she explores it through the racism faced by minorities and through hybrid identities shaped by both British upbringing and parental heritage. Characters like Clara, Samad, and Magid reflect different responses to cultural differences, assimilation, resistance, or attempts to balance both. Smith shows how embracing one's identity can be difficult in a society that either overlooks ethnic differences or reduces them to stereotypes.

Clara's character demonstrates how someone can lose touch with their ethnic background. Initially proud of her Jamaican accent, she later tries to suppress it to fit in and, therefore, loses a key part of her cultural identity. Smith also contrasts the racism of mainstream society with characters like Archie, who does not judge others by race or ethnicity. This shows that even during times of strong anti-minority sentiment, there were white Britons who rejected those views.

Like Kureishi, Smith also portrays the older generation as unable to fully accept British identity, which highlights the ongoing struggle between heritage and belonging.

Last but not least, in *Hotel World*, Ali Smith presents identity as a fragmented and fluid concept shaped by memory, loss, and human connection rather than by traditional developmental stages. Unlike Hanif Kureishi and Zadie Smith, she avoids any direct exploration of ethnic identity. This makes sense in the context of contemporary literature, as discussed in the theoretical section. Many millennial authors focus on various identity constructions beyond ethnicity, and Smith is a perfect example of this shift.

Instead of presenting a linear narrative of identity, Smith gives voice to a deceased girl, Sara, who speaks to the reader through her ghost voice. Through Sara's longing to experience basic human senses again, Smith illustrates how fragile identity is: how it can vanish instantly and how essential it is to protect it. Without identity, a person is no longer whole. While ethnic identity is absent from the novel, social identity plays a key role, particularly in Sara's attempts to reconnect with her family after death. She appears to them hoping to feel a sense of

belonging, but this only deepens the pain for everyone involved. Even after death, she maintains emotional and social ties to her family, suggesting that social identity can live on through memory and relationships.

In this way, Smith captures the same sense of identity split between two worlds as the other authors, but she does so not through a multicultural lens but through the division between the living and the dead. The fluidity of identity is also shown through Sara's sister, Clare, who cannot fully accept that Sara is gone and continues to speak to her, holding on to her as part of her social and familial identity. The loss reshapes Clare's identity, which further reinforces Smith's message that identity is constantly changing and never fixed.

The hotel itself becomes a central symbolic space a site where all these women's identities briefly intersect and influence one another.

Smith also addresses sexual identity, but again, in her own way. It is not something hidden or dramatic for Sara, but natural and intuitive. Smith presents sexuality as something fluid and deeply personal, shaped more by emotion than by fixed labels. Sara does not define herself. She simply describes how she feels, highlighting the spontaneous and sensory nature of desire. For Smith, sexual identity is not a source of internal conflict but rather a part of lived experience, felt through the body and the moment.

The answer to the main research question, then, is that each of the three authors approaches the theme of identity in their own unique way, offering diverse portrayals of how identity is formed by both internal and external factors.

RESUMÉ

Tato diplomová práce se zabývá konstrukcí identity v moderní britské literatuře. Cílem je analyzovat, jak Hanif Kureishi, Zadie Smith a Ali Smith ve svých dílech reflektují proces formování identity. V jejich dílech *My Beautiful Laundrette*, *White Teeth* a *Hotel World* je kladen důraz na zkoumání tří typů identit, těmi jsou etnická, sexuální a sociální.

První kapitola vymezuje termín identita z pohledu sociologů. Termín identita nemá jasně vymezenou definici, a proto je obtížné najít univerzální definici. Na základě přístupů několika sociologů dochází k závěru, že identita je proměnlivý koncept a formuje se v interakci jedince se společenskými, kulturními a osobními vlivy. Kapitola je dále doplněna o Eriksonovu teorii psychosociálního vývoje. Skrz tuto teorii Erikson vymezuje osm vývojových fází, díky kterým se identita formuje. Každá fáze představuje psychosociální konflikt, jehož úspěšné zvládnutí podporuje pozitivní vývoj osobní identity.

Druhá kapitola se věnuje vybraným typům identit, z nichž tři hrají důležitou roli v analytické části práce. Jedná se o osobní, kulturní, sexuální, etnickou a sociální. Každá identita je vysvětlena skrze slova autorů, kteří se ve svých výzkumech typy identit zabývají. Osobní identita je představena jako proměnlivý koncept, formuje se na základě zkušeností, přesvědčení a hodnot daného jedince. Kulturní identita je spojena s příslušností ke skupinám sdílejícím společné hodnoty, tradice, jazyk či náboženství. Jiní autoři ji vnímají jako reprezentaci, buď symbolickou, nebo politickou. Kulturní identita je mimo jiné spojena s pojmem akulturace, což je přizpůsobování se dominantní kultuře. Sexuální identita podle teoretiků vyjadřuje, jak jedinec vnímá svou sexuální orientaci, ke komu pociťuje emocionální a fyzickou přitažlivost. Důležité je zdůraznit, že sexuální identita ne vždy odpovídá sexuálnímu chování. Může se stát, že někdo navazuje vztahy s osobami opačného pohlaví, ačkoliv ho přitahuje stejné pohlaví. Často je to kvůli tlaku okolí, strachu z odmítnutí nebo vnitřní nejistotě. S tím úzce souvisí pojem coming out. Dalším typem identity, je etnická identita, která určuje, jak jedinci vnímají svou příslušnost k určité etnické skupině, přičemž tato identifikace je formována sdílenými hodnotami, tradicemi, jazykem, náboženstvím, původem nebo kulturními zvyklostmi. V rámci bližšího vydefinování je představen a popsán Model vývoje menšinové identity. Model popisuje pět fází vývoje etnické identity a ukazuje, že přijetí vlastní etnické identity může být dlouhý a proměnlivý proces, který je ovlivněn vnitřními i vnějšími faktory. Závěrečným typem identity, který je v této kapitole rozebírán, je sociální identita. Tento pojem odkazuje na to, jak jedinec vnímá svou příslušnost ke společenským skupinám, které utvářejí jeho sebepojetí a chování ve

společnosti. Tato příslušnost poskytuje jednotlivci pocit sounáležitosti, posiluje jeho sebevědomí a ovlivňuje jeho společenské postavení. Sociální identita je považována za nedílnou součást celkové identity člověka. Každý člověk má několik sociálních identit a v každé situaci se projevují jiným způsobem a intenzitou. Důležité rozlišení této identity je mezi in-group skupinou, se kterou je jedinec ztotožňuje a out-group skupinou, od které se distancuje. Mimo jiné je sociální identita rozvíjena prostřednictvím tří navzájem propojených procesů, kterými jsou sociální kategorizace, sociální identifikace a sociální srovnání.

Třetí kapitola se zaměřuje na vývoj moderní britské prózy v kontextu společenských a kulturních změn od 70. let 20. století po počátek nového tisíciletí. Autorka práce se přiklání k názoru, že období současné britské literatury začíná rokem 1975, který je v literárních studiích považován za přelomový. Právě tehdy dochází v Británii k výraznému politickému obratu, a to nástupem Margaret Thatcher do čela Konzervativní strany, čímž začíná éra hlubokých sociálních, kulturních i ekonomických změn. V 80. letech začínají britští autoři reagovat na dopady tzv. thatcherismu, často skrze kritiku, satiru a parodii. Tato doba je charakterizována rostoucími sociálními nerovnostmi, zejména vůči menšinám a imigrantským komunitám. Významnou roli sehrává i rostoucí viditelnost queer komunity a snaha o zobrazení její identity v literatuře. Po roce 2000 dochází k dalšímu posunu. Nová generace spisovatelů začíná kombinovat postmoderní postupy s novými tématy. V jejich tvorbě se objevují jazyková hravost, žánrové prolínání a experimentování s hranicí mezi realitou a fikcí. Kritici tvrdí, že literatura po roce 2001 vstupuje do fáze tzv. post-postmodernismu. Jedná se o období, které přebírá témata postmodernismu, ale z nového, často osobnějšího a angažovanějšího úhlu pohledu.

Poslední kapitola teoretické části adresuje téma multikulturalismu a jeho vývoj v britském kontextu, což je klíčové pro pochopení způsobu, jakým je ve dvou analyzovaných literárních dílech konstruována identita. Multikulturalismus se v Británii začíná formovat v 60. letech 20. století jako reakce na poválečnou migraci z bývalých kolonií a potřebu integrace etnických menšin. V 80. letech se pojem ustálil jako vize společnosti založené na respektu k různorodosti. Z historického hlediska je multikulturalismus v Británii úzce spojen s koloniální minulostí a poválečnými migračními vlnami. Díky migračním vlnám z 50.–70. let se Británie proměňuje v multikulturní stát, kdy do země přicházejí komunity z bývalých kolonií, zejména z Karibiku, Indie, Pákistánu a Bangladéše. Tyto změny se výrazně promítají do literatury, která reflektuje otázky identity, přijetí a kulturního soužití.

V praktické části této diplomové práce si autorka klade výzkumnou otázku: Jak je identita konstruována v dílech moderní britské literatury? Tuto otázku zkoumá prostřednictvím analýzy etnické, sexuální a sociální identity ve třech literárních dílech: *My Beautiful Laundrette* od Hanifa Kureishiho, *White Teeth* od Zadie Smith a *Hotel World* od Ali Smith. Tyto identity jsou v každém díle zastoupeny v odlišné míře. Každá analýza je podložena konkrétními ukázkami z textu a propojena s širším sociálním a kulturním kontextem, čímž poukazuje na rozmanité způsoby formování identity v současné britské literatuře.

Před samotnou analýzou autorka definuje jednotlivé typy identit na základě své interpretace odborných zdrojů. V románu *My Beautiful Laundrette* jsou zastoupeny všechny tři typy identit. Dílo se zaměřuje na hlavního hrdinu britsko-pákistánského původu, a proto je otázka etnické identity ústředním motivem, který se prolíná celým příběhem. Zároveň zde hraje významnou roli sexualita a třídní příslušnost. Hlavní hrdina je rozpolcený mezi dvěma světy a neví, jakým směrem se vydat. Román *White Teeth* od Zadie Smith se soustředí zejména na téma etnické identity napříč generacemi imigrantských rodin. Skrze příběhy několika rodin různého etnického původu, zkoumá Smith veškeré faktory, které formaci identit ovlivňují. V románu *Hotel World* zkoumá Ali Smith konstrukci identity z odlišného úhlu než Kureishi či Zadie Smith. Skrze postavu ducha zesnulé dívky Sary autorka ukazuje, že identita není pouze otázkou vědomí za života, ale může přetrvávat i po smrti prostřednictvím vzpomínek, vztahů a touhy po spojení s druhými. Smith ztělesňuje identitu jako proměnlivou, křehkou a formovanou ztrátou, jazykem i pamětí. Ali Smith tímto dílem dokládá, že identita může být nejzřetelnější právě tehdy, když je narušena nebo ztracena, že existuje v napětí mezi minulostí, přítomností a vzpomínkou.

Závěrem lze říci, že zobrazení identity v moderní britské literatuře je formováno řadou faktorů. Pro každého autora je důležitý rozdílný typ identit. Každé z analyzovaných děl přistupuje ke konstrukci identity svým vlastním způsobem. Ať už skrze etnicitu, sexualitu, nebo mezilidské vztahy. Společně však odhalují, že identita není pevně daná a neměnná, ale naopak proměnlivá, dynamická a úzce propojená se sociálním a kulturním kontextem a individuálním prožíváním.

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