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Literary Responses to Migration Myths in Post-World War II Britain: The 'Windrush Generation' and East European Migration After 2004

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I hereby declare that I have written this dissertation independently, using only the mentioned and duly cited sources and literature, and that the work has not been used in another university study programme or to obtain the same or another academic title.

In Berlin on 28/02/2023   Cornel Borit, M. Phil., M.A.

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Abstract

This thesis examines the negotiation of nativist migration myths in literary texts dealing with two major periods of migration into Britain after the Second World War: Windrush Generation migration between 1948 and the late 1960s and East European migration after 2004. The thesis explores this topic because in contemporary Britain, migration myths have significantly influenced the way many British citizens think about and relate to migration. The Brexit debate stimulated a substantial production of research on migration myths within social sciences; yet, in literary studies, this theme remains largely unexplored, despite a considerable number of migration literature texts that deal with it. This study explores a corpus of seventeen novels focusing on how they negotiate migration myths and their relation to the emergence of nativism in Britain in the two major moments of mass migration mentioned above. It first establishes a typology of migration myths that recurrently appear in nativist discourses of the periods in focus, then literary techniques and strategies are examined to capture, discuss, and question the effects of migration myths on interactions between natives and immigrants in these narratives. In addition, this thesis explores how the selected narratives build cosmopolitan conviviality as an alternative to prevailing nativist views and as a means to challenge anti-migrant myths**.** For pursuing these goals, this study integrates concepts, theories, and methods from social sciences and literary studies to facilitate a reading that highlights the aesthetic qualities of the selected novels, as well as their potential to comment on (and question) current social and political issues. This work undertakes a comparative study of migration literature on the Windrush generation and on immigration from Eastern Europe after 2004. In doing so, it compares canonized works on the period from 1948 through the late 1960s with works on the immigration phase after 2004 that have received comparatively little critical attention. Although the literary works under examination are informed by the socio-historical conditions in which they are produced and on which they comment, they share a significant common cultural, conceptual, and ideological ground. The thesis seeks to highlight these similarities while remaining aware of their textual and contextual specificities. The findings of this thesis support the idea that migration myths were instrumental in the construction of a nativist ethos in Britain throughout the past seven decades. Yet, despite the significant impact of such myths, a representative number of cosmopolitan voices, both of migrants and natives, have constantly struggled to denounce them and worked together to build, consolidate, and maintain a society based on pluralism, tolerance, and cosmopolitan conviviality.

Key words: Brexit, cosmopolitanism, critical analysis, Eastern Europe, English literature, migration literature, migration, migration myths, nativism, typology, Windrush Generation.

Literarische Antworten auf Migrationsmythen im Großbritannien nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg: Die „Windrush Generation" und die osteuropäische Migration nach 2004

Zusammenfassung

Die vorliegende Doktorarbeit thematisiert nativistische Migrationsmythen in literarischen Texten zu zwei bedeutenden Phasen der Migration nach Großbritannien nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg: der Migration der Windrush-Generation zwischen 1948 und den späten 1960er Jahren sowie der Migration aus Osteuropa nach 2004. Migrationsmythen haben in der Nachkriegszeit maßgeblich das Denken vieler Briten und ihr Verhältnis zu Migration beeinflusst. Die Brexit-Debatte hat in den Sozialwissenschaften eine umfangreiche Produktion von Forschungsarbeiten zu Migrationsmythen angestoßen. In den Literaturwissenschaften ist das Thema jedoch bisher weitestgehend unerforscht, obgleich ein beträchtlicher Korpus von Migrationsliteratur dazu existiert. Diese Arbeite konzentriert sich auf siebzehn Romane zu den zwei oben genannten Momenten der Massenmigration nach Großbritannien, die die Rolle von Migrationsmythen auf die Entstehung des Nativismus in Großbritannien diskutieren. Hierfür wird zuerst eine Typologie von Migrationsmythen, die wiederholt in nativistischen Diskursen in den genannten Zeiträumen auftauchen, erstellt. Anschließend werden literarische Techniken und Strategien untersucht, durch die Effekte von Migrationsmythen auf Interaktionen zwischen Einheimischen und Einwanderern in diesen Erzählungen fassen, diskutieren und hinterfragen zu können. Zudem untersucht diese Arbeit, wie die ausgewählten Erzählungen kosmopolitische Geselligkeit als Alternative zu vorherrschenden nativistischen Ansichten und als Mittel zur Infragestellung antimigrantischer Mythen aufbauen. Um dieses Ziel zu erreichen, integriert die vorliegende Studie Konzepte, Theorien und Methoden aus den Sozial- und Literaturwissenschaften. Dies ermöglicht eine Lesart, die sowohl den ästhetischen Qualitäten als auch der ausgewählten Romane herausstellt, aktuelle soziale und politische Fragen zu kommentieren (und zu hinterfragen). Diese Arbeit nimmt eine komparative Studie von Migrationsliteratur zur Windrush-Generation und zur Einwanderung aus Ost-Europa nach 2004 vor. Dabei vergleicht sie kanonisierte Arbeiten zur Periode 1948 bis ca. 1960 mit vergleichbar kaum rezipierten Werken zur Einwanderungsphase nach 2004.Obwohl die untersuchten literarischen Werke von den sozio-historischen Bedingungen ihrer Entstehungszeit geprägt sind und diese auch behandeln, haben sie eine bedeutende gemeinsame kulturelle, konzeptionelle und ideologische Grundlage. Diese Studie versucht diese Gemeinsamkeiten hervorzuheben, ohne dabei ihre textlichen und kontextuellen Besonderheiten aus den Augen zu verlieren. Die Ergebnisse dieser Doktorarbeit stützen die Idee, dass Migrationsmythen in den letzten sieben Jahrzehnten maßgeblich zur Bildung eines nativistischen Ethos in Großbritannien beigetragen haben. Trotz des bedeutenden Einflusses dieser Mythen gibt es eine Minderheit kosmopolitischer Stimmen, sowohl Migranten als auch Einheimische, die für den Aufbau und Aufrechterhaltung einer offenen Gesellschaft kämpft und für Pluralismus, Toleranz und kosmopolitische Konvivialität einsteht.

Schlüsselbegriffe: Brexit, Kosmopolitismus, kritische Analyse, Osteuropa, englische Literatur, Migrationsliteratur, Migration, Migrationsmythen, Nativismus, Typologie, Windrush Generation.

Literární odezvy migračních mýtů v Británii po druhé světové válce – generace „Windrush" a migrace z východní Evropy po roce 2004

Resumé

Tato disertace zkoumá reakce literárních textů na migrační mýty ve dvou hlavních obdobích migrace do Británie po druhé světové válce – v době tzv. generace Windrush od roku 1948 do pozdních šedesátých let dvacátého století a v době migrace ze zemí východní Evropy po roce 2004. Na dané téma se soustřeďuje proto, že v poválečné době migrační mýty významně ovlivnily myšlení Britů o migraci a jejich vztah k ní. Diskuse o Brexitu v podstatné míře podnítily výzkum migračních mýtů ve společenských vědách, přičemž však v literární vědě zůstalo toto téma poměrně neprobádané, a to i přes značné množství literárních textů, které se jím zabývají. Tato práce se soustřeďuje na romány, které se zabývají úlohou migračních mýtů při formování nacionalistických postojů a politiky ve vztahu ke dvěma výše zmíněným důležitým momentům masové migrace do Británie. Nejprve vytváří typologii migračních mýtů, které se opětovně objevují v nacionalistickém diskursu ve zkoumaných obdobích. Poté se zaměřuje na různé literární techniky a strategie, pomocí nichž romány uchopují, líčí a kritizují migrační mýty a jejich dopad na vztahy mezi domácím obyvatelstvem a emigranty. Vedle toho disertace zkoumá, jak vybrané literární texty podporují alternativní postoje a vztahy kosmopolitního soužití, jež jsou protiváhou nacionalistických názorů a struktur vycházejících z protimigrační mytologie. K dosažení těchto cílů práce propojuje teorie a metody sociálních věd a literární vědy, čímž umožňuje interpretaci vybraných románů, která vyzdvihuje jak jejich estetickou hodnotu, tak i jejich potenciál komentovat významné sociální a politické problémy. Srovnávací povaha disertace vychází ze souběžné analýzy románů zabývajících se migrací generace „Windrush" (vesměs jde o kanonické texty, jimž byla věnována značná kritická pozornost) a ze současných románů o východoevropské migraci, které jsou většinou nedostatečně probádané. Ačkoli zkoumaná literární díla obrážejí společensko-historické podmínky svého vzniku, které jsou v nich tematizovány, sdílejí také významnou kulturní, koncepční a ideologickou tematiku. Disertace se pokouší zdůraznit jejich podobnosti, přičemž neztrácí zřetel k jejich textovým a kontextovým specifikám. Zjištění, s nimiž přichází disertace, podporují myšlenku, že migrační mýty byly hlavním nástrojem konstrukce nacionalistických postojů v Británii během posledních sedmdesáti let. Avšak přes značný vliv těchto mýtů se objevilo velké množství kosmopolitních hlasů vycházejících jak od migrantů, tak i od liberálně orientovaných Britů. Tyto hlasy se neustále poukazovaly na lživost migračních mýtů a vyzývaly k budování otevřené pluralistické společnosti, v níž panují tolerantní vztahy mezi příslušníky různých kultur.

Klíčová slova: Brexit, kosmopolitismus, kritická analýza, východní Evropa, anglická literatura, migrační literatura, migrace, migrační mýty, nacionalismus, typologie, generace „Windrush"

Contents

1. Introduction

1.1 Description and Purpose of the Thesis

England [is] an old and highly civilised nation, but the countries of Africa and the Caribbean were very far from being so indeed. (..) [m]any [immigrants] were layabouts who thrived on the three-pounds-ten they got from the National Assistance. This led to labour troubles, and we must remember that the nation had been passing through a slight, though of course temporary, recession. Pressure on housing was another problem. (…) Moreover, it was not unknown for coloured landlords to evict white tenants – often old-age pensioners – by making their lives impossible. (…) Then there was the matter of different customs. By and large (…), English people were renowned for their decent and orderly behaviour. But not so the immigrants. (…) Then there was the question of the women. (…) To begin with, mixed marriages (…) were most undesirable. They led to a mongrel race, inferior physically and mentally (…) The first was, that immigration by coloured persons (…) should be halted instantly. Indeed, the whole process should be reversed, and compulsory repatriation should be given urgent and serious consideration by the government. (MacInnes, 2011 [1959], 154-155)

In this country, housing is scarcer than it has ever been, yet immigration continues to rise. Unemployment among working Britons isn't coming down, yet time and again we hear that companies must have quotas to ensure that for every white Englishman they employ they must also hire three foreigners (…) Doesn't matter who's more qualified. (…) I believe in tolerance, just as I believe in fairness. It's only right that we should try to share what we have with those who have less. But what we have in Britain now is a society that asks those who work to share their earnings with those who scrounge; those who have grown up here to share their hard fought space with those who have just arrived; and those who deserve their place to share it with those who merely envy it. This is (…) a Britain in which there is nothing left to share. (Byers, 2018, 25-26)

These quotations from Colin MacIness' novel *Absolute Beginners* (1959) and Sam Byers' novel *Perfidious Albion* (2018) voiced by two characters with notorious nativist views capture comprehensively the position shared by a large category of British citizens about migration during the past seven decades. Individual and public attitudes as well as the way migration policies have been designed in Britain throughout this period have relied, in most cases, not on real insight into the nature, causes, and consequences of migration but have been highly influenced by a litany that conflates various myths[1] together into a cohesive story. As prominent migration scholar Hein de Haas contends, in contemporary Britain "much conventional thinking about migration is based on myths rather than facts" (De Haas, 2014, n.pag.). In the context of repeated economic, social, and identity crises affecting British society since the end of World War II, the powerful message

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[1] Myth is understood in this study as a symbolic discourse encapsulating narratives, either factual or counterfactual, or mixing factualness with fiction, which is connected to a group's social imaginary and influences that particular group's beliefs, attitudes, and actions. For a detailed description of the concept see also Chapter 2.2.2 in this thesis.

carried by such narratives has been successfully internalised and instrumentalised by nativist discourses, producing widely accepted images of immigrants as exotic, foreign, incompatible, dangerous, and utterly undesirable.

Numerous cultural productions of the period since the end of World War II until today, with literature in the foreground, have provided notable critical responses to the proliferation of such myths and to their detrimental effects on the interaction between natives and immigrants in reception societies. However, despite literature's, in the sense of fiction writing, potential to engage critically with cultural imaginaries and social and political anxieties produced by migration myths, understood in this study as myths that promote negative heterostereotypes about migrants and migration[2], up to now there is a gap in the investigation of migration myths in fiction texts. This applies for fiction depicting migration to Britain, as well as migrations from other social and historical contexts. Therefore, this study sets out to investigate a corpus of migration novels that engage with migration myths, focusing on how they negotiate those migration myths that produce deceptive public perceptions of migrants and migration and trigger irrational, hostile attitudes towards them. The concrete focus is on fictional representations engaging with two important migration moments: the migration from the Caribbean to Britain starting from 1948 and through the 1960s[3], generically known as Windrush Generation migration, and that from East European countries since their integration in the European Union from 2004 until today.

The increasing number of immigrants after World War II produced ethnic and cultural diversity in British society but also triggered divisions between supporters and critics of migration. The latter group has often employed migration myths to justify the need for migration control and for explaining failures of domestic politics or economy. These elements of the anti-migrant discourse, permeating either the public sphere, the mass media, or cultural representations, need to be confronted by a rigorous, critical examination. This thesis intends to contribute to such a project by performing a comparative examination of literary representations of migration myths, investigating why similar migration myths recurrently figure in literary texts dealing with migrations to Britain from different socio-historical contexts during the past seven decades. The investigation highlights similarities, as well as contextual specificities of the processes through which migration myths contribute to the fabrication of heterostereotypes and prejudices about

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[2] For a comprehensive discussion of the term, see Chapter 2.2 of this thesis.
[3] I focus on this period since 1948 is widely accepted as the beginning of Caribbean migration to Britain, whereas the end of the seventh decade is considered a turning point that marks the end of the first and most representative stage in the history of this migration. This is marked by the adoption of the Commonwealth Immigrants Act of 1968 (CIA 1968), as well as by Enoch Powell's notorious 'River of Blood' speech (April 1968).

migrants and migration and to engendering a sense of moral, identitarian, and social crisis in British society in the two historical contexts in focus.

Starting from the hypothesis that fiction texts can play an important role in commenting and questioning social events, cultural practices, and political structures (Tew, 2007), the specific purpose of the study is to examine how migration myths are negotiated in a corpus of seventeen novels that engage with Windrush Generation and East European migrations to Britain. The analysis pursues the literary techniques and strategies that are employed to deconstruct the background of meaning migration myths create, the structures they intend to uphold, and the directions of social organisation they mean to impose. At the same time, this study explores how the selected novels imagine at the textual level models of cosmopolitan conviviality as alternatives to nativism and promote cosmopolitan discursive frames that predispose agents involved in or affected by migration to appreciate the benefits of living harmoniously in ethnically and culturally diverse societies.

This study analyses in parallel novels that negotiate patterns of interaction between immigrants and British natives, examining the reproduction of similar migration myths in the two contexts of migration in focus. The intention behind this approach is to argue for the advantages of boundary crossing within Anglophone migration literature, and to demonstrate that the study of contemporary literature about migration to Britain can, and should, constructively build on the tradition of postcolonial studies, one of the primary theoretical frameworks in contemporary critical migration studies. Consequently, this study bridges works from different literary traditions and historical contexts that are similar by content, thematic approach, and aesthetic expression, yet particularised by distinct textual and contextual features and production conditions, in order to provide a more complete picture of migration to Britain in the past seven decades.

The choice of literary texts engaging with Windrush Generation and East European migrations relies on the similar social interactional patterns and reactions, group positions, attitudes, and policies related to migration that have (re)-emerged in these two social and historical contexts. The case examined in this study relies on the idea that Windrush Generation migration, which represents the first mass immigration to Britain in contemporary history, and the one from East European countries, which is one of the newest, are similar in many ways. In both cases, migration was connected to profound social and political transformations - the post-war dissolution of the British Empire and the eastward extension of the European Union respectively. Besides, both Caribbean and East European migrants benefited from the legal context provided by the British Nationality Act (1948) and the Treaty on European Union (The European Parliament, 1992),

which granted them free movement rights across the borders of the United Kingdom. However, in both cases, British authorities and public actors had not anticipated that immigration would be so extensive; therefore, the reactions of native British alternated between bewilderment and downright vexation, even though extensive cultural and economic exchange between Britain and the immigrants' countries of origin had existed before.

The migrations emerging in these contexts have also affected British society in similar ways, accelerating its transformation into a multi-ethnic, multicultural, and cosmopolitan society, but also triggering a significant nativist backlash among the categories of population that felt disquieted and threatened. The concerns about labour immigration that emerged after the war are echoed in the reactions to migration of workers from Eastern Europe today and similar myths survived, permeating the British natives' social imaginary and impacting their way to think and act. Both periods have been informed by the spread of an anti-migrant mythology that tentatively explained and justified the origin, the structure, and the functioning of British society as a community framed on the logic of 'us' and 'them' and reinforced group positions that sustained migration control, native supremacism, and social hierarchies specific to the British colonial era.

The imperial 'nostalgia' that Paul Gilroy explores (Gilroy, 2005) acted as a mental model that underpinned a continuity of negative attitudes towards migrants throughout the entire post-war period. And even despite obvious contextual differences between Windrush Generation and East European migrations, similar feelings of antipathy towards both categories of immigrants characterised large groups of Britons in both periods. Such manifestations of rejection directed to all immigrants irrespective of their ethnicity or cultural and geographical background, suggest a historical continuity of similar nativist traits in Britain throughout the entire period after World War II. Having replaced biological racism, the underlying principle of nativism in the case of Caribbean migrants, with a form of cultural racism based on wider dimensions of cultural differences in the case of East European migrants, most of the remaining elements characterising the reception of the two groups of immigrants are comparable and this explains the strikingly similar migrant mythology informing both socio-historical contexts.

In the analysis that follows, I argue that this comparative perspective can incorporate efficiently postcolonial literature and theoretical models covering different historical, geographical, and cultural locations, but also needs to go beyond it, as contemporary migration, and its subsequent representations in literature, can take many forms that are in a way or another connected to Britain's colonial past. The comparative reading of selected Anglophone migration novels in this study is informed by the socio-historical similarities of the migrations these texts address, as well

as by the inclusion of similar literary motifs and techniques. Although the selected texts conform to different historical specificities and literary traditions, which influence the aesthetic manner of expressing about migration experiences, they provide a clear example of how certain phenomena, such as migration myths, can become recurrent tropes in all contexts informed by migration.

At the same time, by bringing forth less known texts about East European migration to Britain to be compared with canonised works of prominent Caribbean authors, this study intends to draw the attention of contemporary scholarship to the need to reassess the position of the former category of texts and on the current lack of critical work related to them. Anglophone literature depicting Windrush Generation migration to Britain has received extensive critical attention (to name just a few, Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 2006 (eds.); Dabydeen, 2000; Joseph, 1992; MacPhee, 2011; McLeod, 2004; Nasta (ed.), 1988; Procter, 2003; Ramchand, 1970), coming to be considered an important part within the wider field of Postcolonial studies. Fiction in English depicting East European migration to Britain has however received far less critical attention. Except for the book on Brexit literature edited by Robert Eaglestone (Eaglestone, 2018), which includes chapters that touch upon the theme of immigration from Eastern Europe, and several reviews in quality newspapers, such as The Guardian, Times Literary Supplement, or Independent (Cummins, 2018; Kean, 2017; Leith, 2018; Pitcher, 2017; Segal, 2007; Tonkin, 2007; Turner, 2018), I could not detect other critical studies engaging with any of the texts approaching this migration. As a response to this state of facts, this study deploys an innovative method of analysis through a typological and comparative approach, which facilitates the critical examination of migration myths in relation to a framework of analysis that compares canonical post-colonial works about Windrush Generation migration to Britain with more recent fiction texts about migration from Eastern Europe.

The selected novels incorporate a wide variety of myths that promote similar narratives, which informed the British social imaginary of both periods in focus. Their structures of representation can take various forms, but the scrutiny of these myths in an extended context as that of this study reveals that some myths reiterate the same core ideas with similar effects, thus certain patterns for their analysis can be established. Therefore, for decoding the complexity of their representation and function, as well as for dealing systematically with the extended number of migration myth negotiated in the primary sources, this study develops a model of investigation based on a typological system of classification of recurring migration myths. This typology contains four categories of myths that are established in relation to both the theoretical description and examples of migration myths identified in the novels. This model represents a valuable prerequisite for a

systematic examination of migration myths in a vast corpus of texts, which is done in the analytical part of this study. The typological classification of myths both facilitates an organised reading of the novels and helps to evince the continuity of similar narratives about migration in the narrative universes of novels depicting two distinct socio-historical contexts.

This study implies an interdisciplinary character, as it integrates the theorization of migration and migration myth with elements of narratological analysis and with those critical cultural theories which are interested in the politics and conditions of immigration to Britain, particularly those related to postcolonial cultural production. In this sense, the studies on the transformation or the (re)configuration of identity under the influence of migration done by Stuart Hall (1990), Edward Said's contribution (2003 [1978]) to the study of alterity, and particularly Paul Gilroy's studies (2004; 2005) on the perpetuation of the post-colonial mentalities and attitudes informed by melancholia and by nostalgia for the imperial past in contemporary contexts of non-colonial migration provide valuable tools for the analysis of the primary texts in this thesis. Therefore, the integration of concepts and theories from social sciences and literary studies facilitates a reading of the novels in which both the potential to negotiate social and political issues and the aesthetic elements by which these are represented can be foregrounded and equally valued.

1.2 Migration and Migration Myths

Migration has represented a sensitive topic in the British social imaginary of the past seven decades, a period also designated as 'the age of migration' (Castles, De Haas, & Miller, 2014), prompting significant social and ideological antagonism especially during the incipient mass migration to Britain after the war and again in the recent decades. Literary responses to these realities provide important frameworks for negotiating these antagonisms, challenging the conventional representations of migration in the dominant discourses informed by the ideology of nation state and by nativist rhetoric. This study therefore adopts a reading strategy that integrates key concepts from social sciences related to the study of migration, such as nativism and cosmopolitanism[4], which are valuable analytical tools in the interpretation of the interactional frameworks emerging from the contact between native British and immigrants in the two periods.

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[4] For an extended discussion of these concepts see Chapter 2.1.3 of this thesis.

Soon after the war, Britain witnessed an influx of immigrants from the colonies, with the arrival of 492 Caribbean migrants on board *Empire Windrush* on June 22nd, 1948, becoming a symbol for the beginning of migration from British colonies to the metropole. The unexpected increase in immigration that followed, which was stimulated by the adoption of the British Nationality Act (BNA) of 1948, as well as by the enlistment of colonial subjects during the war, was, nevertheless, not the only phenomenon that shattered British society after the war. As James Walvin argues, "Britain's demise from global and imperial power was equally unexpected and unexplainable" (Walvin, 1984, 134) for a generation of Britons who had fought and won the war, and was expecting a continuation of the pre-war imperial geo-political, economic, and cultural order that would presumably secure a bright and stable future for the nation.

It is in these circumstances that migrants from the colonies, once celebrated for their contribution to the war effort, now joining in the effort to rebuild the 'mother country', became the target of a long-established supremacist discourse, which projected immigration as a destabilizing element, intruding in society, and disrupting the ethnic, cultural, and social cohesion of the country. Even if, with the demise of the empire, Britain's decline from international prominence continued in the decades that followed, the imperial outlook did not disperse. The mythology of Britain's imperial power and her global prominence have endured through time and, even for post-imperial generations, the stories about "the days when 'Britannia ruled the waves' are not mere historical abstractions" (Walvin, 1984, 135).

The roots of British nativism can be traced back, as James Walvin suggests[5], to its colonial past, when the racism-backed British supremacist mentality emerged. Yet, its manifestation was spurred by societal transformations generated by the ongoing immigration, which enhanced Britain's multiculturalism and ethnic diversity. The second half of the twentieth and the early twenty-first centuries was a period informed by uncertainty in many ways, as the reconfiguration of Britain's population has entailed a re-evaluation of issues related to society, culture, and identity. The intensification of ethnic and cultural diversification, which can conventionally be considered to have started with the 'Windrush moment' and was accomplished by the latest mass migration from Eastern Europe, has inevitably produced significant societal cleavages among the native population, opposing liberal-minded cosmopolitans to more conservative, nativist inclined Britons. If the former have welcomed pluralism, tolerance, and cultural exchange, the latter have rather interpreted the presence of migrant 'others' on the national soil as a threat to their vision

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[5] This argument is also sustained by, among others, Alan Sinfield (Sinfield, 1989, 127) and Paul Gilroy (P. Gilroy, 2005, 101; 103).

about the nation as a homogeneous community. It was among this latter group that migration myths have had a significant impact, generating moral panic and emotionally charged responses to migration that range from pressure on policy adoption and decision making, to violent anti-migrant acts, and to unequivocal support for the pro-Brexit campaign.

In the process of defining national identity, images of the 'other' always represent a space for reflection on the cultural 'self', and immigrants are often instrumental in such processes. Especially in contexts heavily informed by nationalist ethos, the debate around migration may take to a large extent the form of representations in terms of significant 'otherness', often stretching beyond factual evidence or rational acceptability. What is questionable in such cases is, anyway, not the facticity of narratives produced, but rather the plausibility of their effects, since discursive construction of images can contribute to producing the 'real' for the members of a group; as long as the group members choose to perceive such images as the reality, they enter this reality and produce concrete consequences. At this point, we enter the territory of myth. In this sense, migration myths represent means of constructing a social imaginary related to migration, which goes beyond the narratives they incorporate, influencing the perception of reality and attitude formation of the group members who follow them.

Migration myths are complex phenomena that have a major impact on the way societies function today. They evoke a horizon of reference which has a powerful impact on the social imaginary of individuals and groups and influence significantly their emotional responses. With its focus on the social and political implications of migration myths in novels about migration to Britain, the argumentation this study develops considers the theorisation of myth against the wider background of migration theories that analyse migration at micro-level. The focus of this paradigm, as theorized by Stephen Castles *et al.* (2014) and Hein de Haas (2014b), is on the subjective experience of interacting agents and on the examination of the personal, social, and political relations that establish between migrants and natives in reception societies in the post-migration phase.

In the context of migration to Britain during the past seven decades, mythmaking seems to have struck the right chord, indicating migration as an easily acceptable explanation for the country's political and economic decline and for the cultural and societal changes which proved to be too difficult to accept for many native British. Such narratives of solace that responded to many people's anxieties and fears proved to be extremely efficient instruments on which sensationalist media, but also populist politicians have capitalized extensively. Their proliferation has, however, produced an urgent need for critical responses. Many scientific outputs emerged lately pursuing to

deconstruct nativist perspectives on migration and foreground a more critical interpretation of the benefits it brings to society. Most studies come from the field of social sciences and they engage in denouncing the instrumentalisation of myths about migration, from either the Caribbean, Eastern Europe, or other regions as a means to legitimise dominant nativist discourses and to endorse a subtraction of migrants' rights in the communities where they settle.

Among the studies that explore migration myths and their effects in mass media, social media, visual media, and political discourses I can mention, without being exhaustive[6], Arcimavičienė and Baglama (2018), Balch and Balabanova (2016), Baldwin-Edwards (2001), Blinder and Allen (2016), Chovanec (2017), De Haas (2008; 2014; 2016), Finney and Simpson (2009), Gabrielatos and Baker (2008), Héran (2004), Langdon (2018), Mawby and Gisby (2009), Threadgold (2009), Ureta Vaquero (2011), and Wickramasekara (2004). These studies provide a critical examination of migration myths in Britain as well as other European contexts of migration, tracing the processes of myth creation and dissemination at the societal level. The scrutiny of discursive procedures and techniques these studies perform evinces how mythical representations can contribute to shaping the public perception about migrants and migration through the creation of social and linguistic stereotypes that turn migration stories into myths and construct discursively a sense of a migration crisis. As the trend of promoting migration myths in the news and political debate continues today, it can be anticipated that more sociological and critical discourse studies will be added to the existing body of research.

1.3 Migration Literature and Migration Myths

Besides sociological studies dealing with the influence of migration myths in society there are also extended cultural responses to this, most of them coming from literature. Fiction has traditionally played an important role in debating major social issues, and literary texts are regarded as inseparable from society, not just because they are created in society, but also because they fictionalize and scrutinise concrete dimensions of the total structure of an epoch. As Stephen Greenblatt contends, a text is more than a linguistic and aesthetic structure; it is produced by humans and thus informed by the forces and conditions that shape society, encapsulating "the social energy encoded in those works" (Greenblatt, 1997, 6).

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[6] This present thesis does not include a detailed discussion of the lines of argument these studies develop, because it is not its scope to compare their results to those of this thesis.

Literature should therefore be read as a product of the social and cultural conditions from which it emerges, since fiction production is influenced by the events of their time as well as by the cultural and political background of the author. Moreover, it is relevant to recall that important aspects of British national identity have consistently been debated by British novelists. The novel has been an important means in the creation of the national consciousness, if we are to follow Benedict Anderson's idea on "imagined communities" (Anderson, 2006, 25), which in the case of Britain has coincided with the emergence of the British Empire. As Patrick Parrinder contends, novels which have been read by subsequent generations "play a key part in the transmission and dissemination of national images, memoires, and myths [and] add a largely untapped body of evidence to historical enquiry into the origins and development of our inherited ideas about England and Englishness" (Parrinder, 2008 [2006], 6)[7].

Novels can thus be said to have been instrumental in outlining important aspects of British culture and identity politics, but at the same time, they have been at the forefront of re-writing national grand narratives and providing fertile ground for critical approaches to the processes of defining and shaping national identity. A major topic in this sense is the issue of immigration, which has been widely treated by several generations of authors, especially in the period following the end of World War II. As mentioned previously, migration has entered the field of public debate as a major issue in the context of ongoing arrivals of immigrants in Britain, first from the colonies and the Commonwealth of Nations and more recently from European Union countries. And if traditionally migration and its impact on society and national identity made the object of social studies[8], with a discipline of its own emerging recently, newer trends articulate more and more the necessity of interdisciplinary approaches in the study of migration, with literature being an integrate part of this.

Historically, literature has often employed themes of migration either in the form of exploration journey, colonial adventure novel, or cosmopolitan bildungsroman, but scholars of migration studies who are mostly preoccupied with the sources' veracity have generally regarded literary texts as "tangential sources" (Burge, 2020, 5). However, the opening towards postclassical and constructivist approaches in migration studies promoted by interdisciplinary scholars (Brettell & Hollifield, 2015; Burge, 2020; King et al., 2003; White, 1985) acknowledge the importance of humanities in understanding migration and rightfully consider that just as "social constructivism

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[7] For further details, see also Timothy Brennan, *The National Longing for Form* (Brennan, 1990, 48-50).
[8] Prominent works by scholars such as Stephen Castles, Hein De Haas, Mark J. Miller, Massey Douglas, Nicolas De Genova, or King Russell have contributed significantly to the study of migration. Their theories will be further discussed in Chapter 2.1 of this thesis.

discourages researchers from seeking objective 'truths', so too can migration literature be helpful for thinking beyond the idea of authenticity and 'truth' to consider what can be revealed by the way these texts use literary forms and techniques" (Burge, 2020, 16). This scholarly tradition regards both literary and non-literary texts as viable objects of analysis, thus by and large dissolving the difference between fictional and non-fictional, between factual and imaginative sources. In the wake of this tradition, this study considers that any text, fiction or non-fiction, that deals with migration can represent valid material for qualitative interpretation, since a text's narrative plausibility should be evaluated by verisimilitude rather than verifiability.

Even though literature has become more and more accepted as a reliable medium in the study of phenomena related to migration, this shift does not come without challenges that need to be addressed contextually to increase the methodological rigour and the clarity of research. The primary sources for this study are included in the category of *migration literature*, which, as Leslie Adelson suggests, includes "all works that are produced in a time of migration or that can be said to reflect on migration" (Adelson, 2005, 23). It is important to mention that some scholars (King, Connell, & White, 2003; White, 1985) tend to restrict the category of migration fiction to texts written by authors who have experienced migration themselves, preferring to use of the term *migrant literature* over that of *migration literature.* Yet, the majority of scholars interested in the investigation of fiction about migration (Adelson, 2005; Declercq, 2011; Frank, 2008; Mardorossian, 2003; Vlasta, 2015; Walkowitz, 2006) contend that the association between authorial biography and text must be reconsidered. In this sense, they argue that the entire literary system, just like the whole society, are influenced by the political and social impact of migration and not just migrants and migrant authors alone.

This perspective allows the possibility to extend the domain of literature about migration beyond the authorial direct migrant experience and take into consideration all literature that responds to the realities informed by movement across cultures and geographies. As Søren Frank argues, "literature of migration is not written by migrants alone" (Frank, 2008, 3) and, by accepting that, we can "move away from authorial biography as the decisive parameter, emphasizing instead intra-textual features such as content and form as well as extra-textual forces such as social processes" (3). Migration literature can therefore be considered to include all texts, either written by migrant or non-migrant authors, which are informed by particular styles, themes, and forms that reflect migration experiences, and thus represent a powerful medium of representation of and debate over migration.

The adoption of interdisciplinary methods that include literature in the study of migration can

become rewarding, since, literary texts, according to Paul White, can "provide deeper insights into the situations of migrants, and can provoke new questions for further consideration" (White, 1985, 278). Migration literature can address qualitative aspects of migration that sociological studies do less efficiently, "aiming to shed light on some single aspects of migration such as the decision to leave, residential location on arrival, or sociolinguistics" (King et al., 2003, x). As Paul White argues, social scientific studies, diverse and complex in terms of methodology and approaches, cover less comprehensively the individual experience of migration, the processes and attitudes emerging among the interacting agents, or the cultural and structural transformations that migration triggers in society (White, 2003, 10). He comments on these flaws informing sociological approaches and regards them as "important gaps which can be constructively filled via the use of creative literature" (10), which offers insights into the experience of being a migrant and migration processes in general. Literary texts, through their detailed account of space, emotions, and situations address in a penetrating way issues such as "place perception, landscape symbolism, senses of displacement and transformation, communities lost and created anew, exploitation, nostalgia, attitudes towards return, family relationships, self-denial and self-discovery, and many more" (King et al., 2003, x). Literary representations can thus play an important role in shaping the public discourse related to migration, since they are not limited to commenting on events, past or present, but they can also have impact on the perception of the situations they represent by generating images and providing alternative perspectives that challenge dominant discourses.

Moreover, literary texts are notably fit for the analysis of the extra-textual migratory reality as they can include representations of real-world phenomena. For instance, they can figure ways in which agents involved in migration create meaning about events, situations, and people, on the experiences of migrants negotiating their social position and power relations in a particular social-historical context, on processes of migrants' identity (re)configuration, on individual and group attitudes emerging from the interaction between migrants and natives in communities informed by migration, on cultural constructs resulting from such interactions, or on structural transformations that migration triggers in society. By drawing their energy and inspiration from the real world (Greenblatt, 1988), fictional texts can negotiate efficiently recognisable social and cultural practices in setting, plot, and character development. They can therefore function as expressions of an existing social-historical environment, of the ideological traces, worldviews, political order, and individual sensibilities that inform it.

Insofar as literature is an adequate medium for representation of contested world views, beliefs,

attitudes, and ideologies, in which vulnerable and marginal groups can receive a voice, it can subsequently provide a space for reflecting critically on the function played by migration myths in discursive representations of community and in the construction of national identity. As Christine Berberich points out, "literature assumes a mythopoeic function: it helps create and perpetuate myths old and new alike and so contributes to cementing a notion of community, belonging and (national) identity" (Berberich, 2015, 159). In this sense, many myths that can be considered to contribute at building the British national identity have been represented in fiction form, for example the myth of Robin Hood, the myth of King Arthur, or, more recently, the myth of England's 'finest hour' related to the Second World War, which, according to Paul Gilroy, has acquired "the status of an ethnic myth" since it addresses the "memory of the country at war against foes who are simply, tidily, and uncomplicatedly evil" (Gilroy, 2004, 97).

Nevertheless, not all myths that contribute to strengthening the ideas of community and national belonging pay tribute to legendary figures or depict remarkable historical moments, in the sense of 'the nation's finest hour' to which Winston Churchill refers (Churchill, 1940). Some myths also address the tropes of loss and danger with equally powerful effects, and such myths have entered the ongoing conversation about Britishness especially in the context of the demise of the British Empire and of immigration to Britain since the end of World War II until today. In this context, many fictional responses to the debate about national identity also reflect on the function of these myths, negotiating the positions of native British that can stretch between what Patrick Parrinder describes as radical (alternative) and conservative (traditional) definitions of Britishness, where "the radical definition is fluid, hospitable, and welcoming to immigrants while the conservative definition is static, defensive, and xenophobic to a greater or lesser extent" (Parrinder, 2008, 19).

It can be legitimately said that negotiating migration myths, in the sense of narratives that impact the perception of migration by promoting commonly accepted images about migrants and migration, represents a particular feature of novels dealing with immigration in Britain after the war, both belonging to the postcolonial and to more recent traditions, as, for instance, novels having Brexit at the core of their narratives. Such texts have thoroughly engaged with the spread of migration myths, sometimes featuring explicit references to historical events or public personalities who have built, and sometimes also ruined their political careers, by promoting migration myths. The rise of populist politicians like Enoch Powell in the 1960s and Nigel Farage after 2010, who have put narratives of nostalgia for the lost greatness in connection with the ongoing growth of immigration, represent significant milestones, that this study discusses, in the

development of nativist conceptions and attitudes in Britain's recent history and in the understanding of ideas such as nationhood and national belonging in exclusionary terms.

1.4 Selection and Description of the Corpus

The novels selected for analysis are included in the category of migration literature in the sense described above, but the selection process has, in addition to this, implied a series of criteria. In a comparative study that extends over a wide social-cultural setting from two specific historical moments, doing the selection of primary sources can be an arduous undertaking. Being aware that an ideal and comprehensive final selection is illusionary, I have proceeded by following some basic criteria that correspond to the principles of relevance, representativeness, and generalisability.

The first major criterion was represented by the thematic dimension, which directed the search towards novels about migration from the Caribbean to Britain between 1948 and through the 1960s and from East European countries after 2004 respectively, as either main or significant theme. My research of novels that fulfil this criterion was based on extensive search that consisted of an ongoing dialogue with other scholars interested in the field of migration literature and, in parallel, of consulting collection catalogues of several universities, reading reviews in newspapers and periodicals, such as The Guardian, The Independent, Times Literary Supplement, and Financial Times, and scrutinising literature review web sites, such as *thebookbag.co.uk* and *goodreads.com*. The focus on these historical and social contexts of migration ruled out important novels that deal with, for instance, Asian migration to Britain, such as Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* (2003), Nadeem Aslam's *Maps for Lost Lovers* (2004), Gautam Malkani's *Londonstani* (2007), or Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* (2017), but also Maggie Gee's *The White Family* (2002), which involves migrant characters of African origin. Also, Marina Lewycka's *A Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* (2005) and *Two Caravans* (2007) were ruled out since, despite fulfilling other relevant criteria, deal with migration to Britain from outside the European Union, Ukraine respectively.

Eventually, a corpus of 52 preliminary primary sources was built based on the first criterion, without claiming to be exhaustive. These novels were afterwards read with the specific purpose of assessing their level of engagement with migration myths, which represented a second fundamental selection criterion. Many novels that engage at the plot and character levels with the two migrations in focus were therefore excluded based on this criterion, as the negotiation of migration myths was either marginal or lacked completely. Among the most representative novels

on Windrush Generation migration that were excluded are George Lamming's *The Emigrants* (1954), Sam Selvon's *The Housing Lark* (1965), V. S. Naipaul's *The Mimic Men* (1967), and Caryl Phillips's *The Final Passage* (1985). At the same time, many British novels that deal with the 'state of the nation' in the period after the European Union expansion of 2004 engage thematically with immigration from East European countries but lack the specific engagement with migration myths. Therefore, such novels as Amanda Craig's *Hearts and Minds* (2009), John Lanchester's *Capital* (2012), Ali Smith's *Autumn* (2016), Jon McGregor's *Reservoir 13* (2017), and Anthony Cartwright's *The Cut* (2017) were also ruled out from the final list.

A final criterion for selection was heterogeneity. Therefore, the selection includes canonical novels that have been acclaimed by critics and recognized by important literary prizes along with marginal works which have been less commercially successful or have received less attention from the literary critique. At the same time, novels by migrant writers or with migrant backgrounds and by British born authors were selected, which provides access to the perspectives of both immigrants themselves and of native British. Based on all these criteria, the final selection was narrowed down to seventeen novels divided into two categories: one comprising nine novels about Windrush Generation migration and the other comprising eight novels about migration from Eastern Europe.

The first category includes the following novels[9]: *The Lonely Londoners* (1956) by Sam Selvon, *To Sir, With Love* (1959) by E. R. Braithwaite, *Absolute Beginners* (1959) by Colin MacInnes, *Escape to an Autumn Pavement* (1960) by Andrew Salkey, *Paid Servant* (1962) by E. R. Braithwaite, *Jamaican Migrant* (1965) by Wallace Collins, *Black Teacher* (1994) by Beryl Gilroy, *Small Island* (2004) by Adrea Levy, *The Riot* (2013) by Laura Wilson. If the first six novels in this category are contemporary to the events they represent, the last three can be considered historical novels, since they address retrospectively aspects related to Windrush Generation migration, thus providing specific insight into events and phenomena connected to this migration period as seen from contemporary perspective.

The novels included in the second category are: *The Road Home* (2007) by Rose Tremain, *Poles Apart* (2008) by Polly Courtney, *Time of Lies. A Political Satire* (2017) by Douglas Board, *We Come Apart* (2017) by Sarah Crossan and Brian Conaghan, *Missing Fay* (2017) by Adam Thorpe, *Night of the Party* (2018) by Tracey Mathias, *Middle England* (2018) by Jonathan Coe, and *Perfidious Albion* (2018) by Sam Byers. The first two novels in the list engage thematically with the incipient

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[9] As a convention, I list these novels based on the year of their first publication.

stage of migration from Eastern Europe to Britain after the EU expansion of 2004. The other six novels can be included in the category of *BrexLit*, which, according to Kristina Shaw, refers to literature that "either directly responds or imaginatively alludes to Britain's exit from the EU, or engages with the subsequent socio-cultural, economic, racial or cosmopolitical consequences of Britain's withdrawal" (Shaw, 2018, 18).

The novels analysed in this study equally accommodate a critical perspective on how migration myths infiltrate society and expose nativist discourses that incorporate and capitalise on these myths. They show significant thematic and structural similarities, contain a high density of narrative sequences depicting the emergence and dissemination of similar migration myths in both periods, and display a high potential to negotiate these myths, criticise nativist positions, and promote a cosmopolitan vision within societies informed by immigration.

1.5 Thesis Structure

This study is organised in five chapters that are separated in two main parts. The first part (Introduction and Chapters 2 and 3) sets the theoretical and methodological backdrop for the analysis and presents the social-historical context of the study. Chapter 2 first explains the key concepts of *migration* and *migration myth* and, in connection to these, examines the nature and origins of two antagonistic attitudes towards migration: *nativism* and *cosmopolitanism.* This is followed by a discussion of some critical theories used in the study. Postcolonial critical theory provides a valuable set of analytical tools for examining the processes resulting from the interaction between immigrants and native British. In this context, postcolonial critical theory is instrumental for explaining the role of migration myths in in the creation of ideological structures based on the binary of 'us' and 'them', in the sense theorised by Edward Said (2003 [1978]). At the same time, the theory section explains Paul Gilroy's (Gilroy, 2005) arguments on the continuity of British nativism throughout Britain's contemporary history in relation to racism and supremacist colonial ideology, as well as to the nostalgia caused by the loss of the empire. The conceptual part of the study is concluded by a chapter that explores the methods employed in the analysis of the primary sources, describing the tools, techniques, and strategies of interpretation by which migration myths are negotiated in the novels.

Chapter 3 outlines the social and historical context of the study, helping to explain the connection between the selected literary texts and the contexts in which they were produced and

on which they comment. I examine here the roots of British nativist attitudes in connection to immigration in Britain, which, since the first arrivals of Caribbean migrants until today, has been perceived by many native British as a reversal of the colonisation process and of colonial power structures of the past[10]. The chapter traces the anxieties caused by these transformations, which were believed by many Britons to threaten the nation's ethnical and cultural homogeneity, the natives' economic privileges, and the community's stable social order.

With Chapter 4, the study moves on to the second part of the thesis, where the focus is on analysing the primary sources against the background discussed in the first part. A first section (Chapter 4.1) presents the typology which provides the structure of this analytical part, as well as discusses the theoretical framework on which this typology is established. Thus, the following chapters (4.2 to 4.5) are organised thematically, each of them examining the following specific typological categories of migration myths: *migrant alterity myths, migrant invasion myths, endangered culture and identity myths,* and *lost control and reclamation myths.*

Each analytical chapter examines how a category of migration myths is negotiated in novels. A first section of these chapters comprises the conceptualisation and description of the corresponding category of migration myths. The subsequent section provides an overview of their expression in all the novels and foregrounds narrative techniques for negotiating the effects of these myths on the narrative dynamics and character development in the texts, for instance statements and manifestations of nativist characters, quotes from newspapers, references to nativist politicians or opinion leaders, etc. By highlighting the perpetuation of similar myths in the socio-historical contexts the novels address, the analysis argues that a continuity of similar mythologies and of their function can be observed in the two contexts in focus. The last section of each analytical chapter performs a close reading of two selected novels, one from each period[11], which most comprehensively engage in negotiating the respective category of migration myths. The focus here is on exploring how these novels negotiate migration myths by employing a series of narrative strategies and techniques, such as characterisation, multiperspectivity, irony, and the creation of counter-myths, as well as by using aesthetical categories, such as tropes of mobility and of transformation of space into liminal contact zones.

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[10] For further studies on the idea of the reversed colonisation in Britain see Ward, S., *British Culture and the End of the Empire*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2011; Webster, W., *Englishness and Empire 1939-1965*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2005.

[11] Except for the first analytical chapter, which features two novels about Windrush Generation migration, both by E.R. Braithwaite. The decision to analyses two novels was motivated by the thematic similarities and the continuity of the storyline in the two texts.

Chapter 4.2 examines the category of *migrant alterity myths.* Myths in this category construct an image of migrants as significant 'others' in relation to British natives, as primitive, savage, and culturally and mentally inferior, thus incompatible and undesirable. The review of myths in the entire corpus is followed by a close reading of the novels *To Sir, With Love* (Braithwaite, 2014 [1959]) and *Paid Servant* (Braithwaite, 2014a [1962]) by Windrush Generation author E.R. Braithwaite and *The Road Home* (Tremain, 2008) by contemporary British author Rose Tremain.

Chapter 4.3 examines the category of *migrant invasion myths,* which claim that Britain is invaded by an unprecedentedly high number of migrants who represent a threat for the nation's social and economic stability. Such myths intend to accredit the narrative that migrants invade British local communities, taking over the natives' living space, homes, jobs, and social benefits. Following the same analytical pattern, the second section traces the expression of these myths in the entire corpus and then examines in the subsequent section how they are negotiated in the novels *Small Island* (Levy, 2004) by the contemporary author with a Caribbean background, Andrea Levy, and also in Sam Byers' post-Brexit dystopian satire, *Perfidious Albion* (Byers, 2018)*.

Chapter 4.4 engages with the category of *endangered culture and identity myths*, which profess that excessively high numbers of immigrants dilute Britain's ethnical homogeneity through miscegenation, debase its exceptional culture, and jeopardise the harmonious social organisation of local communities. In addition, migration allegedly represents the reason for Britain's decay from past glory. A review of critical representations of such myths in all primary sources is followed by the close analyses of the novels *Absolute Beginners* (MacInnes, 2011 [1959]), by British author Colin MacInnes, and *Middle England* (Coe, 2018), by contemporary British author Jonathan Coe.

Finally, Chapter 4.5 traces migration myths in the category *lost control and reclamation myths,* which promote the narratives that Britain is exposed to losing control over its borders and to being irremediably affected by uncontrolled immigration. Therefore, the 'true people', as well as the authorities, must stop new arrivals and expulse the migrants who have already settled in the country. Migrants' expulsion, as a form of regaining societal control, is often justified by resorting to the myth of the criminal migrant, which claims that migration is the cause of increasing criminality. The survey of the myths in the entire corpus is followed by a close reading of the detective novel *The Riot* (Wilson, 2013) by Laura Wilson, which is set against the backdrop of the Notting Hill race riot of 1958, and *Night of the Party* (Mathias, 2018) by Tracey Mathias, a political dystopia set in the aftermath of the Brexit referendum.

The conclusion (Chapter 5) provides some final reflections over the role of migration myths in the debate on migration, as well as a summary of the arguments developed in this thesis. The study concludes with some remarks that assess the value of the debated arguments as starting point for further research, which may extend the investigation of migration myths in relation to various context and histories of migration.

2 Concepts, Theories, and Methods

2.1 Migration

2.1.1 Preliminaries

Migration is an important overarching concept in this study. It is a highly complex term and its prevalence in contemporary public discourses and policy making makes its theorisation both difficult and necessary. Any attempt of conceptualisation can be highly influenced by antagonistic perspectives between those who celebrate the diversity and complexity migration brings in society and those who oppose these transformations. It is therefore necessary to start by recognising that the complexity of the processes connected to migration demands a careful critical approach that can advance a more nuanced and realistic understanding of the phenomenon.

This chapter first explicates migration from a critical perspective, underlining its historical continuity and social, economic, and political significance, then describes briefly the main theoretical developments in the study of migration. Building on this discussion, the second section explicates the significance of the concepts of *nativism* and *cosmopolitanism*, which help to explain the antagonistic attitudes and group positions emerging in Britain in relation to migration during the past seven decades and thus facilitate the analysis of migration myths in the novels selected for this study.

Traditional approaches in migration studies promoted the idea that societies are described as ordered, consistent, and stable in terms of cultural components, ethnical structure, and political organisation. Recent scholarship in migration studies, however, questions this view, which is based on the ideology described by Wimmer and Glick Schiller as *methodological nationalism* (Beck, 2006; Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2002). This line of research criticises the argument that all members of a state share a common history, culture, social customs, norms, values, and institutions, as well as the perception of migration as a recent, accidental, and peripheral phenomenon that has to be monitored and controlled (O'Reilly 2016, 25). Due to its privileged position in the context of Western Modernity, methodological nationalism has been influential to the degree of erasing "the understanding of migrations as part of our human condition, which has led to the belief that the migrant is a social aberration in a civilized society" (William 2016, 151) and that migration does not fit in the construction of European national histories.

Critical migration scholarship (Beck, 2006; Castles, De Haas, & Miller, 2014; De Haas, 2014c; Nail, 2015; William, 2016) challenges such myopic views, which intend to diminish the role of migration and human mobility and favour stable ethnic and political structures. A major idea that this research tradition maintains is that in world history, mobility and intermingling of boundaries and cultures is "the rule rather than the exception" (Beck 2006, 68). This perspective questions the privilege of structure over individual and of sedentarism over mobility by emphasising migrant agency and the potential of migration to change individuals and societies. This shift of focus opens the perspective towards understanding history in terms of human mobility and interaction, since large scale migrations have constantly contributed to the transformation of societies and continue to do so in contemporaneity. The fixed nature of social and cultural units claimed by territorial nationalism and ethnicism can therefore be considered unstable, which, if we look at history beyond the ideological biases imposed by the logic of the nation state, aligns with Benedict Anderson's manner of looking at nations as "imagined communities" (Anderson, 2006, 1983).

2.1.2 An Overview of Migration Theories: Classical Functionalist, Historical Structural, and Symbolic Interactionist Theories

Despite the controversies created by nation state's incentives to control, limit, and prevent the flux of migrants, scholars study international migration because "[i]t has the potential to change societies and individuals in diverse and interesting ways, the potential to exploit, to enrich, to bring about competition, and to engender change. It raises questions about identity, belonging, location, resources, social cohesion and social divisiveness" (O'Reilly, 2016, 25). Migration represents a major driver for development, but also engenders intricate societal, economic, and political issues that necessitate rigorous scrutiny. Prominent scholars in the field of migration studies today (Brettell & Hollifield, 2015; Castles et al., 2014; De Haas, 2014b; King, 2012; Massey et al., 1993) agree that, despite the complexity of theories and methods, a complete understanding of the contemporary migratory processes cannot be achieved by relying on a single theoretical approach, as it is equally impossible to develop an overarching, comprehensive theory that would encompass all aspects connected to migration. This section provides a brief outline of the theoretical directions in migration studies today to contextualise the theoretical framework of this study, thus setting the background of discussion for the main concepts employed in the analysis.

The interest of scholars in studying migration emerged toward the end of the nineteenth century and was influenced by Ernest George Ravenstein's 'laws of migration', which attempts to explain the patterns of human mobility based on economic *push/pull* factors that cause people to move from densely to less populated areas and from economically underdeveloped to more developed regions or countries (Ravenstein, 1885). Ravenstein's model, despite its deterministic features and simplistic emphasis of economic factors, still influences many modern theories of migration, even though these have become more elaborate and specialised. The most prominent theories developed during the twentieth century focus mainly on the process of movement, explaining migratory processes in terms of causality. To facilitate a systematic examination of these theories, Hein de Haas places them within the *classical functionalist* and *historical structural* paradigms of social theory (De Haas, 2014a, 15).

Functionalist social theories conceive society in accordance to liberal political views as a system whose component parts have an inherent tendency towards equilibrium (Castles et al., 2014, 28), since, as they claim, both structures and agents involved act to enhance equality within and between societies. This model works at both macro level, contending that migration results from the uneven spatial distribution of labour vis-à-vis other factors of production, above all capital (King, 2012, 13), and at micro level, viewing migration as an optimisation strategy of individuals or families making cost-benefit calculations (De Haas, 2014a, 15). Castles and his colleagues include three theories in this category. The first is *neo-classical and human capital theory*, which sees migration as a function of geographical differences in the supply and demand for labour and migrants as rational actors who decide to move on the basis of a cost-benefit calculation meant to maximize their income (Castles et al., 2014, 29). The second is *migrant network theory*, which explains how migrants create and maintain social ties with other migrants and with family and friends back home and how the emergence of this social capital increases migration (39). The third is *migration systems theory*, which considers that the flow of goods, ideas, and money inside established social systems changes the conditions of migration (43).

Building also on Ravenstein's *push/pull* model, *historical structural migration theories* contend that migration is shaped by structural economic and power inequalities. Theories included in this paradigm, also known as conflict theories, are inspired by Marxist interpretations of capitalism, (under)development, and the structuring of world economy. International migration is explained through the disequilibria created by historically formed macro-structural forces, which generate unequal access to resources for various social classes and groups, including states. At the same

time, the all-encompassing capitalist expansion has the tendency to reinforce these inequalities and thus incentivise increased migration.

A first theory included in this paradigm is *dependency theory,* which claims that international migration is caused by the underdevelopment of states that have been historically exploited through colonialism and continue to be in a state of dependency to developed countries (Castles et al., 2014, 32). *World systems theory* builds up a more complete and sophisticated historical analysis of the development and expansion of the global capitalist system (King, 2012, 18). This theory claims that world economy is divided into a core of developed countries and a less developed periphery (Castles et al., 2014, 32), which are tightly connected through asymmetric ties of trade, capital penetration, and migration. In this model, migration is a central feature that both results from and perpetuates the unbalanced economic and power relations between centre and periphery, being just another form of domination. *Dual and segmented labour markets theory* contends that migration is caused by the dualistic or segmented nature of economies in the developed world, which comprise a primary labour market made up of stable, high status jobs and a secondary labour market of temporary, low status jobs that attract labour force from abroad (O'Reilly, 2016, 26). Finally, De Haas includes in the historical structural paradigm the *critical globalisation theory,* which was developed in the wake of dependency and world systems theories and claims that globalisation is nothing but the latest stage in the process of capitalist penetration of world economy, while migration results from the transformations in structures, labour markets, and social inequalities that accompany globalisation (Castles et al., 2014, 34).

The theories that fit in the *push/pull* framework dominated migration research during the twentieth century since they have the apparent ability to explain major elements connected to migration, describing the connection between structural constraints and the decision-making processes that contribute to migration. However, these theories have been subjected to criticism in recent scholarship (Castles et al., 2014; De Haas, 2014b, 2014c; Karakoulaki, Southgate, & Steiner, 2018; King, 2012; Massey et al., 1993; O'Reilly, 2016) for offering too general explanations and therefore being too reductionist (Karakoulaki et al., 2018, 6), as well as for minimising the role of human agency. Both functionalist and historical structural theories treat human beings as passive individuals who "uniformly react to external factors, while people's aspiration and capability to migrate actually depends on factors such as age, gender, knowledge, social contacts, preferences, and perceptions of the outside world" (Castles et al., 2014, 31). These theories do ignore factors that contribute decisively to the choice to migrate or not, such as how migrants interpret the social world in which they live, how they relate to the members of

community in the country of origin, or the way they interact with the locals in the country of destination. They also implicitly assume that "people's preferences and, hence, aspirations are constant across societies and over time, and basically boil down to individual income (or 'utility') maximisation" (De Haas, 2014a, 30).

The critique of grand functionalist and historical-structural theories chiefly refers to their limited and deterministic approach in depicting migratory agency. Such theories address mainly aspects that explain the causes of migration, but they underestimate the more significant details referring to the impact of migration for the sending and receiving communities and societies (Castles et al., 2014, 25), ignore the experiences that migration entails on the daily life of migrants and locals, and the transformations that agents affected by migration undergo at the personal and collective levels. In the reality of today, one informed by intensive migration and inherent social tensions, economic and structural models in general cannot explain why tension and conflicts emerge in reception societies. Therefore, theories that promote qualitative, micro-level scrutiny of migration and its effects may have a higher potential to explain "the roots of anti-immigrant sentiments and their connection to the way nationals of the receiving society construct their own identities in relation to immigrants" (Brettell & Hollifield, 2015, 21).

Research that accounts for the active transformation of social space by migration and focuses on the interaction between natives and migrants, on their everyday experiences, perceptions, and identities, often being micro-level, qualitative empirical research, can generally be situated within the *symbolic interactionist* perspective in social theory (De Haas, 2014a, 15). Theories within this framework move away from the structuralist perspective, which tends to reify society as a primordial structure that contains and constrains individuals and their decisions, meanings, and actions. Symbolic interactionist migration theories foreground individuals' agency, autonomy, and integrity, and conceive society as the result of repeated interactions among individuals. They show interest in the subjective experience of the agents involved, as well as how these agents establish social relations and contribute to the construction of social structures through processes of interaction. These theories are mainly concerned with investigating the various forms of integration of migrants in reception societies and undertake an in-depth inquiry into those elements that migrants experience when interacting with natives. Their interest lies with situations when migrants are confronted with migration constraints, such as movement restrictions, rejection, or identity crises, but also bring their contribution to (re)shaping the local topography, economy, and ideology. Hein de Haas includes in this category the following theories: *differential exclusion, transnationalism and diaspora, multiculturalism,* and *assimilation theory.*

Differential exclusion theory describes migration as a sectoral incorporation of migrants in society, mostly in the labour market, while excluding them from other domains such as politics and citizenship (Castles et al., 2014, 266). Another model implying the incorporation of migrants through a one-sided process of adaptation is depicted by the theory of *assimilation,* which stresses the role of social cohesion and emphasises that national values and loyalties should become part of immigrants' identity. Assimilation is thus defined in terms of multiple adaptations on the part of the migrant (O'Reilly, 2016, 28) into the host society, which involves giving up distinctive cultural, linguistic, or social characteristics and become indistinguishable from the majority population (Castles et al., 2014, 266). *Transnationalism* is a theory that builds on the study of migrant networks and contends that migration is not a linear process, governed by the *push/pull,* no return model (King, 2012, 25), but it is a bi-directional phenomenon that implies "migrant activities that take place on a recurrent basis across national borders and that require a regular and significant commitment of time by participants" (Portes, 1999, 464). A related perspective is given by *diaspora* studies. According to Stephen Castles and his colleagues, diaspora is an older term describing transnational communities (Castles et al., 2014, 42) and it has been widely, and sometimes simplistically, used to denote any migrant community. Scholarship today underlines a set of features that distinguish diasporas from other migrant communities, among them a dispersal from the original homeland caused either by political or economic distress, a collective memory reinforced by a homeland mythology, a strong ethnic and cultural group consciousness, and a sense of solidarity and maintenance of links with co-ethnic members (Cohen, 2008, 17). Like transnationalism, diaspora theories acknowledge the migrant's agency, but place it in the context of the community.

Finally, *multiculturalism* is the approach that dominated migration research for the past several decades and that tries to explain the preconditions for successful integration. It addresses the transformations that migration produces in society and its impact on migrants' identity. particularly in the settlement migratory stage. It often stresses the role of hybridisation and migrants' multi-layered identity configuration as coherent strategies of social adaptation, which tend to blur formerly distinctive spheres of state authority (King, 2012, 20) and challenge the tenet of homogeneous nation-states. Such forms of migrant integration often claim the rights for migrants to partake in the processes of social life on equal terms with locals, without giving away their own religion, language, and cultural practices, although usually with an expectation of conformity to certain key values (Castles et al., 2014, 270). The main assumption of multiculturalism is that the native group is willing to accept cultural diversity and cohabitation

with ethnically different groups, as well as the presence of specific public policies meant to secure migrants' rights and appropriate conditions for successful integration.

2.1.3 Antagonist Positions on Migration. *Nativism* and *Cosmopolitanism*

The literary texts analysed in this study negotiate numerous situations of interaction between migrants and natives, in which severe forms of polarisation among natives sharing antagonistic attitudes towards migration are manifested. This section provides a theoretical discussion of how these attitudes materialise in two incompatible positions: on the one hand, a nativist position that promotes hostility towards immigrants, xenophobia, the prioritisation of national interests, and the preservation of native's privileges, and, on the other hand, a cosmopolitan position that emphasizes the significance of inclusive societies, open national borders, shared values, and celebrates conviviality in a pluralistic, tolerant environment.

2.1.3.1 Nativism

The impact of immigration in Britain has generated a backlash caused by the collective anxiety of losing control over symbolic and material possessions and privileged social positions[12], as well as by the discontent of those groups who cannot cope with the dynamics of societal changes and feel marginalized in their own countries (Beck, 2006; Inglehart, 2016). This context has favoured the eventual rise of anti-migrant attitudes and reactions, articulated in the form of a nativist doctrine that received substantial support among certain categories of the autochthonous population. In Western cultural context, nativism's popularity is often explained through its association with a congruous and equally fashionable populist movement.

Nativism is not a new phenomenon. Its theorisation can be traced back to the nineteenth century resistance to 'foreigners'[13] in the United States, which John Higham discusses in his book *Strangers in the Land. Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925* (Higham, 1955 [2011]). Here, he defines nativism as an "intense opposition to an internal minority on the ground of its foreign (i.e. 'un-American') connections" (4). Higham's study has inspired newer scholars of nativism in

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[12] A detailed analysis of these changes are discussed from a historical perspective in Chapter 3 of this thesis.
[13] John Higham, for example, unpacks the term foreigner as a nativist reference to new immigrants who did not fulfil the criteria of Anglo-Saxon Christian whiteness (Higham, 1955 [2011]).

contemporary Europe, as an intense debate has emerged recently in the conditions of increasing interaction between migrants and locals in many European countries. Some scholars (De Cleen, 2017; Duyvendak and Kesic, 2018; Mudde, 2010; Riedel, 2018) place nativism in relation with ethnic nationalism, a doctrine that emphasises the cleavage between allegedly culturally and ethnically homogeneous native populations and newcomers, whether these are refugees, asylum seekers, guest workers, transnational migrants, or settled first or second-generation immigrants. It builds on a commonly accepted belief that the interests of the established inhabitants (nation, religion, linguistic community, etc.) have to prevail over those of the newcomers (Riedel, 2018, 20). Nativism is therefore based on assumptions about an ethnically and culturally homogeneous body nation and promotes nationalistic feelings that separate natives from aliens.

Drawing on these premises, Cas Mudde outlines the definition of nativism, which is today most commonly accepted, as "an ideology that holds that states should be inhabited exclusively by members of the native group ("the nation") and that non-native (or "alien") elements, whether persons or ideas, are fundamentally threatening to the homogeneous nation state" (Mudde, 2016, 296). Hence, a wide spread nativist idea, which is also commonly identified in Britain's recent history, is the promotion of a congruence between the political entity of the state and the socio-cultural body of the nation (Anderson, 2006; Gellner, 1983). As Mudde and Kaltwasser suggest, this "derives from a very specific conception of the nation that relies on an ethnic and chauvinistic definition of the people" (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017, 34) from which all alien elements, either people or ideas, are pre-emptively excluded.

The idea that political and national unity should overlap with ethnicity and national culture represents a continuation of the eugenic obsession for ethnic purity specific to nineteenth century Romantic Nationalism. This tenet was encapsulated in the terms 'folk' and 'blood', inspired by the one-body metaphor and the idea of natural formation of communities, and it can be traced back to the works of Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm and Johann Gottlieb Fichte (cf. Encyclopaedia of Romantic Nationalism in Europe, n.d.). Such views on nation as primarily 'organic' and therefore natural, rather than a social category, are especially revived in nativist discourse when the entities designating the nation's alterity are immigrants dwelling on the national territory. Given thus the ideological and historical connection between the two concepts, it can be said that nationalism represents the background in which nativism is embedded and from which it derives.

However, being a form of nationalism that exclusively targets migration, nativism "emerges rather as a mechanism to modify already existing constructions of nationhood along 'native' and 'non-native' lines" (Guia, 2016, 1), emphasising that the presence of foreign elements inside the

'in-group' represents a threat for the culturally and ethnically coherent order of the nation. The nativist rhetoric builds on an exaggerated and sometimes artificial construction of difference, which, can be related either to a concrete migrant presence, thus justifying the expulsion of immigrants, or to a presumable migrant invasion, which creates a sense of urgency and may arouse anti-migrant attitudes even in the absence of migrants. Therefore, the 'out-group' that threatens the nation's integrity can be immigrants located inside the borders of the nation state or an abstraction, an imaginary migrant. Nevertheless, nativist discourse grounds itself on the opposition to migrants and sometimes advocates a complete rejection of migration, promoting either the necessity of stricter border control or the repatriation of those immigrants who have already entered.

Nativist discourse is regularly charged with xenophobic traits which "claim superiority over the others, stigmatise them as barbarian, or deny them equal rights" (Beck, 2006, 56), advocating an alleged prominence of the autochthonous group that can be extracted from a supremacist mythology about the group's history or present. Such self-representations of the native group that defines itself in opposition to undesirable, ostensibly inferior migrants, underpin its preference for protecting the interests of the domestic group over those of newcomers, its ethnocentric dimension, and the tendency to maintain its economic, cultural, and political privileges. In this sense, nativist discourses rely on promoting narratives about threats to nation's integrity and sovereignty "derived from the arrival and settlement in the country of particular groups of migrants deemed dangerous for the preservation of the essence of an already existing 'nation'" (Guia, 2016, 4).

Nativist discourses construct migration in terms of fundamental threats to all functions and structures of society, including economy, security, and identity. These interpretations are not necessarily contingent on objective facts, such as the dimensions of migration or the salience of the racial or cultural dissimilarities, but rather on the development a credible narrative of crisis (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017, 104). The link between situations of crisis and nativism arises from "the creation of a nexus of threats, where different actors share their fears" (Ferreira, 2018, 58). Whether the crisis is real or not has less relevance, since the accomplishment of a nativist agenda relies on successfully translating the negative group feelings into a perceived real crisis.

It can thus be said that anti-migrant attitudes specific to nativism do not emerge from a factual interpretation of reality; as Herbert Blumer contends, natives construct a commonly shared group position about immigrants based on conjectures and generalisations whose 'realness' is reinforced through processes of "mutual indications" (Blumer, 1969, 6). In this context it is no longer

important whether the interpretations of events or facts are correct or not; as long as the group members "define situations as real, they are real in their consequences" (Lune & Berg, 2017, 17). Such anxieties and feelings of insecurity stimulate the construction of nativist identification frames, which represent society in terms of inclusion of rightful members and exclusion and non-members and delineates in thick strokes the antagonism between autochthonous 'true people' and the migrant 'others'. The emergence of such group positions is strongly underpinned by a migration mythology that promotes negative stereotypes about the migrant 'out-group', exaggerations of migration's economic and cultural impact, and a culture of resistance to cultural and ethnic diversity.

When nativism is incorporated in the fluid ideology of populism, the result is an apparently straightforward but elusive and adaptable ideology that advocates an equivalence between natives and the 'true people' and therefore justifies the people's right and duty to resist any alien interference. Since populism relies on a relational foundation that opposes the 'true people' to a nefarious 'other', when in this dyad the element opposing to the 'true people' are the immigrants, the fear is easily materialised and the crisis turns into an exclusionary form of identity politics. Fear acts in this context as a catalyst that coagulates the in-group members' need of identification, which develops into a policy of protection of the local culture and identity and a dismissal of any interference as immoral and not properly part of the people (Müller, 2016, 3).

In the light of the above discussion, it can be said that nativism gained prominence in Britain during the past decades as a mechanism meant to re-interpret society in radical terms, underlining the boundaries between a 'naturally' established community of natives, 'us', and significantly different migrants, 'them'. This was accompanied by the claim to maintain a privileged status for the native community within the nation-state, thus grounding reality in a logic that establishes and maintains asymmetrical relations of power (Guia, 2016, 13) in situations when migrants and locals interact.

2.1.3.2 Cosmopolitanism

The spread of nativism among a large category of native British is often construed as a backlash to the social, economic, political, and cultural transformations produced by immigration, which have turned many regions in Britain into cosmopolitan communities. Therefore, it is

important to unpack the concept of cosmopolitanism and explain its relevance for investigation this study performs.

Cosmopolitanism is a complex concept that has a long and sometimes controversial history. In a most commonly accepted understanding, it refers to the adherence of all humans to a single world community. To acknowledge cosmopolitanism's complexity, its conceptualisation must, however, be explained in connection to the historical evolution of the term. Ulrich Beck claims that at least three defining moments pre-dating the contemporary understanding of the term can be traced in the development of cosmopolitanism: *ancient cosmopolitanism* (Stoicism), which lays the conceptual foundation of cosmopolitan dual belonging to both the local polity and the world; *Enlightenment cosmopolitanism* (Kant), which advocates the attainment of a universal community based on a *jus cosmopoliticum;* and the *post-World War II cosmopolitanism* (Arendt and Jaspers), which is built on a generally accepted category in international law and international institutions that should prevent humanitarian catastrophes such as the Holocaust (Beck, 2006, 45-46).

The interpretation of cosmopolitanism as either a philosophy or a political ideology promoting the codification in international law of a globally accepted understanding of humanist values undergoes considerable critique today. It is particularly scholars of Postcolonialism who contest this form of cosmopolitanism's claims to universality and consider them a form of new "ethical imperialism" (Gilroy, 2005, 62). A set of all-encompassing, standardised ethical rules, forcefully spread in the behalf of civilisation is considered by Gilroy to represent a "symptom of imperial arrogance and the mainspring of a violent ethnocentrism, which wants to make everybody essentially the same and in doing so, make them all 'western'" (63). This fallacy may lead to failing to recognise the differences between world cultures and implicitly their capacity to interact and intermingle. In this restricted interpretation, Gilroy considers cosmopolitism as an ideology resonating the liberalism of the Enlightenment, a form of universalism which justified the European colonial expansion and the imposition of the ideas of Western Modernity throughout the world (Gilroy, 2005, 5). Nevertheless, he also acknowledges that this is "by no means the only form of cosmopolitan thinking in circulation" (5); the recent migration and the cultural exchange it favours, bring forth ideas, cultural elements, and ideological positions from the formerly colonised world that contribute to casting new perspectives on what cosmopolitanism involves and its role in the contemporary world.

In the context informed by vast migration and reconfiguration of populations across the world after World War II, the concept cosmopolitanism has undergone a re-evaluation and re-theorisation (Friedman, 2018, 274). In this perspective, what Pnina Werbner describes as *new*

cosmopolitanism (Werbner, 2008, 1)*,* is considered to be a product of the late twentieth-century globalisation and movement of peoples, goods, and cultures, and it is theorised in contrast to the Enlightenment cosmopolitanism contested by Gilroy (Gilroy, 2005). Therefore, this section explores the specific category of cosmopolitanism employed in this study, which scholarship designates either as *new cosmopolitanism* (Werbner, 2008)*,* the *cosmopolitan vision* (Beck, 2006)*, migrant cosmopolitanism* (Nail, 2013)*, cosmopolitan conviviality* (Gilroy, 2005), or merely *cosmopolitanism* (Appiah, 2006). Throughout this thesis, I shall refer to it as cosmopolitanism in order to avoid any confusion.

The specific form of cosmopolitanism employed in this study promotes a culture of interactive, positive, and impartial dialogue between cultures and individuals sharing different, even opposing values and ideas. It intends to challenge the conservative, nativist approaches to migration, advocating a specific model of pluralistic conviviality in societies where diversity emerges through dialogical interaction, mutual influence, and cultural exchange between migrants and locals. If a nativist anti-migrant position is based on opposition to and rejection of migration, a cosmopolitan position instead emerges through constructive and interactive contact between 'in-group' and 'out-group' members. To understand the others or to interact equitably with them, a person or a group must be able to detach from their own individuality and show genuine interest in those who are different.

Following this vision, Kwame Anthony Appiah argues that cosmopolitanism, as a concept, can be "rescued" (Appiah, 2006, xiv) from the association with universalism and European colonialism. This approach is today accepted by most scholars, who emphasise cosmopolitanism's ethical dimension that imperatively implies the recognition of dual obligations to universal values and cultural diversity. This cosmopolitanism is thus "situated", that is "rooted" in familial, communal, and even national identities and at the same time it recognizes pluralities of cultural formations world-wide (Werbner, 2008, 1). Unlike the old cosmopolitanism, which is interpreted in connection to capitalist globalisation and the spread of universal (manly Western) ideas, values, and practices, cosmopolitanism is conversely associated today with empathy, toleration, and respect for other cultures and values (2). Therefore, scholars who engage in the theorisation of cosmopolitanism emphasise the importance of its focus on the community dimension, which, through symbolic interpretation of interaction instances, facilitates the emergence of identities based on complex affiliations and multiple allegiances that are relevant to our migration-informed, culturally diverse, politically pluralistic, and economically globalised reality.

Besides rescuing the concept of cosmopolitanism from its association with colonial universalism, it is equally important to disavow the association some critics maintain between cosmopolitanism and "the elites of European modernity – the Kantian Universalism, the Baudelairean dandy, the Benjaminian flâneur, the expatriate modernists of the early twentieth-century" (Friedman, 2018, 275). In this sense, Pnina Werbner rejects the reductionism that "cosmopolitanism is only and singularly elitist" (Werbner, 2008, 12), coining the term "demotic cosmopolitanism" (12), which describes comprehensively the cosmopolitan interaction in a globalising world. The new cosmopolitans, she claims, are not 'from above', but rather 'from below'; they are the millions of refugees, exiles, migrants, and diasporics, as well as that category of natives who, through social interaction and cultural exchange, commit themselves to a logic of conviviality built on "empathy, toleration and respect for other cultures and values" (Werbner, 2008, 2). The new cosmopolitanism should therefore be conceived as an "ethical horizon – an aspirational outlook and mode of practice" (2) that is rooted in the everyday experience, in the plight of the underprivileged interacting in communities informed by migration and diversity.

In modern cosmopolitan societies, the contact between different cultures, as well as the evaluation and integration of differences are, as most scholars agree (Beck, 2006; Dauber, 2020; Inglehart, 2016; Nail, 2013; Pichler, 2008), conditioned by the common denominator of migration. To be able to construe with objectivity the realities of today's world, one informed by mobility and interaction, Thomas Nail advocates the necessity to acknowledge the importance of migration in the process of shaping society. He promotes this desideratum despite the efforts of nation-states and other nativist actors to exclude from history the millions of migrants of the world, since "it is migrants of all kinds throughout history—and not states—who are the true agents of political inclusion and cosmopolitanism" (Nail, 2013, 18).

Migration processes involve not just the movement of persons, but also the transfer of cultures and ideas. This implicitly opens up a dialogical space that stimulates the emergence of a debate over differences and the pursuit of a logic of inclusive oppositions. It is thus dialogue, or "the permanent discursive thematisation of migration" (Beck, 2006, 105) that stimulates cosmopolitanisation, since it is such debates about opposing values that allow the representation of a variety of perspectives and options that can challenge and transform apparently stable social structures. A fundamental feature of cosmopolitanism, as Pnina Werbner argues, is "reaching out across cultural differences through dialogue, aesthetic enjoyment, and respect; of living together with difference" (Werbner, 2008, 2). This model highlights the significance of migration in connecting reception communities to the global network of values, ideas, and processes, and in

promoting the emergence of a cosmopolitan culture to which migrants and natives equally adhere and thus mitigate tensions and increase genuinely unprejudiced, non-hierarchical relations among them.

When analysing cosmopolitanism in connection to migration, one should not reduce this relation to a mere set of social practices, but equally insist on the ethical dimension it entails. As Jacques Derrida claims, the new forms of migration in the contemporary world demand an ethical response in line with the principles of the new cosmopolitanism, which should transform reception societies into "cities of refuge" (Derrida, 2005, 4) open to "the foreigner in general, the immigrant, the exiled, the deported, the stateless or the displaced person" (4). The ethical dimension of cosmopolitanism is also scrutinised by Ulrich Beck, who emphasises its normative character by distinguishing between globalisation as process, on the one hand, and cosmopolitanism as an emerging ethical response, or "vision" (Beck, 2006) to it, on the other.

Beck's major contribution in delineating a new understanding of cosmopolitanism refers to the connection he suggests between the globalised reality and the reflexive processes leading to the conscious recognition that underpins the emergence of cosmopolitan solutions. In his view, what is new about new cosmopolitanism "is not the forced mixing but awareness of it, its self-conscious political affirmation, its reflection and recognition before a global public via the mass media, in the news and in the global social movements of blacks, women and minorities" (Beck, 2006, 21). In trying to answer the question how "certain cosmopolitan principles are nevertheless translated into practice, and thereby acquire an enduring reality" (22), Beck suggests that it is necessary to move from the reality of globalisation to consciousness and eventually to institutionalised normative cosmopolitanism, hence from principle to practice, through a process that he describes as "cosmopolitanisation" (22). This process resonates Anthony Appiah's credo that cosmopolitanism is both "an adventure and an ideal" (Appiah, 2006, xx), a task that humans should assume in practice by "doing for others what morality requires" (xx) from them.

When addressing questions related to the cosmopolitan consciousness, Pnina Werbner considers that an open, experimental, inclusive, normative consciousness of the cultural other emerges through processes that "include elements of self-doubt and reflexive self-distantiation, an awareness of the existence and equal validity of other cultures, other values, and other mores" (Werbner, 2008, 18). This cosmopolitan consciousness can be translated as a hospitable group position, which emerges through positive and interactive contact between natives and migrants. To develop such consciousness or group position, to understand easier the others or to interact equitably with them, a person or a group must be able to detach from their own individuality and

show genuine interest in those who are different. Solidarity in the cosmopolitan consciousness does not imply acknowledging the conjunction of interests and actions based on 'in-group' similarities, but rather "to see traditional differences (…) as unimportant in comparison with similarities with respect to pain and humiliation—the ability to think of people wildly different from ourselves as included in the range of 'us'" (Rorty, 1989, 192). Cosmopolitanism thus promotes a group position based on a connectedness between people who interact in situations in which they have equal status, pursue a shared goal, and engage in inter-group cooperation.

In opposing the nativist influenced views about migration and the relations between migrants and natives, cosmopolitanism implies that dialogue and tolerance are achieved not only through psychological processes, but also through a receptive interpretation of cultural strands, upholding "the recognition of difference, both internally and externally" (Beck, 2006, 57) in a social framework in which "cultural differences are neither arranged in a hierarchy of difference nor subsumed into a universalism, but are accepted for what they are (57). A distinctive feature of cosmopolitanism is the simultaneous recognition of similarities and differences in a way that not only "tolerates differences between people but stimulates comprehension of the other" (Pichler, 2008, 1110) and generates a positive attitude towards the contrasts between societies, cultures, and people in interaction. Ulrich Beck suggests that proclivity for the cosmopolitan outlook arises from the clash of contradictory values and ideas in societies, as well as in the individuals' personal value systems:

> The cosmopolitan constellation *qua* domain of experience and horizon of expectations means the internalization of difference, the co-presence and coexistence of rival lifestyles, contradictory certainties in the experiential space of individuals and societies. By this is meant a world in which it has become necessary to understand, reflect and criticize difference, and in this way to assert and recognize oneself and others as different and hence of equal value. (Beck, 2006, 169)

The cosmopolitan outlook implies not just recognising the intrinsic value of diversity as a source of cultural, economic, and individual enrichment but it also involves a "search for, and delight in, the contrasts between societies rather than a longing for superiority or for uniformity" (Szerszynski & Urry, 2002, 468). The cosmopolitan needs to show openness to both the emergence of new patterns of social interaction and to new forms of critical knowledge. Bronislaw Szerszynski and John Urry have traced a list of cosmopolitan predispositions and practices that includes "a curiosity about many places, peoples and cultures, […], semiotic skill to be able to interpret images of various others, […], and an openness to other peoples and cultures and a willingness/ability to appreciate some elements of the language/culture of the other" (Szerszynski

& Urry, 2002, 470). These skills help cosmopolitans to be in a permanent state of preparedness for accessing, interpreting, and in some measure integrating elements from other cultures.

It is therefore right to say that to be cosmopolitan is to be open to the transformative power of new ideas coming from elsewhere. In the cosmopolitan thinking, communities are no longer established on the 'either/or' principle as in the nationalist/nativist tradition, but on the principle of "both/and" (Beck, 2006, 57), which allows them to perceive the migrant others as simultaneously "different and as the same - something that is ruled out by both hierarchical ordering and universal equality. Whatever is strange should be regarded and evaluated not as a threat, as something that brings disintegration and fragmentation in its train, but as enriching in the first place" (Beck & Grande, 2007, 71). In this way, cosmopolitanism emphasises the benefits of meeting different people and reinforces the belief that migration has a positive impact on the native population in terms of both economic development and cultural and moral advancement.

In conclusion, cosmopolitanism is neither a new ideology that attempts to replace the nation state with the world, uprooting individuals and claiming "a paranoid fantasy of ubiquity and omniscience" (Robbins, 1992, 183), nor a new form of universalism that underpins the alleged privileges of the Westerners. Today, scholars must get over the confusions that are produced by the association of the term with these historically situated interpretations through critical scrutiny of what cosmopolitanism means in the new world context informed by migration and cross-cultural contact. As scholarship widely accepts, cosmopolitanism is conceived nowadays rather as a philosophical concept, an ethical guideline of social practice meant to facilitate the emergence of new civic and political culture based on pluralism, tolerance, and empathy. Therefore, this study foregrounds in the analysis of the selected novels the positions of those cosmopolitan voices that resonate cosmopolitanism as described in this section, emphasising the benefits of the encounter between different people and cultures and reinforcing the belief that migration has a positive impact on the native population in terms of both economic development, as well as cultural and moral advancement.

2.2 Migration Myth

2.2.1 Preliminaries

The novels analysed in this study negotiate many situations in which native British are confronted with the contradictions and perplexities produced by migration, and in the quest for ordering this apparently chaotic reality, myths are used as appropriate instruments for explaining the need for continuity and cohesion of the native community. Such myths about migrants and migration make the focus of this study; therefore, this section continues by scrutinising the main aspects delineating the concept *migration myth,* focusing on explaining what are the social conditions that lead to the emergence of such myths, the forms in which they present themselves, and the functions which they can have. Before engaging in the conceptualisation of migration myth in the context of this study, this section explores several more general interpretations of the concept of *myth* in a historical perspective, which are both influential and instrumental in defining migration myth.

2.2.2 Various Approaches to the Concept of Myth

The concept of myth is commonly regarded as a central frame of reference for Western thinking in explaining how people from different cultures and in different historical moments have structured their understanding of existence, world, and society (Frog, 2018, 1). Many scholars from various fields have attempted to clarify the concept of myth, which has resulted in vast numbers of interpretations and definition. Myth scholarship examines mythic thinking in relation with the advancement of society and human knowledge, and various traditions interpret this development in different, sometimes contradictory ways. The study of myth, both as historical development and as epistemological foundation, is done from the perspective of different disciplines, since, as the prominent myth scholar Robert Segal explains, "there are no theories of myth itself, for there is no discipline of myth in itself" (Segal, 2004, 2). Anthropology, philosophy, religion studies, psychology, sociology, linguistics, cultural studies, and political sciences have all contributed to developing different approaches in the study of myth.

Despite extensive investigations of myth within various disciplines, the complexity of the concept and the heterogeneity of approaches in its theorisation have generated substantial

controversies. There are, however, two basic assumptions that permeate all these approaches. Firstly, they all agree that myth belongs to a category of discourse that is opposed to the rational and which is engraved with symbolic meaning (Balisteanu, 2018; Lincoln, 1999; Stoica, 2017). Secondly, they acknowledge the permanence of myths in society as a phenomenon whose meaning spans from misleading, oversimplifying mechanisms that reduce the complexity of phenomena and appeal to basic human feelings, to a *sine-qua-non* condition for organising networks and underpinning the survival of a particular community, whose members constitute and (re)imagine themselves through these myths, based on the assumption that a myth contains a universal truth (ibid.).

The linear perspective of a progressive development of society (e.g. Tylor, 1958; Frazer, 1922; Lévy-Bruhl, 1966; Horton, 1967; Cassirer 1946) constrains myth to a reductionist definition by restraining its origin and relevance to a past era. This approach makes it difficult to assess when myths cease to be created or when they do not exist elsewhere than in literary works. It is therefore more sensible to consider that myths, as social phenomena, have constantly been a part of humanity, and it is only our perception and interpretation that varies. The history of critical interpretation of myth is in essence a history that examines successive periods of mythification and secularisation of society, or a sequential prevalence of *mythos* and *logos* as dominant epistemological and political discourses.

A first dispute on the semantics and social function of the lexemes *mythos* and *logos* originates from Ancient Greece[14], and the meaning and values attached to them have remained fluid ever since. Ancient poetic texts, such as Hesiod's *Theogony* or Homer's *Iliad,* highlight a binary in which the term *mythos* is favoured over *logos.* In this historical context marked by war, *mythos* was associated with bellicose imagery conveyed through poetry, usually foregrounding male role models in connection to combat or conflict situations. The purpose of *mythos* in these texts is politically instrumentalised in opposition to *logos.* Bruce Lincoln contends that the function of *mythos* is always political, since it represents an "assertive discourse of power and authority that represents itself as something to be believed and obeyed" (Lincoln, 1999, 17). The references to the term *logos* in these texts, by contrary, designate a type of discourse commonly connected to defeatism or deception, being the speech of "women, the weak, the young and the shrewd, which tends to be soft, delightful and alluring, but can also deceive and mislead" (Lincoln, 1999, 10).

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[14] According to historian of religions Mircea Eliade, "all the definitions [of myth] have one thing in common: they are based on Greek mythology" (Eliade, 1992, p. 3).

In the society depicted in Hesiod and Homer's poems, the prominence of orality and poetic discourse as society's archival medium and conveyor of political message validated the augmented status of *mythos*. However, with the development of writing, oral discourse, hence *mythos,* become devalued. Sophists, and later the group of philosophers gathered around Socrates and Plato, started challenging the predominant position of poetry and foregrounded an epistemological paradigm that criticised the stimulation of emotions and promoted reasoning instead as a means of attaining truth. By doing so, they determined a fundamental reversal of paradigm, which both altered the semiotic value of the lexemes *mythos* and *logos,* and inverted their position in the binary. In the *Republic,* Plato categorised *mythos* and poetry as a form of discourse that possesses less truth than others, being " as a whole, false, though there are true things in them too" (Plato, 1991, 54). The truth to which Plato refers does not address the subject matter of *mythos,* which is fundamentally false, but rather its teleology; in the newly established value system, myths were "not only revised, but also radically revalorised" (Lincoln, 1999, 42). What used to be regarded as "primordial revelations, or undeniable truths" (42) by Plato's forerunners, was now perceived as "state propaganda" (42) suited for those incapable to adopt the discourse of *logos*.

The direction set by Plato was canonical in the polemic between *mythos* and *logos* until Renaissance, when scholars recovered the texts from the Greco-Roman antiquity and thus rekindled the interest for the category of myth. This has represented the backdrop for the radically different interpretation of myth emerging during National Romantic movements, which linked "national identity to vernacular languages and literature – especially poetry and myth" (Lincoln, 1999, 51). Language thus becomes the main vehicle in defining group identity, and myths are considered distinctive stories that embed and reproduce the major characteristic features of a nation. As Lincoln contends, myths are in the *Romantic* perspective "a discourse of differentiation, which *Völker* develop as they separate from each other" (Lincoln, 1999, 54), hence the categorisation of this model as *comparative mythology*. The predominant linguistic nature of the Romantic view stems from Sir William Jones' Indo-European thesis, which postulates a common linguistic and racial origin of peoples, thus separating humanity in hierarchical categories based on the their language's relation to a hypothetical proto-language (Lincoln, 1999, 81).

Scholars of myth emerging from the Enlightenment, whom Robert Segal designates as *Rationalists* (Segal, 2004, 14), have developed a model of analysis that is radically different from that of the comparative mythologists. Similar to Plato's critique of *mythos,* they have described ancient mythologies as a pre-rational stage in the development of humankind, whose function was

the literal explanation of the natural world (Tylor, 1958; Frazer, 1922; Lévy-Bruhl, 1966; Horton, 1967). *Rationalists* consider myth as a pseudo-epistemological category, which explains the origins of the world, society, or natural phenomena through irrational, "pre-logical" (Lévy-Bruhl in Segal, 2004, 25) ways of experiencing the world. According to this view, 'primitive' humans, or, seen from a comparatist perspective, the "natives" (Lévy-Bruhl in Segal, 2004, 26) of non-European territories, lived in a world objectified in myth, pervaded by magic and supernatural beings. This epistemological model, which Henry Frankfort calls "mythopoeic thought" (Frankfort, et al. in Segal, 2004, 41), represents a primitive, pre-rational stage in the development of human thought described as "concrete, uncritical, and emotional" (41). By contrary, modern societies have assumably developed an epistemology based on generalizations, science, and impersonal laws, namely scientific, which normatively excludes and descriptively replaces mythic thinking in the modern world.

Following the Enlightenment ethos based on the cult of reason, this transition from mythic to scientific thought, which is connected to secularisation and European modernity, secludes completely myth from modern science and maintains the superiority of the 'modern mind' over the 'primitive mind'. The ensuing hierarchisation, based on the transfer of the Darwinian evolutionist model from natural sciences into social studies, is nevertheless more than a purely epistemological scheme. The category of 'primitive' was a key term for *rationalist* scholars, and they employed it not just in its temporal dimension, but also to designate a "spatial, racial, and political difference" (Lincoln, 1999, 70) between the 'modern' Europeans and those peoples considered inferior. Robert Ellwood warns about the political consequences of juxtaposing the mythical and the scientific discourses in this context, as the rationalist approach claims that myths "have no place in modern discourse and no ideological value, except to showcase how far the modern mind has progressed beyond ancient superstition and misconceptions" (Ellwod, 1999, 680). The attachment of ideological connotations to this debate became a convenient vehicle in the process of justifying European colonial expansion (Lincoln, 1999, 70) as a mission of salvation of those irrational, mired in myth peoples living outside Europe.

If most nineteenth century scholars regarded myth as incompatible with modernity, by contrast, theories developed during the twentieth century reconcile science and myth and contend that they could co-exist. The main critique of nineteenth century's anthropology, as highlighted by Robert Segal (Segal, 2004), refers to the reduction of myth's function to explaining solely natural processes and such theories are committed to demonstrating the falsity of myths, since the explanations they provide are incompatible with scientific evidence. This obsession for a

positivistic examination of myth restricts myth to societies supposedly devoid of science (Segal, 2004, 13) and aims to reinforcing the gap between 'primitive' and 'modern' ontologies and epistemologies. Theories of the twentieth century, by contrary, maintain that myth functions to unify societies and its validity is reinforced by the members' collective acceptance of the source and function of myth, independent of the veracity of its content. This orientation reiterates the Romantic idea that nations and cultures are primordial, organic entities, and myths and groups "are understood to be linked in a symbiotic relation of co-reproduction, each one being simultaneously producer and product of the other" (Lincoln 1999, 210).

The reaction to revive myth and reassert it from other perspectives than scientific, such as philosophical, religious, psychological, and structural, was triggered by the generalized disillusion caused by the association of science and technological progress with the atrocities of World War I. Inspired by Carl Jung's idea of archetypes that exist in a collective unconscious, which allows sharing common experiences and images (i.e. archetypes) in, among others, myths, some mythology scholars, especially Joseph Campbell and Mircea Eliade emphasize the value that myths continue to have for the people of modern cultures because they make transcendental a life that modernity has dispossessed of its sacred and traditional spiritual values. Myths have an eternal and universal power because they, according to Campbell, "reveal true human nature and, with their symbols, archetypes, and paradigms guide the modern man [sic] towards finding his meaning in life" (Campbell in Segal, 1997, 136). Seen as such, myths serve as antidotes to human estrangement, alienation, and insecurity, helping modern humans to reintegrate in a previously established community.

Because they transfer myth from the concrete world to the level of the human psyche and revive the stories of pre-modern societies spurned by *Rationalists*, these scholars are considered to revive the Romantic approach to myth (Lincoln, 1999; Ellwood, 1999), which views myth as a discourse of differentiation and reinforcement of collective identities. Therefore, despite its claim to universalism, the Romantic view is criticised for privileging certain myths over others (Ellwood, 1999, 682), thus allowing the hierarchisation of cultures on the grounds of "patterned oppositions" (Lincoln, 1999, 73). Among these, Lincoln considers the Aryan/Semite binary as the hallmark of (neo)Romantic mythology, a paradigm that fostered strong nationalist feelings all along the twentieth century and continues today, reinforcing nationalist interests through the construction of a binary worldview of a familiar, organic 'us' and a less valued, alien 'them'.

The theories discussed so far distinguish the meaning of myth at the level of subject matter, as either symbolic or literal. In trying to explain why myths from very different cultures are similar,

Claude Lévi-Strauss focuses on the formal relationships among the elements within myth, by applying in the study of myth a structuralist method of analysis inspired from linguistics. He is the first scholar who dispenses with the plot, or the "diachronic dimension" (Levi-Strauss, 1955, 443) of myth and locates the meaning of myth in the structure, or "synchronic dimension" (443). This way, Lévi-Strauss demonstrates that myth is an instance of thinking per se, equally accessible to 'moderns' and 'primitives' (Levi-Strauss, 2005 [1978], 5), which resolves the tension established between Rationalist and Romantic approaches to the study of myth regarding the priority of either logos or mythos. Lévi-Strauss' view, however, does not overcome ideological biases, since it acknowledges myth as "defining product of the savage mind" (Lincoln 1999, 210), which, even though hardly inferior to the scientific 'modern mind' (Levi-Strauss, 2005 [1978], 5), acknowledges the taxonomic categories that separate cultures into 'modern' and 'primitive'.

It can thus be said that, irrespective of its conceptualisation as either a genre (type of story), an explanation, an archetype, or a structure, myth represents a frame of reference about the world that is connected to socially established convictions (Frog, 2018, 18) specific to certain historical epochs and dominant discourses that inform them. In contemporary context, Frog identifies a shift in the interpretation of myth "in terms of signs or symbols rather than stories" (20), and he argues that this shift towards conceiving myth as discourse owes much to the work of Roland Barthes. In his seminal book *Mythologies* (Barthes, 1972 [1957]), Barthes establishes an approach to myth that situates is closer to the contemporary Western cultures, both in chronological and social terms, as he approaches myths as "a type of speech" (107), or a kind of discourse that governs societies today, rather than stories of ancient cultures or religions that penetrate contemporary social imaginaries in the form of stories, archetypes, or mental structures. Barthes' discussion from the perspective of semiotics on what myth is and how it operates corresponds to the colloquial uses of the term in contemporary cultures to refer to counterfactual things people accept as valid explanations of how the world is and works (Frog, 2018, 20). As Barthes argues, myth is characterised by a relationship between the narrative it contains and the world, and the meaning resulting from this relationship affects the way of perceiving the world. He describes this as a process of naturalisation (Barthes, 1972 [1957], 130), in the sense that something that is a cultural product is perceived as part of the natural order of the world. As this perspective on myth is closely connected to the contemporary realities this study approaches, it informs in a high degree the way migration myth is defined in this study.

2.2.3 Conceptualising Migration Myth

As discussed above, the way of conceptualising myth and its implications in the interpretation of social phenomena has varied significantly throughout history. Building on the theoretical discussion from the previous section and other scholarly works that deal with the concept of migration myth, this section examines the main characteristics of this concept, which, as Hein de Haas argues (De Haas, 2014, n.p.), proved to be highly influential in shaping the way many native British have related to migration in the historical periods analysed in this study.

Given this importance of migration myths in the public debate, migration researchers started to show interest in the implications these myths have in the emergence of nativist attitudes (De Haas, 2005, 2008, 2014, 2016; Finney & Simpson, 2009; Hayter, 2004; Wickramasekara, 2014), working towards a critical assessment of myths and facts in order to dispel misconceptions about migrants and migration. In these studies, migration myths are generally described as narratives about migration that are untrue, as in the expression "'that's just a myth'" (Finney & Simpson, 2009, 14), and which imply overstatements, oversimplifications, and generalisations meant to influence the public perception on migration.

Myths, however, are complex phenomena that stretch beyond the appearance of the false narratives they incorporate, permeating all world's cultures in all times and their function cannot be reduced just to misleading the way an individual or a group perceives phenomena, people, and events. Characteristic for myth is to provide collectively accepted explanations for the way things work, to help understand the positions a group occupies in society at a certain time, to provide means to crystallise common beliefs and attitudes, and to underpin ideological group positions and political preferences. Christopher Flood (Flood, 2002) describes myth as "an ideologically marked narrative which purports to give a true account of a set of past, present or predicted social and political events and which is accepted as valid in its essentials by a social group" (Flood, 2002, 44). Therefore, in the tradition established by Plato, who denounced the myth content's claims to validity, Flood construes myth as a form of discourse that, despite the low veracity of its narrative, can be widely believed and thus have considerable influence on people's behaviour if it provides a generally accepted explanation for the way society works. Myths become memorable because they repeat to their specific audience what is already known to be 'true', and this makes them culturally entrenched and therefore difficult to challenge.

It is therefore sensible to consider that myths incorporate narratives about events or situations and are rooted in the culture and the historical reality of a particular group. They do not provide

just an explanation, but also a practical argument that imposes a certain course of action or to justify the acceptance of an existing state of affairs (Tudor, 1972, 124), whose finality is either the survival or the empowerment of a community. It is these characteristics that explain the myth's pervasiveness, despite the low degree of veracity informing the narrative it contains; myths are believed to be true and followed not because of the factual evidence they allegedly provide, but because they concentrate a way of understanding, thinking of, and expressing about social issues, such as migration, that are commonly accepted by the members of a group. As Christopher Flood argues, "mythicality arises from the intricate, highly variable relationship between claims to validity, discursive construction, ideological marking, and reception of the account by a particular audience in a particular historical context" (Flood, 2002, 2), thus making sense of an individual's or a group's experience. They tell a story in which events are selectively included just because they coincide with what the members of the group think to be a valid description of events, and which corresponds to their ideological expectations.

Although the common understanding of myth in today's social context has derogatory connotations, not all myths are harmful; by contrary, myths can be seen as "narratives that coagulate and reproduce significance […] by which the members of a social group or society represent and posit their experience and deeds" (Bottici, 2007, 201) and thus contribute to the construction of the collective imaginary and constitute the framework for social organisation and policy making. Myths may however become problematic when they promote a narrative that "pivots around the dichotomy that opposes a 'we' to a 'they'" (Bottici & Challand, 2013, 11), thus stimulating prejudice, division, discrimination, hostility, and tension between groups. It is thus not the inaccuracy of the narrative promoted by myth that is disputable but rather its capacity to discursively constitute a context for partial interpretation of social phenomena and a framework for implementing discriminatory political decisions.

Migration myth is understood in this study, in the light of the explanation provided by Bottici and Challand, as a category of myth that upholds a divisive ethos through the promotion of narratives that depict migration as a harmful phenomenon, which disturbs the structure of genuinely cohesive cultural and ethnic communities, produce social and economic dis-balance, and interrupt a so-called natural historical development of an allegedly ethno-politically homogeneous and stable body nation. Most of the migration myths examined critically in this study are framed as myths whose subject matter involves fabricated or exaggerated references to migrants or instances of migration, originate in the antagonisms raised by the interaction between

migrants and natives, and underpin nativist attitudes, actions, and policies that intend to exclude migrants and alien influences from the social fabric of a native community.

Although migration myths proliferated as part of British nativist discourse in the context of increased migration after the Second World War, their origin can be explained in connection to the paradigms of interpreting the social function of myth developed during the nineteenth century. The "discourse of differentiation", which Bruce Lincoln identifies in the *Romantic* perspective (Lincoln, 1999, 54) as a core idea in the creation of ethnic myths, represents the foundation for migration myths that emphasise the existence of a collective body, a homogeneous ethnocentric native community, which in the National Romantic discourse is designated as *das Volk,* and whose continuity is allegedly jeopardised by the infiltration of migrants. Migration myths often appeal to a social imagery specific to National Romanticism, such as the idyllic countryside which preserves an idealised conception of community. Such imagery is meant to uphold an imagined connection between the ethnical composition of the nation today and a space in which a national core culture has naturally developed and endured. This also represents the foundation for myths professing the exclusive right of the nation to inhabit the physical and cultural space in which it allegedly is historically rooted. Imagined in terms of an organic connection between national culture and space, this definition of community nurtures the obsession for ethnical purity, which unequivocally entails a projection of migration as the source of ethnic degeneration and social, political, and economic debasement.

In similar way, the anthropological theories of myth in the late nineteenth century, which Robert Segal places in the *Rationalist* perspective (Segal, 2004, 14), inspired the emergence of a series of migration myths in the contemporary British imaginary. This category of migration myths emphasises cultural and civilizational differences between natives and migrants, either coming from the former colonies or from anywhere outside the Anglo-Saxon cultural space. Such differences are explained through an alleged evolutionary gap that distinguishes and hierarchizes these groups. The *Rationalist* perspective approaches myth diachronically, premising that the history of humanity follows a uniform development from savagery to civilisation. This urges to reconstruct the early stages of human culture by drawing a comparison between the contemporary 'savages' and the ancient people (Tylor, 1958; Frazer, 1922; Lévy-Bruhl, 1966; Horton, 1967), since both have failed to access modern, scientific thinking. This way of separating societies has grounded a form of binary thinking that, building on the comparison between contemporary immigrants and so-called primitive peoples, has prompted the creation of myths which profess an unequivocal cultural and civilizational incompatibility between migrants and natives of the

reception society. It is ironic that the same discourse claiming incompatibility between the 'modern' Europeans and 'primitive' colonised peoples, which had historically been deployed to justify the colonial expansion, as Robert Ellwood signalled (Ellwod, 1999, 680), is recycled in the context of contemporary migration to account for the rejection of migration. Contemporary migration myths thus re-invest the racist discourse specific to the colonial ideology with a new political value, professing that culturally and morally inferior migrants represent a threat to the allegedly superior social organisation of the reception society, thus should be kept out of its social fabric.

Even though migration myths originally start as a discursive construct that enact in "dramatic form" (Tudor, 1972, 124) factual or imagined situations about migrants or migration, they end up being regarded as reality by those who believe and promote them in the sense of the "naturalisation" explained by Roland Barthes (Barthes, 1972 [1957], 130). This results not because they describe how things are, but because they respond to the expectations of the community in reducing the complexities of the realities of migration to "a relative and comprehensible simplicity" (Flood, 2002, 8). In this sense, migration myths are pragmatic phenomena because they manifest themselves when they become instrumental in providing simple resolutions to problems that some communities face at certain junctures, such as periods of increased migration, identitarian disorientation, or social and economic difficulties. In such contexts, migration myths may serve as antidotes to the sense of disorderliness, alienation, and insecurity that native communities experience in the face of societal transformations by providing acceptable and predictable explanations for otherwise complex phenomena.

It is specific to social actors, when facing uncertainty, to make choices depending on the familiar and understandable, and thus (re)define themselves based on subjective interpretations of reality in terms of 'self' and 'other'. This means that, even though migration myths are the result of an essentially pragmatic option, the process of their production and reception "adds to a simple story the emotional underpinning typical of myth" (Bottici and Challand, 2013, 90); without the emotional component, the significance of the narrative may be disempowered and therefore, what acts as myth in a certain context, may easily regress to the condition of a mere story. Many contemporary migration myths are therefore problematic because, by appealing to feelings, generating moral panic, and a sense of besieged fortress, intend to establish a 'naturalised' discursive order, which creates and upholds symbolic borders between migrants and natives, thus impeding communication and the possibility of a convivial co-existence.

2.3 Further Theoretical Perspectives for Reading Migration Myths in Literature: Postcolonialism and Beyond

Ever since the term *postcolonialism* has entered the academic debate in the 1980s, Postcolonial Studies have been considered one of the most significant areas in the field of critical cultural studies. Major contributions from Edward Said, Gayatri C. Spivak, Stuart Hall, and Homi Bhabha, to name but a few, have set the background for engaging critically with the shifting power relations between the former colonised and the former coloniser and with the colonial legacies in the post-war years. Among these, immigration from the former colonies to the metropole and the themes of exile, displacement, (non)belonging, and rejection connected to it have frequently been at the forefront of cultural studies in this period. Since a major feature of Postcolonial Studies refers to examining forms of resistance to totalising discourses and foregrounding the subject as an effect of many intersecting discursive domains in contexts of migration, I consider that it is both productive and relevant to rely in this study on certain theoretical principles deriving from this tradition.

Postcolonialism attempts to question modes of domination that extract their roots from the ideology that has accompanied European colonialism, deconstructing the modes of thinking in terms of such binaries as coloniser/colonised, master/slave, civilised/savage, or self/other, where the preference for the former term in the binary had the meaning of reifying structures of power and relations between the so-called European 'self' and non-European 'other'. Nevertheless, even after the dissolution of the colonial system, such mentalities have continued to significantly influence the interaction between former colonisers and former colonised in the post-imperial relations established both in the once colonised world and in the context of immigration to the metropoles. Edward Said explains this continuation through the fact that colonialism does not represent just the political system which had informed world politics for centuries and has ceased to exist today, but also a way of thinking and interpreting the world in all its aspects: "[i]mperialism", Said argues "lingers where it has always been, in a kind of general cultural sphere as well as in specific political, ideological, economic and social practices" (Said, 1994, 9).

Therefore, in the context of reversed migration from colonies to Britain which this study examines, the colonial mentality is still present, as investigations within postcolonial studies widely acknowledge, resulting from the appropriation of discourses that tend to exclude the presence of other voices than that of the British 'self' in contemporaneity. Postcolonial studies thus help in this study not just to examine critically the postcolonial condition of migrants, but

also to identify traces of the colonial thinking that continue to haunt the British collective consciousness today. Bakshi and Sengupta (2009) consider that in the context of today's migration to Britain, colonialism acts as "a metaphor of cultural and epistemological domination where 'truth value' is ascribed to any one particular set of values or knowledge system to hegemonize the other" (Bakshi & Sengupta, 2009, 5).

Postcolonial studies have comprehensively engaged with questioning such hegemonic systems constructed on the opposition between 'self' and 'other', and this tradition can be traced back to Edward Said's fundamental work *Orientalism* (1978). Influenced by the ideas of Foucault, Gramsci, and Althusser, Said has evinced how Europe generated the 'Orient' as a conceptual category in its discourses, thus helping postcolonialists to understand how the colonial power discourse of 'self' and 'other' has influenced more recent power relations established between migrants and natives in the contexts of migration to metropoles. Said grounds his critique of the exteriority of articulatory colonial practices on the deconstruction of the binary opposition between what Europeans have constructed as "the familiar (Europe, the West, 'us') and the strange (the Orient, the East, 'them') (E. W. Said, 2003, [1978], 44). He further explains that the underlying mechanisms that generate, uphold, and promote asymmetrical power structures rely on

> [the] collective notion identifying "us" Europeans as against all "those" non-Europeans, and indeed it can be argued that the major component in European culture is precisely what made that culture hegemonic both in and outside Europe: the idea of European identity as a superior one in comparison with all the non-European peoples and cultures.
> (E. W. Said, 2003, [1978], 7)

For Said, the West needed to build such an image of the 'other', which "in a sense created and then severed the two worlds thus conceived" (43), to strengthen its own identity and to create its own positive image in opposition to that of the 'other'. He insists on criticising the arbitrariness of constructing such mental boundaries by which Europeans imagine the 'other' to dwell in what "they call the 'land of the barbarians'" (54), ultimately "another different and competing *alter ego*" (332), which represents everything that the European is not.

The setup of such powerful imaginary boundaries relies on an equally arbitrary way of understanding cultural identity in terms of what Stuart Hall describes as "one, shared culture, a sort of collective 'one true self', hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed 'selves', which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common" (Hall, 1990, 223). This sense of identification, often built on the myth of a unified, commonly shared, and apparently immutable culture is repeatedly demystified in postcolonial discourses. Said himself

argues that identity

> […] is finally a construction - involves establishing opposites and "others" whose actuality is always subject to the continuous interpretation and re-interpretation of their differences from "us". Each age and society re-creates its "Others". Far from a static thing then, identity of self or of "other" is a much worked-over historical, social, intellectual, and political process that takes place as a contest involving individuals and institutions in all societies. (E. W. Said, 2003 [1978], 332)

Following the same line of thought, Stuart Hall criticises the way of understanding cultural identity in terms of once and forever established "oneness" and "essence" (Hall, 1990, 223), insisting on its character as constructed in time, subject to transformation and constant (re)negotiation. In Hall's view, "[f]ar from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they [cultural identities] are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power" (225).

Postcolonial thought thus contributes to dismantling the idea of stable identity structures, which also allows the reversing of allegedly stable binary oppositions between cultural centre and periphery. The articulations of this line of enquiry emanate from the simultaneous inclusion of different, even competing discursive positions, challenging the monovocality of those determinate discursive structures which tend to monopolise certain allocations of individual or group identities and social positions as determined and immutable. In the context of interaction between migrants and native British, the postcolonial deconstructionist tradition discussed thus far contributes to dismantling those practices of external articulations of migrants' identification as a collective 'other', which nativist discourses intend to construct by assuming the formulation of norms and criteria against which the migrant 'other' and the British 'self' are measured.

Nevertheless, despite the critique formulated in postcolonial studies, the powerful colonial mental models that have entered the British collective consciousness persist today. As Edward Said argues, the Western colonial powers have used significant resources to produce commonly assumed knowledge (E. W. Said, 2003 [1978], 40) that renders the non-European 'others' as exotic, backward, savage, morally and mentally inferior, and dangerous. This strategy was first aimed at upholding the colonial order, but, in the context of massive migration to the metropole, it was effectively re-distributed in a new role. By building on this embedded knowledge, such narratives about migrants and migration are elaborated and perpetuated within nativist discourses until eventually they are viewed as real, thus becoming myths on which the new social and political order is underpinned.

In British context, as scholars such as James Walvin (1984) and Paul Gilroy (2005) contend, the period following World War II, which has been informed by increasing immigration and

significant societal transformations related to this, has witnessed a continuation of the colonial ethos. Building on such ideas as mutually exclusive and allegedly incompatible cultural identities, this ethos has contributed to generating powerful nativist attitudes towards all migrants arriving in Britain. The immigrants have become in this context not just the epitome of the 'other' as opposed to the contemporary recognisable "self", but, as Paul Gilroy argues, also the symbol of self-identification in relation to that British national 'self' which had been constructed throughout the imperial history. The incomers came to represent the human reminders of this process, as well as an uncomfortable link to the standings that the empire entailed. As Paul Gilroy outlines in his seminal book *Postcolonial Melancholia*:

> In this precarious national state, individual and group identifications converged not on the body of the leader or other iconic national object […], but in opposition to the intrusive presence of the incoming strangers who, trapped inside our perverse local logic of race, nation, and ethnic absolutism not only represent the vanished empire but also refer consciousness to the unacknowledged pain of its loss and the unsettling shame of its bloody management. (Gilroy, 2005, 101)

Immigration has therefore influenced not just the way society has been (re)configured, but also represents the benchmark of cultural identity constantly and 'annoyingly' undermining the mythology of a continuous, stable core of British culture and identity.

In analysing the processes of cultural interaction and identity construction in the context of postcolonial migration in Britain, Paul Gilroy also touches upon the role of racism in these processes. Following in the tradition of Franz Fanon and Stuart Hall, he explains the power of the colonial supremacist mythology through the persistence of anti-black racism, which had justified the hierarchies of the empire based on the alleged right to exploit the subjects of so-called naturally inferior races (Gilroy, 2005, 31). These myths, Gilroy claims, have survived the dissolution of the empire, permeating British people's consciousness and affecting the way of thinking and acting throughout the entire contemporary British history. As in this time immigration to Britain was rather the rule, and not emigration, as it used to be in the colonial epoch, these mental models have constantly informed the interaction between native British and immigrants, either if they came from former colonies or other socio-geographical contexts, as for instance Eastern Europe.

And if the relations between colonial and later Commonwealth migrants and natives have been informed by "the old hierarchies produced by race thinking's excursions into political anatomy" (Gilroy, 2005, 143), as Gilroy semanticises biological racism, in today's context of intra-European migration, these established patterns are "recycled and endorsed for the test of absolute culture that they provide. In other words, culture talk draws renewed power from the specifications of

racial difference that are smuggled inside it" (143). As Paul Gilroy further explains, the "underlying cultural codes" (Gilroy, 2005, 142) promoting exclusion and discrimination, which found justification in the imperial racial hierarchy during the colonial and Commonwealth migration period persist as a 'commonsensical' component of the British ethos even in a time when critical postcolonial discourses have proven the obsolescence of the language of race.

The interaction between early colonial migrants and metropolitan natives was therefore preconditioned by an already emergent race consciousness that is fudged today into the 'more acceptable' discourse of 'cultural difference'. This, however, is just a new modality of regarding racism, as detached from the idea of race as biological heredity, and which stresses, as Etienne Balibar explains, "the insurmountability of cultural differences, a racism which, at first sight, does not postulate the superiority of certain groups or peoples in relation to others but 'only' the harmfulness of abolishing frontiers, the incompatibility of life-styles and traditions" (Balibar & Wallerstein, 1991, 21). This new form of racism, which Balibar conceptualises as "racism without race" (21), represents just a discursive shift, which, according to Gilroy, camouflages a continuity of old hierarchical power relations produced by colonial framings of race differences in newer contexts of migration.

The newly established divisions on cultural and civilizational criteria have proved to be as resolute as the 'natural' hierarchies preceding them, since the switch from the discourse of biology to that of cultural nationalism has aligned the expectations of the public with the limits of moral acceptability, thus increasing the credibility of political decisions. Such an expansion of the field of exclusionary ethos therefore justifies not just the proscription of miscegenation but also that of any form of multicultural conviviality, promoting the tenet that "exposure to otherness is always going to be risky, and contact with aliens feeds uncertainty and promotes ontological jeopardy" (Gilroy, 2005, 142). The old racial mythology justifying colonial supremacy is transferred into the nativist discourse of today in the form of a "tacitly race-coded common sense" (143), which proves to be attractive for those categories of population that become confused and anxious when faced with the rapid and radical changes that inform our globalised world. It is therefore easy to notice that in the space where British natives and East European incomers interact today, "the residual traces of imperial racism combine easily with mechanistic notions of culture and a deterministic organicism to form a deadly cocktail" (Gilroy, 2005, 144). As Gilroy concludes, the "later groups of immigrants may not, of course, be connected with the history of empire and colony in any way whatsoever. However, they experience the misfortune of being caught up in a pattern of hostility and conflict that belongs emphatically to its lingering aftermath" (103). It can

thus be concluded that the language of 'otherness', which Edward Said criticised, has perpetuated in a form or another the cultural perspective of the dominator-dominated relation in both contexts of immigration in focus, being a significant component of the anti-migrant mythology this study examines.

2.4 Methodological Considerations

This study entails an interdisciplinary methodology that integrates key concepts from social sciences with concepts and methods of analysis from literary studies, building on the idea that, in specific cases, literature's expressive force and ability to engage with social issues may contribute to a comprehensive critical examination of migration myths. This methodological approach in analysing novels about migration emphasises the relevance of aesthetic categories and narrative strategies in dealing with aspects of migration in heterogeneous societies, since literature, although this is not its primary function, can be seen as a thorough articulation of the social and political convulsions of the epoch it represents (Greenblatt, 1988). The reading strategy employed in this study proceeds from the assumption that the selected fiction texts represent a viable material for understanding certain aspects of the migration realities, while reading the texts and interpreting the structures of representation requires an integration of narratological and sociological tools.

By relying on a typological classification of migration myths in the novels, this study performs a structured, context-oriented, comparative examination of the strategies by which the novels negotiate these myths. It intends to foreground literature's potential to denounce migration myths' role in constructing and maintaining nativist attitudes and to imagine spaces of cosmopolitan conviviality that can accommodate tolerant attitudes towards migration, ethnic diversity, and cultural pluralism. An advantage of a comparative study refers to the paucity of critical engagement with literary productions dealing with migration from East European countries to Britain. Aspects of this migration have been committedly depicted by several literary works in recent years, but there is a significant lack of critical scrutiny of such works. It is therefore necessary and productive to do a comparative study of texts that have benefited from extended critical attention (i.e. Caribbean migration literature) and newer texts, which so far have received little attention from critics.

A first aspect related to the method of analysis pursued in this study refers to the extraction of a typology of migration myths from the selected novels. The literary works examined in this study

do not create migration myths but rather incorporate and negotiate narratives that circulated extensively within the British nativist imaginary of different historical periods. It can thus be instrumental to implement a reading strategy and an exercise of literary analysis that allows establishing the thematic and functional interrelatedness of various migration myths and their classification into typological categories as a prerequisite for the critical examination of their social and ideological functions, which is performed in the analytical portion of this study.

The investigation strategy is thus informed by the typological classification of migration myths and each category of myths is examined in a chapter of its own. These chapters, first provide an overview of expressions of myths in the whole corpus, tracing the contextual conditions of their emergence and the narrative forms of their representation. Consequently, individual literary texts that engage critically with each category of migration myths are exposed to a close analysis, investigating how the employment of specific narrative strategies and aesthetic categories contribute to negotiating these myths. For this purpose, one novel from each historical period is selected for close reading, based on myths' frequency and on the clarity of engagement with the respective category of migration myths.

Another important methodological aspect of this study refers to the relation between text and context. The potential of representation of a literary text, in particular a text which treats overtly social-historical events as migration novels do, can be fully revealed only through a context-oriented reading. As Stephen Greenblatt contends, literature has, besides its aesthetic function, an important role in reflecting "how the social energy inherent in a cultural practice is negotiated and exchanged" (Greenblatt, 1988, 12) in a particular phase of history, since fiction texts are ineluctably connected to a social-historical context that is manifest beyond their material and aesthetic dimensions. References to the real world, such as allusions to and comments on contemporary politics, society, and discourses represent important elements that inform the novels analysed in this study, as they both anchor the narrative in the referential realities of the epoch they depict and contribute to the intra-textual production of meaning. Being "anchored in the larger reality they represent" (Tew, 2007, 13), these novels can effectively facilitate the comprehension of certain social phenomena as they "both rationalize and engage dialectically with our historical presence, playing their part, however provisionally at times, in our understanding of and reflection upon our lives" (7).

My interest in reading and analysing the novels therefore lies with the interrelatedness between the literary form, the narrative content, and the socio-cultural aspects negotiated in these texts. I consider that the fiction texts under scrutiny in this study can be comprehensively analysed only in

relation with, and as part of, the social and historical contexts in which they were written and/or which they represent, since these texts are informed by the social forces that shape society, or, as Stephen Greenblatt terms it, "they are the signs of contingent social practices" (Greenblatt, 1988, 5) that intersect and interact in a heterogeneous society. This heterogeneity of interacting social forces and cultural elements determines and conditions the capacity of the texts to become "site[s] of institutional and ideological contestation" (3), as they host and encourage a dialogue between asymmetrical, sometimes antinomic discourses.

The hermeneutical strategy employed in this study implies a reading focused on how the texts deconstruct those elements that attempt to represent migration narratives in the form of a single, totalising master discourse. When reading a text, my interest is in how it acquires meaning when regarding it not from its literary centrality, but rather "at its borders, to try to track what can only be glimpsed, as it were, at the margins of the text" (Greenblatt, 1988, 4). Migration myths represent seemingly peripheral aspects of the texts; therefore, the focus is on subplots, marginal phenomena, and apparently less significant images, which then are integrated and interpreted in the wider diegetic, but also social-historical context. In this way, this study intends to highlight the potential these apparently less significant aspects of the narratives have in tracing the "social energy" (Greenblatt, 1988, 6) specific to the socio-historical epoch they depict. In concrete terms, the investigation done in this study traces at the textual level the role of migration myths in the processes of interaction between migrants and British natives in two social-historical contexts informed by increased migration. It places these myths at the centre of the analysis in order to examine closely the effects these myths have at the textual level in the creation of nativist group positions and in the negotiation of social positions and power structures between interacting British natives and Caribbean and East European migrants respectively.

As mentioned in the introduction of this thesis, this study deals with literary works that are considered canonical and with texts that are less recognised. This allows me to perform a more focused reading of the social-historical contexts of the Windrush Generation and East European migrations to Britain and thus provide a more comprehensive contextual understanding of the significance of the selected novels. Furthermore, the comparison between two different contexts and different literary traditions foregrounds the similar impact that the two migrations have had on British society and how they (re)activated similar anti-migrant myths. The focus here is on examining the role of migration myths in texts dealing with similar themes, such as representations of symbolic borders and border crossing, biopolitics, stereotypes, otherness,

racism (ethnical and cultural), rejection, (dis)placement, movement, memory, economy, politics, and many more.

As already mentioned, the novels in focus take on a topic that had already been extensively politicised and debated in the British public space, namely the anti-migrant myths serving the nativist positioning towards migration of a category of British natives. However, the incorporation of these myths in the diegetic frames of the novels does not function just as plot devices contributing to the generation of conflicts and to their narrative development. As all novels analysed in this study provide outspoken critical responses to the social-historical contexts they address, the negotiation of migration myths has a significant political function. The texts thus do not limit themselves to simply representing the tensions raised by the presence of migrants in Britain but expose migration myths to a thorough critical inquiry and invite to assess critically the discursive practices and political grounds that uphold the nativist positions of a specific category of characters.

Due to the limitations of the study, I do not perform a close reading of all the selected texts. Some examples of migration myths are only mentioned in the section providing an overview of each category of myths, presenting the narrative strategies and the circumstances of their representation, and briefly commenting on how the respective novels challenge them. This emphasises the quality of all selected novels to function within common discursive frames, which provides a reliable ground for reasserting the contingency of normative mythical representations of migration and migrants. Therefore, the novels can be considered to subscribe to a wider category of cultural practices which intends to dislodge the nativist trends that emerged in the two historical moments under scrutiny and provide viable models of cosmopolitan conviviality in pluralistic, multicultural societies.

Since the novels in focus are extensively laden with references to real events, such as allusions and comments to contemporary politics and discourses, a context-informed (political) reading is appropriate. Nevertheless, to exploit the "full potential of literature" (King, Connell, & White, 2003a) in understanding phenomena connected to migration, a strategy that combines the analysis of a text's political and aesthetic sides can bring, as Elleke Boehmer suggests, the most effective results. This implies linking the analyses of the novel's form, narratological structure, content, and sociocultural and political aspects (Boehmer, 2010, 170) in a way that facilitates a multi-faceted and comprehensive examination of text's message. In the following, I describe the most significant narrative strategies, techniques, and stylistic devices to represent migration myths in

the texts as well as the categories of analysis employed in this study to highlight how the selected novels negotiate migration myths.

One of the most frequent methods by which migration myths are inserted in the texts is the presentation of statements, attitudes, and actions of reflector characters, who are sometimes depicted in contrast to the overall position of the novel, functioning at the diegetic level as promoters of a nativist discourses and obstructers of inter-group dialogue. Some characters in this category display signs of banal nativism, for instance children who mimic their parents, who involuntarily endorse or promote anti-migrant myths. The narrative trope of generational transmission is in some cases represented in institutional contexts, for instance as part of the school culture, when migration myths are promoted by teachers and/or included in the school curriculum. Another technique often used to insert migration myths in the texts is the employment of montage- or collage-like structures, a stylistic device through which the plot-line of the literary text is interrupted and supplemented with quotations, newspaper articles, posters, songs, or speeches that either reproduce or make direct reference to events in the real world (Hartner, 2012, n. pag.). In many situations, characters with nativist attitudes uncritically reproduce such discourses of populist politicians and newspapers with the intention to justify their positions and actions. Moreover, authorial interventions in the form of description of characters or comments on individual or group attitudes are also employed as a technique for representing migration myths in some of the novels.

Nonetheless, the overall vision of all selected novels reflects a critical position to migration myths, promoting the idea of interpretability of those narratives that intend to achieve a closure of meaning, as migration myths do. The narrative strategies and stylistic devices these novels employ facilitate the production and juxtaposition of competing subject-positions and systematically invite to interpret the various and often mutually exclusive diegetic discourses they accommodate. Characterisation represents an important category of analysis in this sense, as the inventory of characters generally juxtaposes characters with nativist and cosmopolitan views and attitudes. Characters promoting cosmopolitan values function as cultural mediators, embodying in the text what Stephen Greenblatt called, "go-betweens, translators, or intermediaries" (Greenblatt et al., 2009, 251). Some characters in this category are migrants who negotiate their position and image in interaction with native characters and with the local environment, but in many cases, when the voice of migrant characters is absent or obstructed, their perspective is expressed by transgressive native characters who cross the epistemological boundaries upheld by myths. The focus of the analysis is on such characters, who, by crossing borders from one ideological field into another,

reassert the contingency of the interpretative frames promoted by migration myths and signify the transformative potential of dialogic interplay in pluralistic contexts. The category of characters embracing cosmopolitan views contribute through their statements, attitudes, and actions to destabilising the semantic relationality that migration myths intend to produce in the texts. They cross borders, induce narrative events, or transform the spaces they inhabit into liminal cultural spaces or inter-group contact zones.

Physical and social spaces correlated with time frames describe the setting of the novels, and they often carry references to cultural and political debates informing the historical contexts in which the respective texts were produced and on which they mean to comment. One strategy of this study is to investigate how the interrelation between elements of the setting and characters influences the positioning of characters in relation with migration myths and their attitudes towards migration and migrants in general. All narrative settings of the analysed novels refer to locations in Britain, mostly in London, which create the social frames for interaction between migrants and locals. A relevant distinction for the analysis can be made between private spaces, such as houses or other closed locations inhabited by individuals, families, or civil servants and public spaces in which access is open, for instance streets, parks, public squares, theatres, dance or concert halls, and schools. A particularly important location for the negotiation of migration myths is represented in several novels by education institutions, for instance schools, which often are employed as metaphors for transformation through education and symbols of direct interaction between migrants and British natives.

The closed or open character of such spaces stimulates their function as either spaces of exclusion, in which migration myths proliferate, or figure as "interrogatory, interstitial spaces" (Bhabha, 1994, 3), which can take the interacting agents "beyond" (3) the experiences, cultural representations, and values of their in-group and which can facilitate the denouncement of migration myths. The investigation done in this study aims to identify and evaluate the function of such contact zones, which "are deliberately made open, with the rules suspended that inhibit exchange elsewhere" (Greenblatt et al., 2009, 251) in the interaction between migrants and natives. The focus is on the potential of theses spaces to facilitate direct contact and dialogic situations for characters who otherwise would be kept apart in semantically and ideologically opposite worlds.

Since the analysed novels accommodate opposing views on migration, the narrative perspective represents an important means of representation that indicates certain ideological directions for the interpretation of the novels. In some cases, explicit, omniscient narrators provide direct

descriptions which influence the perception of characters and their actions, but most of the novels in focus use a variety of different perspectives that are juxtaposed through the employment of shifting focalisation. Through this technique, the novels can make explicit the processes by which migration myths originate and construct epistemological and social boundaries but equally stimulate a critical approach to them. This is by and large achieved through the simultaneous presentation of different, opposing perspectives on phenomena connected to migration and the characters involved in them. In this sense, most of the analysed novels display a general tendency to engage critically with dominant discourses by giving voice to marginalised subjects, mostly migrant characters, whose perspectives on plot events and evaluations of situations, values, or attitudes are thus expressed and scrutinised. Besides offering alternative views to the prescriptive narratives promoted by migration myths, the employment of this narrative technique facilitates the reader's identification with migrant protagonists, allowing them to enter the migrants' inner world, realise what it feels like to be a migrant, which may trigger empathy and opening towards tolerant, convivial attitudes. The privileging of a migrant characters' perspectives, through extended focalisation or sympathetic portrayal, not only increases the legitimacy of that perspective but also has an impact on the text's overall ideological message. The migration novels analysed in this study often celebrate aspects of cosmopolitanism thus criticising the tendency of oversimplification and reification of inter-group relations that migration myths intend to do.

   Another relevant aspect in the discussion about representation and perspective in the analysis of the primary sources refers to the inclusion of native characters who act as promoters of cosmopolitanism. The representation of such perspectives reinforces the novels' legitimacy in refuting anti-migrant myths, as this conveys the idea that there is not just one way of viewing the relations between migrants and natives even inside the in-group of British natives. Such characters are generally depicted as having a high degree of credibility, which legitimises their position and thus may contribute to raising the readers' empathy and awareness about migration realities.

   The representation of multiple perspectives on epistemological, socio-political, or cultural questions is expressed in some cases through the adoption of various linguistic forms and structures. The employment of dialects and varieties of English, which act as markers of belonging to a certain class, subculture, or ethnic group can be interpreted as a form of *heteroglossia,* in the sense of Bakhtin, who considers that a novel's *heteroglossia* is a way of representing "specific points of view on the world, forms for conceptualising the world in words […] each characterised by its own objects, meanings and values" (Bakhtin, 1998, 291). It can thus be said that linguistic diversity in migration novels not only contributes to a more accurate depiction of characters, but

also facilitates representations from multiple perspectives of historical events, socio-political settings, and individual or group attitudes towards the societal transformations triggered by migration. Non-standard English, either if we refer to Caribbean dialects, patois, international English, British regional dialects, or working class dialects, is employed in most of the analysed novels as an acknowledgement and celebration of Britain's cosmopolitanism and cultural diversity and as a form of empowerment of underprivileged groups, in this case, immigrants negotiating their position.

In addition, the use of irony represents a major technique by which the novels intend to denounce the mendacity of migration myths. By foregrounding the contradictions that inform nativist characters or through direct comments on their inconsistent behaviour, as well as by describing situations that consequentially contradict the expectations and assumptions of such characters, the novels stimulate the readers to reassess their position and interpretation of events. In some cases, dramatic irony is employed, thus the readers can see beyond the misconceptions that nativist characters display and filter the story through the additional information which the author provides directly or through other characters' voices. The use of irony can also be seen as a means by which the authors provide a literary comment on the societal problems raised by the spread of migration myths and increased nativist attitudes in British society, thus denouncing the deceitfulness of such narratives and the hypocrisy of their promoters.

A final category used for analysing how the novels respond to migration myths refers to the inclusion of already existing, or the creation of new counter-myths, which, in the context of this study, are myths promoting narratives that countervail those narratives professed by anti-migrant myths. Most myths in this category are expressed through different symbols and narrative tropes that conceive Britain as a successful multicultural society, in which the cosmopolitanisation stimulated by immigration is acknowledged as a strength. Besides, some migrant characters are depicted as archetypes of the "ideal migrant" (Richmond cited in Matti, 2019, 155), who, by a display of evocative human and professional qualities and exemplary performance, destabilise essentialised, negative images attached to migrants by nativist mythology. The inclusion of such positive narratives about migration or migrants is therefore meant to promote a world view based on tolerance and pluralism, suggesting that, since cosmopolitan conviviality can be realised in the recognisable worlds of the texts, its achievement is also imaginable in the real world.

3 Windrush Generation and East European Migration Fiction in Context

3.1 Preliminaries

This chapter provides an overview of the social and historical context against which the novels analysed in this study are set. Since immigration to the Britain after World War II and the transformations it entails have generated passionate debates both in society and politics, fictional responses to this situation have provided significant comments to the tensions dividing British society on this topic. Therefore, through the brief exploration of the socio-historical conditions related to migration during the past seven decades, this chapter provides a transition towards the analytical section of the study, in which I scrutinise how the selected novels negotiate the effects of some of the of most prominent migration myths pervading the nativist discourse in relation to Windrush Generation and East European immigration to Britain.

As a response to the increased attention that migration as a phenomenon has received through mediatisation and politicisation, scholars have shown increasing interest in studying various aspect connected to it. In the light of this tradition, this section focuses on migration to Britain from a historical perspective, first providing a brief account of immigration before World War II and then concentrating on the period after the end of World War II and until present, which was significantly marked by the arrival of Caribbean migrants and by immigration from East European countries after their integration in the European Union.

3.2 Migration to Britain Before World War II

Following the outlook on migration expressed in the previous chapter, it can be considered that migration to Britain has been a constant historical phenomenon; however, as most scholars agree (Brown, 2006; Castles, De Haas, & Miller, 2014; Geddens & Scholten, 2016; Hansen, 2000; Holmes, 1988), the period following World War II is informed by an unprecedented level of migration, which entails a high degree of social transformations. Historically, the general (self)perception of the British, as well as other Western European nations sharing a colonial past, was by and large that of an emigrant nation. Migration to Britain had nevertheless existed in the context of the British Empire before World War II, even if at lower rates (Brown, 2006, 11).

In British historiography, the first references to immigration are done in terms of foreign-born population starting in the sixteenth century. These sources mention mainly groups of refugees from European provinces fleeing religious oppression, such as the Dutch Protestants fleeing from Spanish persecution during the 1560s, or, some years later, the Huguenots, who forcefully left France in the aftermath of the Saint Bartholomew Day's massacre in Paris in 1572 (Walvin, 1984, 27). Nevertheless, it is difficult to discuss systematically about migration related to that historical time since organised documentation of population dynamics began only later. As James Walvin contends, the examination of migration and race relations in Britain can only be done comprehensibly in the wider context of British imperial and colonial history (Walvin, 1984, 28), when the structural frameworks that inform migration even today emerged.

During the imperial period preceding World War II, immigration to Britain was low and sporadic[15]. The most representative examples include the Jewish refugees from Tsarist Russia and Eastern Europe who settled during the nineteenth century, but mostly after the Russian Revolution, Africans who were forcefully displaced directly from Africa or from the American colonies, Irish settlers, mostly in the context of the Great Famine of the 1840s, or refugees from Nazi Germany and the Nazi occupied territories arriving in the first years of the war (Walvin, 1984, 66). The most representative group of immigrants in this latter context were the Polish civilians, as well as soldiers who took refuge in Britain and fought in the war under British command, contributing in particular to the Battle of England (Burrell, 2002, 60). Many of them settled permanently after the war, as they refused to return to native Poland after the emergence to power of the Communist regime. Despite these sporadic migrant arrivals, the proportion of immigrants compared to the size of the population remained small, having little significance for the country's demographic balance, but the situation changed significantly after 1945.

3.3 Migration to Britain After World War II

In the decades following World War II, foreign born population in Britain has constantly increased, but significant oscillations in the levels of immigration were registered in connection to Britain's positioning in the new international context and to the domestic response to migration. Between the end of the war and the early1960s, immigration grew steadily, but at a relatively

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[15] Here I do not consider Irish migration to Britain, which amounted to over 800 000 only during the nineteenth century (Drudy, 1986, 107), given the special historical conditions that informed the relations between these ethnic groups, particularly after Ireland's incorporation into Great Britain in 1801.

moderate rate before declining in the late 1960s and becoming rather stable and low until the end of the century. According to Oxford University's Migration Observatory, in the four decades between World War II and 1991, the number of foreign-born population in Britain reached two million (Vargas-Silva & Rienzo, 2020). The late 1990s witnessed a massive increase in migration, as the number of foreign-born residents in Britain increased to 5.3 million in 2004, just to reach 9.5 million (which represents13.4% of the entire population) in 2019 (Vargas-Silva & Rienzo, 2020).

Numbers aside, it is significant to explain the societal impact of these fundamental demographic shifts. For that purpose, it is important to explore the post-war migration facts, circumstances, and politics, in connection with two major historical factors: The British Empire and Britain's integration in the European Community (later European Union). The unprecedented speed and scale of immigration triggered by these circumstances reconfigured the British polity, giving rise to a distinctive form of "British multiculturalism" (Ashcroft & Bevir, 2019, 26), which accommodates a series of paradoxes; a permissive migration legislation, pluralistic integration of minorities, cultural exchange practices, and cosmopolitan attitudes towards migrants on the one hand, and increasingly stricter legislation, tougher immigration control, restrictions of the citizenship regime, and discriminatory race-relations legislation on the other.

The first stage of the debate over migration in the United Kingdom after World War II is utterly informed by the imperial policy of citizenship. India's declaration of independence in 1947 compelled the British authorities to revisit the Imperial Act of 1914, which granted "British subjecthood" to everyone born within the allegiance of the Crown (Walvin, 1984, 118). In this context, the British Nationality Act (BNA 1948) was passed in 1948 in the attempt to preserve the formal unity of the empire. This law defined for the first time the British citizenship, granting the quality of "citizen of the United Kingdom and Colonies" (CUKC) to people born or naturalised either in the United Kingdom or in one of its colonies (Parliament of the United Kingdom, 1948). This hypothetically allowed 800 million citizens of the Commonwealth to reside and work in Britain.

The adoption of BNA 1948 is retrospectively considered by scholars (Ashcroft & Bevir, 2019; Hansen, 2000) as the underpinning act that has facilitated mass migration to Britain and implicitly promoted its transformation into a multicultural society, even though it was never intended to function as such (Ashcroft & Bevir, 2019; Brown, 2006; Hansen, 2000; Walvin, 1984). As mentioned before, the initial explicit intention of BNA 1948 was purely constitutional, namely to retain "a uniform status and the possession of uniform privileges for all British subjects" (Hansen,

2000, 35), which evinces a conservative perspective intended to preserve the pre-war imperial *status-quo*. In other words, the authorities expected that, in the tradition established before the war, the "privileges" would be accessed exclusively by the white subjects of the Commonwealth, thus granting their mobility freedom and reinforce Britain's position as the head of the new Commonwealth of Nations.

The implications of the BNA 1948 for the colonial immigration from the Caribbean, Africa, or Asia were, however, largely unanticipated (Brown, 2006, 178). Motivated by the desire to reassert Britain's symbolic status as "mother country", and thereby its commitment to "the freedom and equality of both its individual subjects and the nations in the Empire and Commonwealth" (Ashcroft & Bevir, 2019, 27), the authorities have created the conditions for any subject of the British Empire to live and work in the United Kingdom without restrictions, anticipating that this right would nevertheless remain symbolic for most of the subjects from the colonies. The expectations of many native British were, however, shattered by the arrival of *Empire Windrush* in June 1948 carrying 492 West Indian passengers who responded to the invitation to rebuild the 'mother country'. The event was ever more impactful, as it occurred amid the debate over BNA 1948. This episode received wide coverage in the media, which depicted it in terms of an emerging migrant invasion, rather than the arrival of migrant workers recruited by municipal or national companies (e.g., London Transport) or private businesses to fill the labour force gaps caused by the war. The perspective on events promoted in the media provoked panic among large groups of native British. At the same time, the event would later acquire mythological dimensions, symbolising the beginning of mass migration from the empire and the beginning of Britain's multiculturalism.

The authorities, however, failed to interpret it in this manner; the Labour government, the one who had invited workers from the colonies, considered the arrival of these colonial immigrants (Brown, 2006, 178) to be a product of exceptional wartime circumstances and that in short time they would return to their home countries. Nevertheless, the arrivals became a pattern in the following years and the average numbers increased constantly so that in 1954 an estimated 10,250 migrants arrived in Britain from the Caribbean and this more than doubled the following year to 24,500 (179). In addition to Caribbean settlers, significant numbers of migrants from India, Pakistan, and West Africa arrived during the 1950s increasing the 'coloured' [sic] population of Britain to 336 600 by 1961, among them 81 400 Indians, 24 900 Pakistanis, and 171 800 West Indians (Walvin, 1984, 111).

The increasing migration from the Commonwealth resulted in the establishment of a Cabinet committee in June 1950 to find "ways which might be adopted to check the immigration into this country of coloured [sic] people from British colonial territories" (HANSARD, 2003). Even though immigration was not a completely new phenomenon, as mentioned above, post-war migration was more impactful as colonial immigrants were also perceived through a racial lens, which served as an additional argument for the adoption of new regulation. The adoption of the Commonwealth Immigrants Act (CIA 1962) in 1962 introduces for the first time migration restrictions for the Commonwealth passport holders, distinguishing between those whose passport was issued by London authorities or by the colonial governor. The former were exempted from control, whereas the latter needed to apply for a work voucher, being graded according to the applicant's employment prospects (Parliament of the United Kingdom, 1962). The adoption of the1962 Act was an attempt to rectify the unpredicted inconsistencies of BNA 1948 and in this sense its symbolic value is comparable to the 1948 bill. Although it proved faulty in many aspects due to equivocal re-definition of citizenship, CIA 1962 represented a watershed in the history of migration to Britain as it symbolically reversed the liberal provisions of BNA 1948, thus ratifying a series of relentless nativist traits that started to emerge in British society.

Despite the legislative turn initiated by CIA 1962, subsequent developments in terms of migration revealed significant inconsistences that allowed ways to bypass immigration restrictions. Between 1962 and 1974, a large immigration from the Commonwealth was registered, consisting mostly of the spouses and dependents of migrants already settled in Britain. Randall Hansen construes this phenomenon as an inevitable consequence of the first arrivals (Hansen, 2000, 62), with the concrete result of increasing hostility towards non-white migrants. In addition, British passport holders of Asian origin who lived in East African colonies, did not fall under the CIA 1962 provisions. Consequently, when Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda gained independence in the 1960s, these people could legally resettle in Britain, and many did so indeed, as they faced fierce discrimination in the newly independent African countries. Thus, adding to the already tense situation in Britain, the 1968 crises triggered the adoption of the Commonwealth Immigrants Acts 1968 (CIA 1968), which amended sections 1 and 2 of the 1962 law extending the control to those without a "substantial connection with the United Kingdom" (Parliament of the United Kingdom, 1968), which meant that, to qualify for British citizenship, one had to be connected to the country by birth or ancestry. The Act and its implementation were flagrantly discriminatory since it granted the right of colonial residents with British ancestry, i.e. white colonists, to re-settle in Britain and simultaneously kept out non-white colonial citizens (Walvin, 1984, 119).

More regulation on migration followed. In 1971, the Conservative government initiated the Immigration Act 1971 (IA 1971) seeking to avoid a repetition of the 'Kenyan crises' of 1968. The act replaced the work permits and allowed only temporary residence, which included provisions for assisting voluntary repatriation and famously introduced the concept of "patriality" (Parliament of the United Kingdom, 1971), which created a category of British citizens who traced their roots to parents or grandparents of British ancestry. The equivocal definition of the category of "patrials" allowed discretionary interpretation of the concept, which favoured discrimination on racial grounds (Hansen, 2000, 33) when deciding who is allowed to enter the country.

The new British Nationality Act of 1981 (BNA 1981), which primarily updates the provisions of BNA 1948 regarding British citizenship, introduces a definition of citizenship exclusively for the British territory, linking it with membership in the political entity of the United Kingdom (Hansen, 2000, 207). Simultaneously, BNA 1981 amends IA 1971 with respect to the rights to abode in the United Kingdom, repealing the category of CUKC (Parliament of the United Kingdom, 1981), thus reducing still further the possibilities of non-white Commonwealth citizens to enter the country.

The 1981 Act represents the apogee of a series of shifts in British society meant to curtail the arrival of colonial migrants and thus end the colonial legacy that provoked it. This, however, did not alleviate the anxiety about migration nor did it hinder the reconfiguration of the British population for decades to come, since the door was left open to 6 million 'patrials' and 200 million citizens from the European Economic Community (Walvin, 1984, 215). Despite this, between 1981 and 1997 the total net migration to Britain was low, with average rates reaching 17 000 a year, of which 7 000 represented migrants from the EEC/EU (Vargas-Silva & Rienzo, 2020); therefore, migration was a low priority topic in the public and political discourse for nearly two decades.

The permissive approach on migration taken by the Labour Governments between 1997-2010 engendered major shifts in British society (Geddens & Scholten, 2016, 36), causing a return of migration as major topic in the political agenda and societal debate. This period is characterised by new developments in the way British natives understand and relate to migration, as, under the pressure felt by increased immigration of EU citizens, the debate on migration is conflated with the issue of Britain's EU membership. The distinctions, however, stop at the racial composition and geographical origin of migrant groups, as many anti-migrant attitudes from the period between 1948 and 1997 are reiterated in the new context. An ironic historical parallelism can be noticed in the way authorities after 1975 construed the access of the EEC/EU citizens to the

British labour market; if by the adoption of BNA 1948 British authorities were expecting to facilitate the intra-imperial transit of a few privileged elites, a similar outcome was expected within the EEC/EU context. In reality, an unforeseen influx of immigrants from the Commonwealth followed in the 1950s and the 1960s. Similarly, after the incorporation of the eight East European states in the EU in 2004 and 2007, the influx of migrants from these countries was much larger than originally forecasted by the government. Migration from the EU, most of it from the new member states, triggered an increase of foreign born population from about 5.3 million in 2004, representing 9% of the entire British population, to nearly 9.3 million and 14 % in 2019 (Vargas-Silva & Rienzo, 2020).

Besides the authorities' failure to anticipate the influx of immigrants, another fundamental similarity between these two migrations refers to the legislative deadlock the authorities had to resolve under the pressure of public opinion. Just as the free entrance in Britain of Commonwealth subjects was guaranteed by BNA 1948, so was the free movement of workers inside the EU granted by article 3(2) of the Treaty on European Union (The European Parliament, 1992). This, however, did not become an issue in the debate about immigration until the 2004 extension of the EU, which generated an increase in immigration from East European countries that many British natives deemed as uncontrollable (Ford & Goodwin, 2017, 7).

Before the 2010 elections, the Conservative campaign appealed to the anxious anti-migration voters by pledging to reduce net migration to "the tens of thousands" (Ford & Goodwin, 2017, 6). The new Coalition government (Conservative – Liberal Democrat) attempted to implement amendments to the existing regulation in 2010 and 2012 to no avail, as in 2014, 284 000 EU citizens entered Britain for work purposes only (Ashcroft & Bevir, 2019, 38). The debate about migration thus remained a key issue in the 2015 elections, and one of the first measures introduced by the newly elected Conservative government was a new Immigration Bill, which introduced the criminal offence of 'illegal working' and stricter sanctions against housing irregular migrants (Parliament of the United Kingdom, 2015). Besides, the Cameron administration committed to renegotiating Britain's relationship with the EU, with the restriction of free movement as one of the leading topics, and then put this to a referendum in 2016. The negotiations failed on that very topic, as the Commission President, Jean-Claude Juncker, stated that he wanted Britain to stay in the EU, but that for him free movement was a red line issue on which he would not compromise (Ashcroft & Bevir, 2019, 44).

Despite the inconsequential outcome of the negotiations, the referendum preparations proceeded in a sharply polarised British society, with the *Remain* campaign focusing on the

economic risks of leaving the EU, whereas the *Leave* campaign highlighted issues of sovereignty, the costs of EU membership, and particularly exploited the topic of immigration (Ford & Goodwin, 2017, 8). On the voting day, June 23, 52 percent of the votes were in favour of leaving the European Union. The result provoked a political crisis in the country, as the Cameron cabinet resigned, leaving the task to implement Brexit to its successors.

It can thus be said that immigration into Britain since World War II has an intricate history, being informed by major irregularities and contradictions. The two migration periods in focus, despite specific particularities, follow a few similar patterns; friendly politics, motivated by politicians' allegiance to the Commonwealth after 1945 and to the European Union after 1975 respectively, facilitated the settlement of millions of migrants. Each of these migrations was followed by backlashes, which triggered a disproportional response that made British migration policies among the most restrictive in Europe (Bosworth, 2008; Griffiths, 2017). Moreover, a continuity of the discourses in which natives refer to these moments of migration can be noticed, with a wide spectre of myths intended to reify negative perceptions about migrants informing both periods. Migration has nevertheless impacted decisively the society, changing irreversibly the British demography, culture, and politics; Britain has become multicultural, but polarisation between nativists and cosmopolitans has also increased because of opposed views and attitudes on migration.

3.4 Tracing the Sources of Contemporary British Nativism

So far, this chapter has outlined a brief description of the historical context of this study. Yet, as its distinct purpose is to examine critically the function of migration myths in the production of nativist responses to migration**,** a thorough examination of the effects of migration myths in this context would be incomplete without addressing questions about the emergence of British nativism. This chapter turns to examining the origins of British nativism and its connection to the emergence of wide-spread anti-migrant feelings and attitudes. Clearly, increased immigration is a part of the explanation, since manifestations of British nativism grew significantly in historical moments marked by high numbers of arrivals. Its roots, however, can be traced back to the complex relations emerging during Britain's colonial history, when British supremacist ideology was concocted with ideas of racial and ethnic homogeneity and cultural cohesion.

The societal development and historical landmarks outlined in the previous section sustain the argument that after World War II Britain has undoubtedly become multicultural because of immigration, especially that from former colonies and EU countries. At first glance, these phenomena may seem socially unrelated and chronologically disparate, but a thorough analysis traces imbrications that go beyond their contribution to fostering the original version of British multiculturalism. It is, however, not in the intention of this study to describe the historical processes by which Britain became multicultural. Its focus is on addressing questions about the natives' reactions and attitudes to the societal transformations that migration triggered, assessing the degree of cosmopolitanisation and level of tolerance or, by contrary, rejection of cultural and ethnic pluralisation. Therefore, this section explores how the interaction between migrants and natives has altered the British social and political landscape, highlighting the pre-eminence of historically entrenched nativist tendencies in the creation of group attitudes and policy making all through the period since the end of World War II until today. In this time, Britain's increasing anti-migration and anti-EU attitudes and support for populist nativist political actors have been substantially influenced by the spread of migration myths that managed to capture the emotions and influence the attitudes of large groups of native British. This has materialised in increased pressure on policy makers and has eventually produced one of the most restrictive migration regimes in contemporary Europe.

An important discussion in relation to the emergence of nativism in Britain concerns the very idea of Britishness and identification. Scholarship connects the terms Britishness and British identity to a common genealogy shared by the four nations incorporated within the United Kingdom, which is based on a political construction closely linked to the imperial project (Ashcroft & Bevir, 2019; Baucom, 1999; Kim, 2005). The emergence of a common British identity can be traced back to the many situations in which the history of the nations sharing the territory of the British Iles intersected, with the 1707 act of union between England and Scotland often being regarded as a watershed moment. As Ashcroft and Bevir argue, "[c]olonization provided a common project for the different nations of the United Kingdom, helping to form both the modern British state and a new "national" identity (Ashcroft & Bevir, 2019, 239). Yet, the common British identity is a highly debated issue, as the Anglocentric construction of Britishness within imperial context is often contested by the other associated nations, with Devolution representing in recent history the apogee of this contestation process. What then Britishness represents and why is it relevant in the context of this study to discuss the relationship between immigrants and natives in terms of Britishness, rather than Englishness?

A major characteristic of Britishness refers to multiple allegiances to nation and state, which allows individuals to consider themselves both British and English, Scot, or Welsh at the same time. If the allegiance to the individual nations implies an ethno-national component, the common British identity relies on a political and ethno-cultural identification in terms of citizenship, a common set of cultural values and practices, recognition of the authority of the monarch, and the identification with a common past (Kim, 2005, 63-64). Besides, a major component in the forging of British identity is represented by the positionality of Britons in relation to real or imagined 'others' inside and outside the nation. Britons, Linda Colley argues, came to define themselves as a nation both as a result of a common cultural and political consensus and as a reaction to the 'other' (Colley, 2000, 294). Historically, the 'other' was at times France, Nazi Germany, as well as ethnic minorities resulting from immigration (295).

Nativism in Britain in the period after World War II is a phenomenon that informs in equal measure all British society, despite the nuances in defining British national identity that inform the underlying nationalisms of each of the constituting nation of the United Kingdom. Devolution is considered to have affected the cohesion of the British nation, but its economic, political, and identitarian aspects are concerned specifically with the issue of centrality in the relation between England and the other nations (McEwen, 2014). Moreover, attitudes towards migration expressed by the Scottish National Party delineate a form of nativism that merges British cultural supremacism with an ethnic oriented nationalism which, as Yasmin Alibhai-Brown argues, hinders the integration of immigrants into the British nation (Alibhai-Brown, 2000, 27). Therefore, despite the controversies around Devolution, Britishness remains throughout the post-war period an important driver in mobilising emotive support both among the masses and political elites, significantly influencing attitudes and decisions related to migration.

Immigration into Britain in the period in focus has contributed to a radical transformation of the entire British society in terms of nationality, citizenship, and immigration laws. The multiculturalism it produced implies an integration of immigrants into the British nation (Ashcroft & Bevir, 2019, 239), but also a backlash to it that manifested in all strata of society. Scholarship (Brown, 2006; Freeman, 1994; Geddens & Scholten, 2016; Hansen, 2000; Walvin, 1984) agrees that the strict migration and citizenship policies in Britain have been adopted under democratic pressure. The extensive public hostility towards migration manifested by large groups of British natives has constantly pressured authorities to respond in key moments through a "responsible issue management" (Freeman, 1994, 176) by which strong advocates of migration restrictions were appeased. Public opinion has decidedly influenced authorities' response to migration and

anti-migrant attitudes among masses are confirmed by sociological studies carried out at various moments in the post-war era. Randall Hansen identifies in his seminal study on immigration in contemporary Britain that public opposition to migration constantly intensified in the decades following the arrival of first migrants from the Commonwealth (Hansen, 2000,14). Consequently, a wide majority called on the adoption of stricter migration control, as Gallup's measurements of public opinion starting from 1958 demonstrate. Moreover, the pressure to pass further legislation increased even after the adoption of the Commonwealth Immigrants Acts of 1962[16] and 1968[17].

The level of pressure that constituencies and organisations exerted directly on politicians in the field of migration and race relations was indeed effective in reconfiguring the entire British polity, but this is not the only explanation of the acquiescent reactions displayed by authorities. Indirect pressure was added by the tendency of large numbers of voters to disavow the policies of the traditional political parties (Labour, Conservatives, and Liberals), which were perceived as a "failure to respond adequately to the public sentiment about migration" (Walvin, 1984, 133), and hence started manifesting proclivity for the message of nativist populist politicians. Even though other political matters have also raised controversy between voters and politicians, scholars tend to agree that "the gulf between Westminster and 'popular opinion' on matters of race and migration" (Walvin, 1984, 134) is one the main factors causing this divide in contemporary British politics (Geddens & Scholten, 2016; Hansen, 2000; Walvin, 1984). Therefore, the public perception among many Britons about traditional parties being too elitist, too similar, and too conciliatory when dealing with migration issues facilitated the rise of nativist populist figures who were willing to appease the dissatisfied segments of the population.

The first tendencies to yield the electoral pressure were displayed already in the late 1950s and early 1960s by far-right politicians like Colin Jordan, the founder the White Defence League, or John Tyndall, the leader of the Greater Britain Movement (Walker, 1977), or by unorthodox Conservative politicians, who adjusted their discourse to the public desideratum and succeeded in achieving resounding and unforeseen success. In the 1964 elections, Conservative candidate Peter Griffiths won the traditional Labour constituency of Smethwick, aided by the slogan 'If you want

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[16] Gallup's question regarding the adoption of CIA 1962 'Do you approve or disapprove of the measures the Government are taking in controlling migration from Commonwealth countries?' was answered 'approved' by 72%; 21% disapproved; and 7% did not know. *Coloured People in Britain* (Gallup, 1982)

[17] National Opinion Polls (NOP) asked: 'Do you think the Government was right or wrong to introduce the new migration bill?' 79% thought it was right; 15% thought it was wrong; and 6% did not know. (National Opinion Polls, 1969).

a nigger (sic) neighbour, vote Liberal or Labour', an event symbolically considered as the official entrance of issues of migration, race, and racism in British national politics (Buettner, 2014, 710).

This watershed episode was soon to be overshadowed by the rise of Enoch Powell, who, during the 1960-70s, coagulated the public anti-migration sentiments and expressed them in an articulate discourse known today as "Powell's legacy" (Earle, 2018; Sweney, 2018), which also paved the way for the nativist populist movements of the twenty-first century. The Powell case represents a symptomatic example describing the realities of British politics during the last seven decades. It epitomises the cleavage between 'conventional' politicians and those factions of the public dissatisfied by increasing immigration, as well as the tense relations within political parties on the issue of migration. The day after the 'Rivers of Blood' speech (Powell, 1968), Enoch Powell was sacked from the Heath Shadow Cabinet never again to hold another senior political position and unconditioned entry was granted to nearly 50 000 Asians expelled from Uganda. Despite his isolation within the Conservative Party, Powell received in the wake of this event 110 000 letters of support and his ongoing campaign for repatriation of Commonwealth migrants was supported by most of the public. As a Gallup survey shows[18], in the time following the speech, he even surpassed in popularity Edward Heath, the leader of the Conservative Party (Studlar, 1974, 379). Regardless of his demotion in the party and ever-declining political career, Powell's radical stance regarding migration continued to be supported by large masses of voters, thus posing constrains on the major political forces to harshen their migration policies in order to avoid losing electoral support to nativist populist movements.

Nevertheless, after 2004, most attempts to appease the dissatisfied portions of the electorate proved futile, as British society polarised drastically on topics such as national identity, diversity, and multiculturalism in the context of increased immigration from the CEE countries. The two main political parties (Labour and Conservatives) consensually showed a generally liberal approach to these shifts, failing to observe the expression of general dissatisfaction among an increasing class of 'left-behinds' who found the main-stream politics to be "threatening and disruptive" (Ford & Goodwin, 2017, 4). With migration emerging again as a major political issue in the mid-2000s and traditional political parties failing to address it, a new generation of nativist populist politicians revived Powellian anti-migration rhetoric and employed it in order to mobilise the masses of dissatisfied voters to their advantage.

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[18] Gallup's Questions on Leading Conservative Party 'If you were making up a new Conservative Government, who are the first three people you would put in for Prime Minister and other jobs', revels that 36% of respondents placed Enoch Powell in October 1969 (cf. Studlar, 1974, 379).

The surge of anti-migration feelings and Euroscepticism, compounded with low levels of confidence in the conventional way of running politics, allowed the rise of a new political challenger, the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP), which swiftly became the "primary vehicle for public opposition to EU membership, mass immigration, ethnic change, and the socially liberal and cosmopolitan values that had come to dominate the political establishment" (Ford & Goodwin, 2017, 4) during the first two decades of the new millennium. UKIP's growing popularity, which materialised in a resounding victory in the 2014 elections for the European Parliament, as well as an appreciable 12,6% at the general elections in 2015, determined both Labour and the Conservatives to reassess their position on the highly controversial topic of migration, a strategy that had Brexit as a result. Once again, as in the 1950s and onwards, the public opinion was a decisive factor in shaping British migration policies, both by exercising direct pressure on authorities and by turning to unconventional, nativist populist actors when mainstream political parties showed proclivity for cosmopolitanisation and openness.

Alongside the overwhelming majorities reflected by sociological measurements and the fractures within the political body on the topic of migration, the racially motivated riots in Notting Hill and Nottingham in 1958 demonstrated the rising resistance of public opinion to Commonwealth immigration, thus increasing the pressure for reforming the migration system (Ashcroft & Bevir, 2019, 29). It bears repeating that the widely spread anti-migrant attitudes in contemporary Britain are a continuation of a historically established mind-set based on "the assumption that it was right to exploit Africans and Asians because they were inferior" (Sinfield, 1989, 127), which was a central tenet to the imperial experience "popularly held by all classes of Britons" (Walvin, 1984, 135). But claiming that the imperial outlook dispersed with the demise of the empire does not hold; the mythology of Britain's imperial power and her global pre-eminence have endured through time. Even for post-imperial generations, the stories about "the days when 'Britannia ruled the waves'" (Walvin, 1984, 135) have had a significant impact, influencing their views on nationhood, identity, and society.

The way British society transformed after 1945 proves that the legacy of the empire did not affect just the colonised space, with newly independent states struggling to rebuild their economy, society, and cultural identity, but also the metropole. The intricate historical events following World War II reversed the direction of migration, as presented above, and the settlement of former colonial subjects in the metropole triggered the manifestation of the historically encroached colonial mentality, which was by and large informed by racist backed British supremacism. Even after it became clear that the empire had faded and Britain, as a world power, was declining, the

"residual attitudes survived, but they were increasingly directed not towards the people of distant colonies and possessions, but towards the ethnic communities emerging in British cities" (Walvin, 1984, 28).

With the growth of migrant population, a series of complex relations between natives and newcomers developed. Discrimination within the labour market, housing, and education became some of the main expressions of the racial antagonisms informing the interaction between migrants and locals. Thus, in British post-imperial context, redistribution of resources, sharing the territory and dwelling space, and above all, the threat perceived by many native British that immigration represented "a source or symbol of rapid social change that threatens traditional identities and values" (Ford & Goodwin, 2017, 6), have generated a powerful anti-migrant mythology. This came to complement an already existing ethno-national mythology which sustained that social, ethnic, and cultural homogeneity granted Britain's status as world power. Moreover, the readjustment to the irreversible changes that migration brought was happening simultaneously with the "rapid, quite unexpected and inexplicable demise of British global and imperial power" (135), which came to be symbolised by historical landmarks such as India's independence in 1947 or the withdrawal from the Suez in 1956.

The trauma of the sudden retreat from imperial greatness was therefore ineluctably and irreversibly associated with the settlement of Commonwealth migrants in Britain; therefore, the incomers were both feared and unwanted because "they were the unwitting bearers of the imperial and colonial past" (Gilroy, 2005, 101). As the unanticipated and harsh decline of the British Empire proved too difficult to acknowledge for many, the settling immigrants reminded British natives of both losing their hegemonic positions and of the extreme forms of suffering they had imposed on their colonial subjects.

The arrival of migrants shaped not just the relationship of British natives with their imperial past, raising disconcerting feelings of nostalgia for the imperial glory and the guilt for its shameful management, but it also impacted the social and political life throughout the post-colonial period. The natives' very self-identification that Gilroy mentions, as well as the way they related to either grand or banal social, economic, or political matters, have been informed by the interaction with migrant newcomers. For several generations of Britons who witnessed their country's decline from international pre-eminence and had to experience recurrent social and economic crises, it was easy "not merely to explain key aspects of that decline in terms of one of the most obvious and undeniable social transformations – coloured [sic] immigration – but it was a comfort to blame the immigrants for the undesired changes in Britain's fortunes" (Walvin, 1984, 137).

It bears repeating that the nativist responses that were pioneered during the 1950s and 1960s in the context of the Commonwealth migration "remain the backbone of the resistance to convivial culture" (Gilroy, 2005, 103) in the new millennium, proving that Britain is still deeply connected with its imperial past, as this continues to influence the debate over contemporary migration. This melancholia-fed outlook on migration is therefore not restricted to the incomers from the former imperial space, but it reverberates on later migrant groups as well, even if they have no connection whatsoever with the colonial history. These migrants belonging to more recent migrations become mere targets of a "structure of feeling [that] governs the continuing antipathy toward all would-be settlers" (101), thus projecting British nativism as a historical continuum which highlights the prominence of exclusionary attitudes over other circumstantial aspects, such as migrants' origin, race, or cultural background.

The imperial imagery that still nurtures British exceptionalism and ethnical nationalism today has proved to be so unwavering that it not only remains an important debate issue in the public space, but it heavily influences the major policy lines of political actors of both the Left and the Right. Therefore, when analysing migration to Britain in the context of the imperial demise and ongoing political and economic decline, it becomes more clear why this issue has permeated to such a high extent the public space after 1945, arousing powerful feelings and often irrational attitudes that impose the direction of politics, even in those fields that are just adjacent to migration or race relations, such as welfare, housing, and foreign policy.

4 A Typological Analysis of Migration Myths in the Selected Novels

4.1 Towards a Typology of Migration Myths

As the main goal of this study is to examine how the selected novels negotiate migration myths in the contexts of the Windrush Generation and Eastern Europe immigration to Britain, this chapter turns to the close analysis of the primary texts. The numerous depictions of migration myths identified in these texts are organised typologically in this study in relation to the theoretical definition of migration myth discussed in the previous chapter, to examples of migration myths corresponding to this definition, and to specific criteria that foreground a relational connection between certain myths.

The structure of the chapter relies on the typological classification of migration myths, each section dealing with one of the typological categories of myths. Since this study operates with a vast corpus of primary sources, this structure endows the analysis with clarity and coherence. Therefore, the typology is integrated in this study primarily as a descriptive and classificatory tool that represents an important foundation for explanation (Bailey, 1994, 15) and for further critical examination of migration myths in the selected novels. The analytical portion of the study reflects the typological classification of the migration myths identified in the texts and based on this, provides a close examination of each category of migration myths in the novels. The focus of the analysis is on how the formal properties of a given text contribute towards reflecting and, furthermore, deconstructing the discourses, values, attitudes, and ideological tenets ingrained in mythical discourse.

Among scholars who have worked with theorising typologies, there is a general agreement that typologies represent a particular form of classification that are distinguished from generic classifications by two main characteristics: they are *multidimensional,* meaning that the classification into categories is done by taking into account more than one criterion, and *conceptual,* which entails that, by combining the attributes of different dimensions, new epistemological categories called *types* or *type concepts* emerge (Bailey, 1994, 4). In establishing the typology of migration myths, this study first proceeded to identifying migration myths in the novels, which corresponds to what Kenneth Bailey calls the *identification the typology's cases* (Bailey, 1994, 8). Subsequently, the particular instances of migration myths corresponding to the typology's type cases were subsumed into more general classes (Miles & Huberman, 1994, 225) or categories based on coherent patterns that certain myths share in common following two

dimensions: the thematic dimension, or the myth's subject, and the focal dimension, or the myth's object. In connection with these two dimensions, four variables result. Two variables are associated with the thematic dimension or the myth's subject matter, namely social-cultural themes and territorial-spatial themes. The other two variables are associated with the focal dimension or the myth's object, namely external focus, i.e. on migrants, and internal focus respectively, i.e. on native British and British society. Both variables associated with the focal dimension are connected to the myth's beneficiary, namely the native British population, since the myths express their vision either related to migrants' condition, characteristics, and actions, or to how British identity and community are affected by immigration.

By combining variables derived from the thematic dimension and the focal dimension characterising the migration myths extracted from the novels, four categories, or as Kenneth Bailey calls them, type concepts (Bailey, 1994, 4), are established, as presented in Table 1.

Myth's object (focal dimension) *Myth's subject (thematic dimension)*	**External focus - migrants**	**Internal focus – native British**
Social-cultural themes	MIGRANT ALTERITY MYTHS - Migrants are radically different (the 'other'). - Migrants are culturally inferior (primitive, uncivilised). - Migrants are physically and intellectually inferior.	ENDANGERED CULTURE AND IDENTITY MYTHS - British culture and community life are affected by immigration. - British national identity is affected by immigration. - Britain's past glory is lost because of immigration. - Britain's ethnical homogeneity is diluted through miscegenation.
Territorial and spatial themes	MIGRANT INVASION MYTHS - Migration is unprecedentedly high. - Immigrants invade local communities. - Immigrants take over natives' living space and homes. - Immigrants are a social burden; they live on social benefits and take the jobs from natives.	LOST CONTROL AND RELCAMATION MYTHS - British authorities have lost control over migration. - Britain must take back control over its borders and society. - Immigration stop and repatriation are the solutions for solving Britain's crises. - Migration and criminality converge.

Table 1. Typology of migration myths

The first category refers to *migrant alterity myths,* which incorporates myths claiming that migrants are significantly different from native British, in the sense of a primitive, uncivilised,

infrahuman 'other'. This category was generated by the intersection of the social-cultural thematic variable and the external focus variable. Therefore, the myths grouped in the typological classification under this category represent structures of othering and representation of difference that are constructed by combining subject matters subscribing to the domain of migrant identity or migrant cultural representations (social-cultural themes) and provide a projection that British natives have on migrants (external focus). They are meant to reify a binary opposition that intends to naturalise a differentiation between native British - 'us' and migrants - 'them', and project an image of migrants in line with the nativist message that, in the binary 'us' against 'them', 'they' are inferior, incompatible, and dangerous, therefore they should be kept outside the British social fabric.

The second category of the typology is described as *migrant invasion myths.* The myths included in this category profess variants of the narrative claiming that an unprecedentedly large number of migrants insidiously invade Britain's geographical and social space. The category is established by combining the territorial and spatial thematic variable with the external focus variable, meaning that the myths' subject matter refers to territorial and spatial aspects, while the myth's object, similar to the category of *migrant alterity myths,* is the immigrants. Some major themes exploited by myths in this category to create discursively a sense of migrant invasion refer to a so-called takeover by immigrants of the natives' privileges, such as dwelling spaces, welfare, and jobs. The narrative focus of these myths is on migrants and migration, which implies that the representation of instances of the so-called invasion is done from the perspective of native British, with the intention of instilling a general perception of an alleged massive migration that threatens the national territory and the community's ethnic, economic, and social cohesion.

The third typological category, *endangered culture and identity myths,* includes those myths professing that the nation's ethnic and cultural homogeneity is jeopardised by the 'intrusion' of immigrants. Besides, an alleged identity dilution caused by this intrusion represents the source of Britain's decay from its past cultural, political, and economic position of prominence. This category was established through the intersection of the social-cultural thematic variable and the internal focus variable. The subject matter of these myths' narratives refers thus to identity dilution, loss of ethnic and cultural homogeneity, or political and economic decay, which are allegedly caused by the 'contamination' of the pure, superior British community with migrant elements. At the same time, the object of the myth, or the focalising agent is the national community seen from a native British perspective. This focal angle is meant to emphasise the importance of cultural and ethnic self-preservation as a prerequisite for regaining the bygone supremacy of the past, which was allegedly

lost after the immigrants came. The attention is often drawn towards past events, traditional values, or idyllic landscapes, which engender a so-called 'core culture', a standard of desirable norms, attitudes, and values that supposedly define a unanimous and perennial ethno-cultural identity.

The fourth typological category includes myths professing that Britain has allegedly lost control over immigration and, consequently, over the mechanisms that organise and facilitate society's functioning. Therefore, the true people, the patriots, led by charismatic leaders must re-establish order and take back control of society. Hence, the category encompassing such myths is called *lost control and reclamation myths.* It was established through the intersection of the territorial and spatial thematic variable, meaning that the subject matter of these myths refers to concrete and symbolic spaces such as borders, communities, or the territory of the motherland, with the internal focus variable, which implies an inward looking perspective of the focalising agent of the myth, who, as in the case of *endangered culture and identity myths,* is the community of British natives. The most prominent subject matters speculated by myths in this category refer to internal security problems that migration allegedly engenders, intending to construct an image of migrants as dangerous law offenders, who are not fit in an allegedly tranquil community characterised by solidarity and social order. Myths in this category are directed towards the members of the native community, intending to increase the feeling of public anxiety, and thus reinforcing a commonly held belief that expulsion, or re-emigration as the official discourse calls it, would re-establish social order and group cohesion.

This typological classification also informs the structure of the analytical section, as each category of myths represents the topic of analysis in one of the four sections of this chapters. The typological classification of migration myths has, however, limited intrinsic analytical function in itself, since typologies in general have low explanatory value in the study of social phenomena (Bailey, 2000, 3185; Lehnert, 2007, 66). It can nevertheless facilitate the selection of relevant study cases and thus render a clear and coherent framework that facilitates a critical investigation of migration myths at the textual level. The type cases that are presented in the matrix under each category (see Table 1) represent abstractisations of the concrete diegetic representations of migration myths that are examined in the novels considering the critical theories and key concepts discussed previously in this thesis.

The hermeneutic approach by which this study intends to deconstruct migration myths in the novels focuses on writing technique and aesthetic modes of representation, such as the situated analysis of interacting characters, the representation of opposite angles and multiple perspectives, as well as interactional and confrontational instances. In addition, the study considers as instrumental

analytical tools the representations of space and its impact in the transformation of attitudes towards migration, the choice of specific vocabulary and discourses, the role of narrative irony, and the function of counter-myths[19]. The present chapter examines how these features contribute to the deconstruction of nativist group positions, to destabilising the work of migration myths that recurrently emerge in both contexts that the novels negotiate, and to promoting alternative discourses that emphasise tolerance and cosmopolitan conviviality.

4.2 Migrant Alterity Myths

4.2.1   Preliminaries

Myths purporting migrants' alterity are frequently evoked in the selected novels, expressing at the plot level the views of nativist characters who claim the existence of unassailable cultural borders that separate British natives from Caribbean and East European newcomers. This chapter investigates how the selected texts incorporate such myths in the plot, exposing them as questionable means of closure and, at the same time, promoting alternative models of constructive interaction between migrants and natives. To achieve this goal, in section 4.2.2 of this chapter is included a description of the category 'migrant alterity myths', looking at how these myths are deployed to uphold the binary opposition between the native 'self' and the migrant 'other' and profess the idea that migration to Britain is un-natural, undesirable, reprovable, reprehensible, disruptive, and destructive. The migration myths that are scrutinised are permeated by nativist discursive frames that promote a hegemonic relation between natives and immigrants. The characters adhering to this mythology defiantly promote a deformed image of migrants as significantly different, barbaric, and infrahuman thus uncanny and incompatible. Subsequently, section 4.2.3 presents an overview of migrant alterity myths expression in all primary sources, briefly presenting the narrative strategies of myths' textual representation and commenting on how the texts work towards denouncing their deceitfulness.

Finally, section 4.2.4 examines how the novels *To Sir, With Love* (Braithwaite, 2014b, [1959]) and *Paid Servant* (Braithwaite, 2014a [1962]) by Windrush Generation author original from Guyana, E.R. Braithwaite, and *The Road Home* (Tremain, 2008) by contemporary English novelist Rose Tremain respectively engage critically with myths about migrant alterity through

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[19] For a detailed discussion see Chapter 2.4 of this thesis.

employment of specific narrative techniques and aesthetic devices. The three novels are analysed against the social-historical backgrounds they depict and in the light of theoretical approaches to migration and migration myths delineated in this study.

4.2.2 Unpacking the Migrant Alterity Myths

Migrant alterity myths are integrated in the novels analysed in this study at textual level as a means of expressing the positions of a category of characters who embrace a form of exclusionary essentialism, acting as members of the British native group who pretend to represent the vision of the entire nation on migration. In this way, myths act as a determining instrument accessible to dominant actors who, by spinning stories and distorting language, aim to impose or, depending on the perspective, maintain a hierarchical socio-political order rooted in the British colonial mind-set. Such exclusionary reflexes developed during Britain's colonial past have triggered, as Paul Gilroy contends, anti-migrant attitudes directed at immigrants from the former colonies, as well as at "later groups of immigrants" (Gilroy, 2005, 103) who are not historically connected to the British Empire, but are caught in the pattern of hostility that continues to influence the migration debate in contemporary Britain. A historically recurrent pattern can therefore be observed to inform the relationships between natives and migrants from different migration contexts; when Britain experiences economic, social, and political crises, British nativists tend to appeal to narratives that justify the emergence of such crises through the presence of essentially inferior and culpable, nonetheless significant 'others'.

The scrutiny of primary sources reveals various modes of constructing a mythical image of the migrant as an essential 'other' based on certain patterns that can be noticed both in the texts dealing with Windrush Generation migration and those about migration from Eastern Europe. These patterns include individual or collective narratives, use of tropes, or assertions that intend to demonstrate the fixity and finality of a socially constructed image of migrants. Such mythicized depictions of migrants subscribe to a larger pattern informing the British colonial discourse, which promotes a binary opposition between what Edward Said has termed as the familiar 'self' and the uncanny 'other' (Said, 2003 [1978], 44). This strategy of creating a particular type of knowledge about the 'other' through officialising a discourse that includes particular "perceptions, vocabularies and modes of representation" (42) are not innocent in Said's perspective; they create imaginative truths about the inferiority of the subjects they describe in order to control them, but

also to gain credibility about Western superiority (McLeod, 2010, 19). Thus, this "library or archive of information" (Said, 2003 [1978], 41), as Said argues, represents a Western European imaginative discourse particularly built upon binary representations of 'self' and 'other', which became the norm against which the world is measured (Said, 2003 [1978], 57; see also McLeod, 2007, 2).

Such reflexes of separating the world in 'us' and them', rooted in Western European Enlightenment thinking, are nevertheless not limited to colonialism, but are also practiced in relation to other non-Western groups and cultures. So is the case for Eastern Europe, which, after the fall of Communism and normalisation of communication between the West and the East, has occasionally been exposed to the production of similar discursive practices meant to construct a sense of Western superiority and thus establish an asymmetry of power between the two regions. This process reproduces, as Larry Wolff suggests in his study *Inventing Eastern Europe* (1994), the established patterns of othering criticised by Edward Said, namely the production of knowledge about a backward East European 'other,' "standing somewhere between barbarism and civilization, evaluated with respect to a standard set in Western Europe" (Wolff, 1994, 356), which identified itself as mature, developed, and superior. As a result of this, the myth professing migrants' alterity places any immigrant to Britain in the same category, turning them into a stereotypical 'other', thus taking away their individuality and contesting their humanity "upon disregarding, essentializing, denuding the humanity of another culture, people, or geographical region" (E. W. Said, 2003, [1978], 103).

The migrant alterity myths evoked in the analysed texts are therefore part of a Western discourse that intends to reify a disparity between, on the one hand, the centre, the metropole, represented as an epitome of desirable stability and continuity, and, on the other hand, the periphery, the culture from where migrants originate, and which embodies impermanence and social deviance. Representations of migrants as an essentially inferior 'other' thus provide legitimation for natives to disparage, reject, or act aggressively against such foreigners who "feed uncertainty and promote ontological jeopardy" (Gilroy, 2005, 142) for the alleged 'naturally superior' local community. Described in this way, the migrant becomes an unequivocal object of a political myth, originally identified in ancient Greece, where the incomers were portrayed as uncivilised, primitive, savage, and violent; therefore, their presence in the metropole is undesired, as they are presumed to disrupt the superior local civilisation.

As a consequence, a common denominator of the ancient and modern mythical image of the migrant is the barbarian, as Thomas Nail sustains, whose "mobility, the temporary encampments,

and even geographic distance from the polis create a natural inferiority" (Nail, 2015, 52) in the eyes of the sedentary civilisations. The alterity myths encountered in the analysed texts attempt to perform a decentring of the migrant subject, by upholding as real a dualistic division between the 'superior' natives, 'us' and the 'inferior', 'primitive' migrants, 'them'. The intended effect of these myths is to endorse migrants' peripherality and reinforce their exclusion from metropolitan mainstream culture and polity.

Representations of migrants as a culturally inferior 'other' in the novels is complemented in the nativist social imaginary with depictions of migrants as belonging to a different group with a different essence than one's own. Such representations insinuate the out-group members' infrahumanity, which Jacques-Philippe Leyens and his colleagues consider to be a form of in-group favouritism (Leyens et al., 2003, 705), corresponding to an ethnocentric view of itself combined with different forms of derogation of outgroup members. (Leyens et al., 2000). Some of the most common representations of infrahumanity that intend to reify migrants' alterity detected in the novels refer to the heterostereotypes about migrants being less intelligent than the British natives and lacking speech. In their study on the role of infrahumanization in inter-group discrimination, Leyens and his colleagues conclude that members of an in-group consider intelligence as primary characteristic defining human nature (Leyens et al., 2000, 188) and, correspondingly, upholding the idea that members of a certain outgroup are less intelligent represents a way of considering them as less human (194). At the same time, the study reveals that language, defined as the general capacity to communicate, is a second characteristic generally believed to define human nature (Leyens et al., 2000, 188); therefore, a symbolic 'absence of language' is considered by in-group members as a feature specific to the infrahuman 'other' belonging to an outgroup.

The imagery depicting migrants as 'incapable' of language and less intelligent than natives encountered in the analysed texts attempts to uphold a hegemonic discursive frame that confines the migrant 'other' beyond the natives' sphere of comprehension, thus setting the ground for its exclusion. With similar effects, employment of animal imagery in connection with migrants functions as an extreme form of othering through infrahumanisation. Constructing a mythical migrant 'other' through constant references to the bestiary, which Franz Fanon considers to produce a Manichaean division in the Western way of thinking, (Fanon, 1963, 42) is a reflex that the Europeans had already developed in colonial times. The arrival of former colonial migrants in Britain has therefore triggered the manifestation of a historically established pattern. Myths about migrants' alterity often take in the novels the shape of derogatory images that not only denote a

perceived difference in terms of skin tone or behaviour, but recall, as Fanon claims, "also the multifarious narratives surrounding them" (84).

Mythical representations of migrants as infrahuman 'other', often rooted in ethnic or cultural racism, emerged in contemporary Britain as a reaction to what many locals perceived as threats caused by the arrival of former colonial subjects and, later, East European migrants. Leyens et al. (Leyens et al., 2000) contend that for such myths to emerge and have effect, a perception that the outgroup represents a competition or a threat represents a major condition (194), and migrants arriving in Britain in historically different moments have systematically, although unintentionally, filled this pattern. The emergence of these myths in the contexts of migration to Britain examined in this study represents a defensive reaction of natives to the uncertainties caused by the appearance of these mobile aliens, who are perceived as a cultural, social, economic, and security threat to the community. The function of these myths is to preserve the integrity and the position of the dominant group and their manifestation has informed in similar ways the relations between natives and newcomers during the historical periods analysed in this study.

4.2.3 The Different Faces of the 'Other'. An Overview of Migrant Alterity Myths in the Novels

As Britain was struggling to recover during the challenging years following World War II, migrants from the Commonwealth became the available 'other' meant for emphasising British identity and bolstering its sense of superiority. Discrimination and prejudice against colonial subjects had already become an accepted convention during the century long imperial history (P. Gilroy, 2005; Walvin, 1984), but the circumstances created by increased immigration from the Caribbean colonies stimulated the manifestation of such attitudes in the heart of the metropole.

These attitudes were significantly empowered by myths professing that migrants from the colonies were culturally and racially different, meaning backward, primitive, irrational, and inferior to the locals in all aspects. In similar manner to the 19th century rationalist theories of myth, which studied people from the colonies as 'contemporary savages' comparable to the primitive, prehistoric people (Frazer, 1894; Horton, 1967; Lévy-Bruhl, 1966; Tylor, 1958), so this mythology attempts to reduce the complexities of the new social reality informed by increased migration to the comprehensible simplicity to which Christopher Flood refers (Flood, 2002, 8).

A similar mythology re-emerged in the context of increased migration from the East European countries after 2004, which exploited the nativist mental models already instituted in the British collective consciousness. The re-circulation of some established myths about migrants, as well as their adaptation to the new circumstances, served equally well as a strategy of self-immunization to what many British natives perceived during Brexit times as a hazard for society. These myths are therefore catered for a demand of stability and continuity, for the perpetuation of the nostalgic belief that Britishness is still the epitome of civilisation, founded on its self-ascribed rationality, self-containment, humanity, efficacy, and cultural progress, but which can be jeopardised by the infiltration of agents and elements of different cultures. In what follows, this section traces the most significant cases of myths that represent migrants as the 'other' in the primary sources analysed in this study.

A significant degree of othering is constructed through narratives professing that migrants are driven by uncontrollable sexual desires, a myth which implies that the arrival of migrants jeopardises local communities' safety and exposes local women to hazards of sexual aggression. An example of such distorted images about Caribbean migrants is negotiated in Andrea Levy's novel *Small Island* (Levy, 2004)*.* Urged by ostensible fear, Blanche, a British native, insists to warn her neighbour Queenie, who is one of the novel's protagonists*,* about the dangers of letting rooms to Caribbean migrants. Her husband, who "knew all about blacks" (Levy, 2004, 116), claimed that they were possessed by uncontrollable "animal desires" (116) of mating with white women. In similar way, Andrew Salkey denounces this myth in *Escape to an Autumn Pavement* (Salkey, 2009 [1960]), inserting it in the text of a pamphlet issued by a fictional anti-migrant organisation, possibly an inuendo to the White Defense League, which sustains that "the main reason for blacks pouring into Britain is their desire to mate with white women of our country" (Salkey, 1960, 138).

If the examples mentioned above may have racial implications, the representation of East European migrants as sexually deviant supports the idea that, in the discursive production of the migrant 'other', nativist discourse often conflates the ethnic and cultural racism for similar purposes. In the novel *We Come Apart* (Crossan & Conaghan, 2017)*,* by Sarah Crossan and Brian Conaghan, the label of sexually deviant is attached to the male protagonist, Nicu, by some of his schoolmates - "is rape you were done for" (Crossan & Conaghan, 2017, 204), with no actual conncetion to any inapropriate act or behaviour. This scene, which echoes situations decried in novels about Windrush Generation migrants, suggests that the myth which projects migrants of both generations in a mythic space of exoticism, moral laxity, and sexual depravity has a powerful

effect in enhancing the binary separation on moral grounds between migrants and natives in the British social imaginary. Although rooted in the practice of sexualising black male migrants of the 1950s, the then established prejudices are sometimes reiterated in contemporary contexts of migration, as it is the case of East European male migrants in this study, or of Muslim men in different contexts.

In a similar manner, the myth that migrants belong to inferior, primitive cultures nurtures the belief that migrants represent a significant 'other' that is incompatible with the British culture and values. Such myths are extensively negotiated in the analysed novels, as, for instance, in *Escape to an Autumn Pavement* when Jonnie Sobert, the protagonist, denounces in a dialogue with a local the practices of the British education system. By referring to schoolbook examples, he decries the policy that continues to programme yet "another generation of fanatics rearing to take over the myth" (Salkey, 1960, 76) that migrants belong to a cultural space that, to the British natives, is comprehensible through comparisons to pre-historic cultures in the manner promoted by the 19th century theories of myth. Schoolbooks, as well as educational programmes, depicting the colonial subjects as people "as wild as hell, running amok with painted faces and curare darts, tribal markings and distended ear lobes" (75) not only endorse the myth that colonies are savage spaces inhabited by primitives, but also attempts to influence the British natives to perceive immigrants from colonies as agents of an incompatible, inferior civilisation.

This myth is negotiated in similar way by E.R Braithwaite in the novels *To Sir, With Love* (Braithwaite, 2014b [1959]) and *Paid Servant* (Braithwaite, 2014a [1962]). In *To Sir, With Love*, the British education system appears to be, just as in *Escape to an Autumn Pavement,* the repository of an anti-migrant mythology. The myth that migrants are "people [who] were physically, mentally, socially and culturally inferior to themselves [the British]" (Braithwaite, 2014b, [1962], 66) is presented as entering the British collective memory through "the same textbooks" (73) that have conditioned several generations of British natives to reify colonial subjects as inferior. In *Paid Servant,* Braithwaite reveals the "general opinion" (98), expressed through a conversation among representatives of the London cultural elite, that the colonial migrants of the 1950s were agents of primitive cultures that could bring "no contribution to social progress […] as they come here from Africa, India, Pakistan, the West Indies, etc., where standards of work, education, artistic expression, are all considerably lower than ours […]" (98).

The societal effects of the inferior culture myth are also challenged by Ian MacInnes in his 1959 novel *Absolute Beginners* (MacInnes, 2011 [1959]), when the unnamed protagonist reads in the fictional Mrs Dale Daily newspaper an article conveying the myth that "England […] was an

old and highly civilised nation, but the countries of Africa and the Caribbean were very far from being so indeed" (MacInnes, 2011, 149). The Manichaean imagery contained in this myth conveys a simplified picture of reality, establishing the way British nativists position themselves in relation to migrants and contributing, as the narrative development of the novel indicates, to increasing the already tense atmosphere preceding the events of the Notting Hill race riots of 1958. This narrative implies a dualistic division between a barbarian, less civilised migrant, and a superior native, which can thus justify political exclusion and even legitimate direct violence against migrants, as the text clearly suggests when depicting the reprehensible Notting Hill events.

The myth claiming migrants' inferior culture is revisited in Rose Tremain's *The Road Home* (Tremain, 2008)*,* a novel dealing with post-European Union extension migration to Britain. Lev, the protagonist, accompanies his English girlfriend, Sophie, to meet her coterie just to experience a humiliating conversation with Andy Portman, a supercilious playwright who has authored the "ground-breaking play" *Peccadilloes* (Tremain, 2008, 118). Andy's conduct and statements transpire a sense of 'natural' cultural superiority, which he considers inaccessible to East European migrants: "in your country, you've got a lot of catching up to do, art-wise" (121).

The examination of primary sources also reveals many cases when the myth's content shifts from abstract references to migrants' culture, as a generic and unifying element, to assigning personal or group features denoting a supposedly infrahuman nature of migrants. The heterostereotype that Caribbean migrants are less intelligent than British natives resonates the emerging nativism of the 1950s in Britain in *Escape to an Autumn Pavement,* as Jonnie can read in the agenda promoted by the above mentioned far-right organisation:

> Mentally the Negro is inferior to the white man. The sutures of the Negro's skull close quite early in life, preventing the future expansion of the brain, whereas the suture in a white man do not close until late in life. It is estimated that the sutures in the skull of an anthropoid ape are obliterated at the age of twelve, in a Negro when he is twenty, and in a white man when he is forty [sic]. (Salkey, 1960, 139)

The ethnological racism rehashed in biological, morphological, and post-Darwinian evolutionary discourse encapsulated in this myth resonates the wide spread nativist metalities of the 1950s-60s Britain. An indicative manifestation of this myth is also depicted in *Paid Servant* (2014a [1962]) through the trope of heredity. Miss Wren, the protagonist's supervisor in the Department of Child Welfare, sustains the conviction that Roddy, an orphan of migrant descent, is endowed with less intelligence and thus cannot be adopted by an intellectual family: "the important effects of heredity in these matters cannot be ignored" (Braithwaite, 2014a [192], 80), she states in conversation with the novel's protagonist, Rick.

The construction of a sense of alterity is enhanced in some cases by infrahumanising myths that question migrants' access to articulate speech. The male protagonist in *Small Island,* Gilbert, approaches a native elderly with a courteous speech – "Is there something I can do for you, sir?" (Levy, 2004, 165), which triggers the man's perplexity. As this scene suggests, the British social imaginary appears to be imbued by the myth that migrants from colonies are infrahuman to the degree of lacking articulate language: "They expect us colony men to be uncultured. Some, let us face it, do not expect that we can talk at all" (165), Gilbert bitterly reflects. The reaction of the local triggered by this encounter encapsulates the groundless belief that Caribbean migrants are characterised by what Thomas Nail designates as a "natural incapacity for proper speech and reason" (Nail, 2015, 52). "'It speaks, Mummy, it speaks', has been called after me" (Levy, 2004, 165) Gilbert adds, thus also suggesting a generational transmission of the myth, a trope which, in this context, reverberates the question formulated by Bernard in a dispute with his wife, Queenie, about the Caribbean residents she has lodged in their house while he was in the war: "Are these people our sort?" (285).

Instances of the myth that the migrant 'other' lacks speech also pervade the narrative of *We Come Apart* (2017). Nicu is treated by his caseworkers in the rehabilitation centre as a voiceless savage, unable to understand or practice articulate speech: "Many caseworkers never speaking to me. They just wave and point to filth I should see. 'Understand?'" (Crossan & Conaghan, 2017, 81). Similar to the caseworkers, Jess initially avoids Nicu, even when he tries to establish contact, as she also fails to acknowledge his capacity to use language: "… cause he doesn't really understand much. Not words anyway" (Crossan & Conaghan, 2017, 87).

Myths claiming that migrants lack the ability of speech reflect a belief specific to a category of British natives, who refute the possibility of cross-cultural dialogue. Such attitudes are also endorsed by myths employing animal imagery to frame migrants as an infrahuman 'other', with the intention to reinforce the in-group members' belief that migrants are less worthy than natives. Several novels expose derogatory bestial representations encapsulated in such myths, as, for instance, Beryl Gilroy's *Black Teacher* (B. Gilroy, 2021 [1976]). The protagonist is often confronted with zoological associations in this novel: "Black people live in trees. Me dad saw them isself. He was in the war" (B. Gilroy, 2021, 193), a boy says during a fervent discussion in the multicultural context imbued with racist prejudices against foreigners that the classroom of the 1960s represents. As this scene suggests, generational transmission of the myth prompts children to mimic the bigoted remarks and attitudes of their parents, unconsciously becoming part of a historical continuum informed by prejudice and division. The colonial reflex of referring to

migrants in zoological terms, to which Frantz Fanon refers (Fanon, 1963, 103), is therefore part of a wider exclusionary culture that has its origins in the colonial history of Britain, but which, in the context of immigration from the colonies, became a convenient defence mechanism to justify nativist attitudes and policies.

Bestial references are also included in myths professing the infrahuman character of migrants from East European countries. The "underlying cultural codes" (Gilroy, 2005, 142) endorsing anti-migrant attitudes, which found justification in the colonial racial hierarchy, re-emerge in contemporary context in forms reminiscent of the Commonwealth migration period, as the novel *We Come Apart* (2017) suggests. The image Jess projects on Nicu on the day of their first encounter at the rehabilitation centre is informed by prejudices specific to anti-migrant mythical discourse: "And he's weird. An immigrant gipsy boy who looks half-wolf if you ask me" (Crossan & Conaghan, 2017, 79). Although the bestial inventory changes from "monkey" (B. Gilroy, 2021), a zoological trope suggesting backwardness, primitiveness, and inferiority, to "half-wolf" (Crossan & Conaghan, 2017, 79) or "gipsy wolf boy" (80), these metaphors signify savagery, aggression, and hostility, with the similar effect of disenfranchising the migrant 'other'. Such bestial representations are done with a great sense of dramatization meant to emphasize the incompatibility between the human 'us', the in-group, and the infrahuman 'them', the uncanny immigrants.

Images of East European immigrants as the exotic 'other' are also negotiated in *Missing Fay* (2017) by Adam Thorpe, a novel that captures the tense pre-Brexit atmosphere ingrained with casual racism, insecurity, and suspicion of a community in Lincolnshire which, in the words of a local real estate agent, is "burgeoning with foreigners" (Thorpe, 2017, 106). In this context, a Romanian healthcare assistant, Cosmina, struggles to integrate in the local community, finding acceptance among a few native inhabitants, but facing rejection and discrimination when interacting with most of those whose perception of Romanian immigrants is heavily distorted by mythicized depictions in the tabloid media and by casual hearsay.

In a telling scene, Mike Watkins, a bookseller who befriends Cosmina at the nursing home where his mother resides, engages in pub talk with a local named Gavin. The conversation shortly turns to the topic of immigration and Gavin, who had never met any immigrant, expresses his concern about the dangers that Romanian immigrants represent: "The Romanians are coming, however. Then stuff's really gonna happen. Ouch. Double ouch. And it's gonna happen for us sensitives especially. Dark and perilous. Really perilous. (…) Shadow kissers. I'll really have to be on my guard" (Thorpe, 2017, 184). The vampire cliché inspired by Bram Stocker's story and

often attached to Romanians in British sensationalist media as a means of exoticisation and dehumanisation has a real impact on Gavin. Mike, who knows Cosmina very well, is bewildered by his companion's views and tries to reassure him: "We're all as one in Europe" (185), Mike responds, this way giving voice to "the other half country" (185) that chooses to ignore prejudices and rather get involved in genuine interaction with the new settlers.

4.2.4 Negotiating the 'Other' in *To Sir, With Love, Paid Servant,* and *The Road Home*

Myths emphasising migrants' alterity contributed to the emergence of a culture of rejection of migration and of denial of society's cosmopolitanisation in Britain after World War II. In reaction to the production and dissemination of this mythology, successive generations of novelists have engaged in exposing and challenging this culture by diversifying their methods to tackle the experience of migration and the tensions it entails. As the previous section shows, novels dealing with anti-migrant mythology can suggestively interrogate how such myths intend to construct an image of migrants as uncanny aliens in order to keep them outside the economic, social, and cultural fabric of the metropole. In this section, the focus is on examining closely the various narrative strategies and techniques to negotiate the content and the effect of myths about migrant alterity in three novels that are selected for the high density and rigorous negotiation of myths in this category. The novels selected for scrutiny are *To Sir, With Love* (Braithwaite, 2014b, [1959]) and *Paid Servant* (Braithwaite, 2014a [1962]) by Windrush author E.R. Braithwaite, and *The Road Home* (Tremain, 2008) by contemporary English author Rose Tremain.

4.2.4.1 E. R. Braithwaite's 'Good Migrant' in *To Sir, With Love* and *Paid Servant*

Among the first texts considered to be canonical novelistic response to the realities experienced by Caribbean immigrants in the 1950s are E.R. Braithwaite's autobiographical novels *To Sir, With Love* and *Paid Servant.* Based on the author's experiences while working as a teacher in an East London secondary school and as a social worker in London's Department of Child Welfare respectively, these novels examine closely the theme of racial discrimination against Caribbean

migrants in the incipient stage of migration from former colonies to Britain. Being among the first works to fictionalise instances of interaction between the newly settled migrants and British natives, *To Sir, With Love* and *Paid Servant* have earned E.R. Braithwaite the reputation of a "perceptive and humane commentator on race and colour problems" (Birbalsingh, 1968, 75); the novels have had a significant impact on British readership from the time of their publication and continue to be popular today [20].

Both novels follow the development of the same protagonist, un-named in *To Sir, With Love,* referred as Rick in *Paid Servant,* as a character whose romantic illusions about Britain, inculcated by his colonial education, are shattered by encounters of racial prejudice, bigotry, and ignorance, which are fuelled by strong myths about newly arrived migrants from the Commonwealth colonies. Many cases of alterity myths recounted in the literature of the Windrush Generation also figure in Braithwaite's novels. Although he attempts to foreground successful stories about the capacity of migrants to integrate into the reception community through constantly observing the highest moral and cultural standards of the natives, the narratives he depicts are nevertheless informed by the anxiety generated by racist natives he encounters and the exclusionary narratives they promote.

Like many Windrush immigrants of the 1950s, Braithwaite's protagonist in the novels was astonished by the reality he encountered in the British labour system and in society in general. Although the authorities 'invited' citizens of the colonies to work in Britain, it soon transpired that in most situations different standards applied for natives and migrants in almost all societal aspects. The explicit manifestation of the difference between British and Briton, the discriminating experiences to which migrants were exposed functioned as a reality check that forced them to reassess their expectation. "Yes, it is wonderful to be British—until one comes to Britain" (Braithwaite, 2014b [1959], 23) becomes a bitter refrain that Caribbean migrants had to learn in time. Therefore, the myth of the 'Mother Country', which was meticulously constructed in the colonial discourse and speculated pragmatically by British authorities both during the war[21] and immediately after the war, dwindled when put to test. The enthusiastic idealism that convinced many colonial citizens to relocate to the metropole and contribute to its reconstruction was shattered by the painful experience of integration. As William May remarks, the "double-edged process of welcome and exclusion, of assimilating and demarcating racial categories"

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[20] Especially *To Sir, With Love,* which in 1967 was made into a successful film of the same name starring Sidney Poitier.

[21] E.R. Braithwaite himself, like many colonial subjects, some depicted in the novels analysed in this study, had served in the Royal Air Force during the Second World War.

(May, 2010, 195) meant that debates about Britishness exceeded the legal provisions of the British Nationality Act of 1948. Phenomena that colonial migrants did not expect to confront, such as racially and culturally grounded discrimination, as well as a colonial mythology of well-defined hierarchies, proved to be more efficient in reifying and exaggerating differences than the commonality conferred by the British passport.

Although elated by the myth of Pan-Britishness, after arriving to Britain, Braithwaite's protagonist finds himself confronted with a reality heavily informed by another mythology, one that constructs Caribbean migrants a significant 'other' in the locals' social imaginary. The novels therefore insist on challenging this mythology by exposing the absurdity of the situations and attitudes in which such myths transpire. *To Sir, With Love* recounts the protagonist's first work experience, depicting the school where he works as an environment exclusively populated by British natives, both students and colleagues, him being the only colonial migrant, moreover, in a teacher position – "an oddity" (Braithwaite, 2014b [1959], 112), as his colleague Weston asserts. It is, paradoxically, in this environment where the protagonist expects to be valued for his refined eloquence and flawless behaviour, that he falls victim to stories and myths long entrenched in the history of colonial relations. The same Weston exoticizes Braithwaite's hero, suggesting that he uses "black magic" (Braithwaite, 2014b [1959], 39) on his turbulent students to control them, thus placing the protagonist in a universe that he constantly tries not just to ignore, but to dismantle. Nevertheless, the more the protagonist navigates this environment, the clearer he unravels the existence of an ancestral mythology that has strongly influenced British natives to perceive colonial subjects as "people [who] were physically, mentally, socially and culturally inferior to themselves" (Braithwaite, 2014b [1959], 66). Moreover, this mythicized image of the colonised was transferred in the nativist discourse emerging in Britain as colonial migrants started to settle in the metropolis. The migrant, the protagonist comes to understand, remains for his students and colleagues an overdetermined entity, present in the collective mind of the native British rather as a distant agent of alterity, an uncanny dweller of the remote colonies whose presence in the metropole is an undesired accident.

Despite migrants' presence and disposition to integrate, British natives appear in Braithwaite's novels to be captive to the myth that they, 'the self', and the newcomers from colonies, 'the other', belong to separate worlds. The first contact between the protagonist and his students is symptomatic in this sense. As he enters the classroom, the children "were standing about in groups and had paid no attention to my entrance" (Braithwaite, 2014b [1959], 31). The fact that the protagonist is 'invisible' to his students can be interpreted as a metaphor for the obstruction of

dialogue between natives and migrants, or, as Paul Gilroy contends, a way to keep the migrants "cast outside of both culture and historicality" (P. Gilroy, 2005, 32). And it is exactly from this position of imposed obscurity that Braithwaite's hero proceeds to deconstructing the myths that prompt migrants' exclusion based on an alleged cultural inferiority or fantasised infrahumanity. He insists to persuade British natives that he is inferior to them in no respect and, had the colour of his skin been disregarded, he could easily assimilate into the community of Britishness (Birbalsingh, 1968, 75). Based on the cultural capital acquired through his refined education, his impeccable behaviour, and professional excellency, the protagonist basically intends to respond to the myths that reify migrants' alterity by creating a counter-myth, which constructs the migrant as being "under his skin, […] as British as Britons themselves" (75). In *To Sir, With Love*, Braithwaite resorts in many moments to depicting situations that reaffirm his credo that he has "grown up British in every way" and knows "no other cultural pattern" (Braithwaite, 2014b [1959], 23). References that the protagonist makes to Chaucer, his Cambridge education, and his RAF experience represent attempts at underlining his claims to Britishness. To similar ends, the novel describes a casual conversation the protagonist has with another teacher in the staffroom: "We soon fell into easy, pleasant, conversation and discovered a common interest in books, music, the theatre and films" (38).

In the same tone as the emphasis on commonality in the previously mentioned scene, Braithwaite manifests a compulsive disposition to keep his protagonist within the canons of British high culture by an unwavering commitment to using a faultless, standard English. Ron Matti suggests that besides constructing his protagonist as "British in every way" (Braithwaite, 2014b [1959], 23), Braithwaite also chooses to keep "heteroglossia largely external to his novelistic composition, which intentionally and unequivocally utilises a Standard English narrative register" (Matti, 2018, 129). The inculcation of British culture and values, as well as the emphatic use of standard English can be interpreted at the extra-textual level as "a conversation between Braithwaite and the reader" (Matti, 2018, 129), more specifically his white readership, intended to delineate the premises of cohabitation in the metropole on equal terms and under uniform cultural standards. This endeavour should however not be seen as an intention to devalue the position of Caribbean dialects or of any other forms of cultural expression, but rather as a quest to highlight the centripetal function of language in the process of negotiating his hero's, and by extension all Caribbean migrants' integration in British society. As Birbalsingh explains, Braithwaite's migrant "battles for his humanity according to the brutal criteria of a value-system which tacitly acknowledges white standards of behaviour as superior" (Birbalsingh, 1968, 79). He

therefore consciously chooses to exhibit his eloquence to avoid accusations of deviating from the cultural standards accepted by the natives of the metropole. It can be argued that, seen from the vantage point of the early 1950s, this form of mimicry, in the sense described by Homi K. Bhabha (Bhabha, 1994), can be legitimately considered by Braithwaite as an acceptable strategy of deconstructing the dominant discourse of the metropole and of negotiating the migrant's position in its cultural space.

The narrative strategies adopted by the author, as well as the way he conceives his protagonist as a 'mimic man', to paraphrase V.S. Naipaul, attempt to create an image of what Anthony Richmond described in his 1954 *Colour Prejudice in Britain* as the "ideal migrant" with a "balanced personality", who refuses to succumb to his aggressive inclinations in response to ill-treatment by whites' (cited in Matti, 2019, 155). Therefore, Braithwaite's protagonist never responds to provocations, such as the derogatory remarks of his colleague, Weston, so that "to be on the safe side I decided I'd just not hear the things he said" (Braithwaite, 2014b [1959], 39). He sometimes even actively sabotages attempts to confront racism as when, in the debut of the novel, he decides to get off the bus when a woman refuses to sit next to him on the only available sit, thus de-escalating a tense racist situation. Such examples encapsulate Braithwaite's wider strategy of self-consciously presenting his protagonist as a non-threatening black male ever-willing to turn the other cheek (Matti, 2019, 154).

Implicit to this strategy however is the assumption that the prejudices to which he is exposed are unfairly directed towards him as an individual. Therefore, the protagonist assumes that finding the right solution for each disturbing situation, through a combination of personal qualities and skilful performance, should facilitate his social inclusion and provide recognition of his human qualities. He hopes that, by displaying standards of intelligence, eloquence, and cultivated behaviour that he is expected not to possess, he should succeed in dispelling the mythicized image projected over the entire Caribbean migrant community. What he really achieves is to win the respect of his colleagues, students, and people closely involved in the school life, which represents an auspicious starting point for dislodging the offensive misrepresentations of alterity attached to Caribbean immigrants. 'The good migrant' that Braithwaite represents in the novel acts as an agent of cosmopolitanisation, who facilitates communication and cultural exchange between migrants and natives who involve in direct interactional situations. Therefore, the narrative function of the counter-myth of the good migrant, which foregrounds the protagonist's personal qualities, social accomplishments, and willingness to integrate is to stimulate the emergence of cosmopolitan group attitudes, to create dialogic contact zones in spaces inhabited by both

migrants and natives, and to stimulate natives to change their vision and acknowledge how migrants really are instead of how anti-migrant myths intend to construct them.

Braithwaite's narrative strategy in *To Sir, With Love* to dispel alterity myths by distributing the exemplary migrant in the role of negotiator is also relevant for the representations of phenomena of social organisation and practices in school environment. As the school represents the pivotal point of the setting, the protagonist's performance in this milieu significantly impacts the way natives come to perceive Caribbean migrants. The novel's protagonist negotiates with patience, skill, and perseverance his status as a migrant teacher, turning the school into a contact zone, a space of contingency in which communication between migrants and natives can gradually be established.

The protagonist's initial contact with his students and colleagues reveals the school's role as an institution symbolising the stability and continuity of colonial values, therefore a space of separation. The image of colonial migrants that the British education system conveyed "was largely conditioned by the familiar caricature in books and films — a shiftless and indolent character, living either in a primitive mud hut or in the more deplorable shanty town, and meeting all life's problems with a flashing smile, a sinuous dance, and drum-assisted song" (Braithwaite, 2014b [1959], 66). Braithwaite himself, like many colonial migrants of the first generation, often experienced the consequences of stigmatisation; such derogatory, mythicized images about migrants as those depicted above proved successful in justifying the demarcation fault lines between natives and newcomers as natural. The message conveyed by such myths is that the sense of cultural exceptionalism associated with the colonial heritage must be preserved even when colonial subjects become a part of the metropolitan reality.

By calling attention to the idea of generational transmission of this mythology, which has conditioned several generations of British natives to reify colonial subjects as culturally inferior or infrahuman, Braithwaite encloses a commentary on the systemic propagation of anti-migrant myths via the education system. He contends that teachers and students alike adhere to such myths as a result of systematic exposure to the schooling apparatus: "It was not entirely their fault. They had been taught with the same textbooks that these children were using now, and had fully digested the concept that colored people [sic] were physically, mentally, socially and culturally inferior to themselves" (Braithwaite, 2014b [1959], 66). Therefore, the persistence of deeply entrenched convictions about Caribbean migrants' inferiority among the protagonist's students, often supported "with quotations from these school textbooks and from others of more recent vintage" (66), confirms Henry Tudor's idea that myths construct abstract images of migrants

as a group, regardless of the concrete experience with actual individuals in daily associations (Tudor, 1972, 17). Braithwaite's hero, however, strives to challenge this abstraction by using himself as example. The presence of a colonial migrant who does not match the mythical pattern challenges the "powerful […] written word that [made it] hard for them to disagree with what they had read" (66). But, instead of dispelling the myth, this challenge triggers more confusion among the students: "But, Sir, you're different" (66).

The transformations triggered by the protagonist's presence in the school can be interpreted as an incipient stage of a dialogical, cosmopolitan culture. His insistence on challenging his students and colleagues to cross the epistemological borders that myths uphold represents a crux in the relations between the groups these characters represent. The entire novel is actually structured around the metaphor of school as a liminal space that significantly figures what Homi Bhabha calls an "interrogatory, interstitial space" (Bhabha, 1994, 3), in which the conventional, deeply entrenched cultural representations and values of the in-group become unstable as a result of inter-cultural dialogue. By acknowledging the protagonist's integration in the school network, not as an exceptionally endowed migrant, in the sense intended by the author, but as an ordinary British-Caribbean subject assigned the role of teacher, his native students and co-workers unconsciously endorse the possibility of unblocking the ideological, but also ontological separation framed by migrant alterity myths.

Space, as a narrative trope, can represent a separation, but also a contact zone that facilitates a dialogue between migrants and natives, where cultural exchange can take place and migration myths can be challenged. The dialogue that the protagonist manages to initiate with his colleagues and pupils reveals that communication-as-interruption, in the sense theorised by Pinchevski, can represent "a point of exposure and vulnerability upon which the relation with the other may undergo profound transformation" (Pinchevski, 2005, 68). The school in *To Sir, With Love*, as a setting charged with symbolic value, is turned into an important narrative trope since it represents an institutional liminal space that facilitates the interaction between the migrant teacher and his native pupils and co-workers, where the uncanny can turn familiar, where the unknown 'other' can be identified as similar to the recognisable 'self'.

The clear intention to engage critically with the anti-migrant mythology affecting the relations between migrants and British natives transpiring in Braithwaite's debut novel, *To Sir, With Love*, persists in his second novel, *Paid Servant* (1962), as well. As in *To Sir, With Love,* Braithwaite assumes the role of narrator-protagonist, this time designated as Rick, and shares his experiences in London's Department of Child Welfare. In his new job and social position, Braithwaite's hero

assumes the role of a social worker commissioned with finding homes for London's orphaned, abused, or abandoned migrant children. The novel's core narrative is built around the case of Roddy Williams, a bright, handsome four-year-old boy whose adoption fails repeatedly because of prejudice and institutionalised racism. Various attempts to mediate Roddy's adoption expose Rick to racial prejudices and derogative judgements either targeting him directly, the children he assists, or the entire community of Caribbean migrants.

The environment the protagonist navigates in *Paid Servant* is imbued by a similar mythology as that depicted in *To Sir, With Love,* which intends to uphold the incompatible character of colonial migrants in British society. The myth professing that migrants are less intelligent due to genetic determinism transpires in a confrontation between Rick and his supervisor, Miss Wren, as she expresses concerns about Roddy's capacity to cope with the intellectual exigencies of a highly educated white family of potential adopters. In this dispute, Rick intends to dispel his supervisor's assumptions arguing that the intellectually stimulating atmosphere in the prospective adoptive home would provide Roddy "a real chance to develop" (Braithwaite, 2014a [1962], 80), but Miss Wren assumptively sanctions "the important effects of heredity in these matters" (80), which cannot be ignored. The trope of faulty heredity – "this child has bad blood" (81) – which Miss Wren expresses in connection to Roddy indicates the manifest and steady intention of a category of British natives to reify the hierarchical differentiation between colonial migrants and themselves, based on an essentialist tradition of categorising racially different migrants as inferior. Her concerns about Roddy's inferior intelligence are deeply entranced in what Rick decries as "a long history of being superior" (81). By this, the novel challenges the discursive conditioning of Britons to perceive migrants as an amorphous group of infrahuman, instead of interpreting independently each concrete case. This type of attitude is a characteristic example of how myth functions for an in-group; as Christopher Flood maintains, the authenticity of the myth's content is never doubted by members of the in-group who believe it (Flood, 2002, 8). Thus, for Miss Wren, upholding the social Darwinist-inspired prejudices that predefine the group to which Roddy belongs means "merely facing the facts" (Braithwaite, 2014a [1962], 81).

If the school in *To Sir, With Love* represents a flexible environment, prone to dialogue and transformation, the Department of Child Welfare's appears to epitomise the exigencies of a rigid, implacable bureaucratic system. Braithwaite depicts the characters in positions of authority in this institution as rather stereotypical; if Miss Wren was prejudiced about Roddy's intellectual capacity, another co-worker, Miss Coney, seems to be captive to the myth claiming that "Africans and West Indians in London […] feel about things like sex, quite different from the way we

English people feel" (Braithwaite, 2014a [1962], 4). She therefore implies that Roddy, if adopted in a white family who already has girls, would inevitably represent a sexual threat to his stepsisters as soon as they are teenagers. Rick intends to debunk this myth by placing himself again, an exceptional migrant, as evidence for the ability of Caribbean men to act in accordance with the most rigorous British norms of conduct. "Oh, no, Mr Braithwaite", Miss Coney replies to the insinuation that Rick was a Caribbean migrant as well, "you're different. You're an educated man, and I understand you've lived in England for many years" (Braithwaite, 2014a [1962], 8). It can thus be said that in his second novel, Braithwaite continues his struggle to convince British natives that migrants do not comply to mythical patterns by creating an exceptional character, inspired by his own experience, who is not very different in his entirety from native Britons.

If in his first novel Braithwaite presents almost exclusively his protagonist's perspective on events, in *Paid Servant* he diversifies his narrative strategies, juxtaposing the voices of various characters holding contrasting views about migration. In this novel, myths about British natives' superior culture and intellectual status shine through in several narrative situations in which natives and migrants interact. As Rick visits another potential adoptive family, he involuntarily witnesses a conversation among other visitors, all of them connected to art and theatre, on the topic of recent migration from the Commonwealth and its contribution to Britain's cultural advancement. The interlocutors are anonymised, which, together with the use of the expression "the general opinion is" (Braithwaite, 2014a [1962], 97), suggests that the attitudes and positions they express are representative for a wide group of British natives. The conversation reveals the 'general opinion' that the colonial migrants of the 1950s came from primitive cultures that could bring "no contribution to social progress […] as they come here from Africa, India, Pakistan, the West Indies, etc., where standards of work, education, artistic expression, are all considerably lower than ours […]" (98).

The myth professing migrants' cultural backwardness as expressed in this scene should be interpreted as part of a wider colonial tradition claiming that the cultures of the colonised are less worthy than those of the coloniser. In the essay *Decolonising the mind*, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o argues that the colonial mind-set involves two major aspects: "on the one hand, a deliberate undervaluation of all aspects of the indigenous cultures (e.g. art, dances, religions, orature and literature) and, on the other hand, the conscious elevation of the language of the coloniser" (Thiong'o, 2004 [1986], 1135). Thiong'o's critique is still applicable in the context depicted in *Paid Servant*, since the binary representation undervaluing the cultures from colonies, in the

manner expressed by Thiong'o, appears in the text as a construction that also persists in British social imaginary when colonial subjects start to settle in the metropole.

The fact that Rick is not included in the conversation can be interpreted as a metaphor for the exclusion of migrants from the world of the 'superior' culture of the metropole advocated by nativist discourses. Nevertheless, in *Paid Servant,* not all British native characters endorse this anti-migrant mythology. The dialogue between the anonymous characters is informed by antinomy, as suggested by the intervention of one of the anonymous interlocutors, whose perspective on migration challenges the orthodoxy of the British cultural hegemony myth embraced by most people involved in the conversation. In reaction to the nativist tenet purporting that the allegedly inferior migrant cultures represent a reason for exclusion, the anonymous interlocutor performs a deconstruction of the British cultural superiority narrative by interrogating the   validity of hierarchical arrangement of cultural standards based on principles inspired from cultural relativism, which contends that one culture should not be evaluated using the norms and values of another. The unnamed character, assuming a transgressive position to the 'general opinion', argues:

> 'How can you compare standards of artistic expression? Whoever the artist is, whether Academician or caveman, his only intention is to capture a fragment of truth, to freeze it as seen and recognized. This we try to do, each in his own way, interlacing a thread into the changing tapestry of life; and the colour of one's skin is no criterion of the colour, texture or durability of the threads contributed.' (Braithwaite, 2014a, 98)

The juxtaposition of antagonist perspectives in a dialogue between British characters upholding opposing opinions about cultural hierarchies has symbolic value. The native character who questions the validity of the 'general opinion' acts in this case as a generic transgressive character who displays willingness and capacity to question a myth that is solidly established in British social imaginary, even when this implies the prospects of losing a privileged position. The novel suggests by this that the hegemonic colonial discourse can be disrupted through active and honest dialogue, even when this dialogue is held between members of the native group. This narrative strategy is an illustrative example of efficient textual critique of migration myths done through the voice of native cosmopolitan agents who defy British nativist group positions, acting in the text as transgressive characters who successfully cross cultural and ideological mental borders. Such characters, by speaking on the behalf of migrants, act in the novel as mobilising agents in the

transformation of the metropole into a liminal space of peaceful "cohabitation" or "conviviality" (P. Gilroy, 2004, xi). [22]

The opposing perspectives may have a deconstructive function in this case, showing that the obsessive interest of nativist actors to present any form of difference as a reason to sustain an essentialised opposition of the 'us' versus 'them' type is unsustainable. This antagonism thus highlights the tension between the concepts of *difference* and *alterity* in the discursive construction of migrants. If the emphasis on *alterity* with reference to migrants implies a mythology that, based on the construction of an essentially different 'other', sustains exclusionary attitudes and hierarchical power structures, the idea of living with *difference,* in the sense promoted by Ulrich Beck (Beck, 2006), provides an alternative model that challenges this mythology. Braithwaite's first two novels, which are analysed in this section, despite being sometimes problematic with respect to their cultural assumptions and anti-racist textual strategies (Matti, 2019, 153), remain notable for their attempt to imagine an alternative, harmonious community and to challenge the British natives of the post-war period to accept their post-colonial reality, which was inevitably becoming multicultural.

It can be concluded that Braithwaite's *To Sir, With Love* and *Paid Servant* bring a significant contribution to the critique of the nativist mythology that insidiously contributed to the disenfranchisement of colonial migrants in the 1950s. The transformation of spaces into contact zones of dialogue and the influence over natives' way of perceiving migrants attained by the protagonists' performance in the novels, as well as the representations of certain British natives as agents of tolerance, diversity, and conviviality represent narrative strategies that recommend these novels as representative texts subscribing to the anti-nativist tradition promoted by the entire literature of the Windrush Generation.

4.2.4.2 Contesting the 'Barbarian' from the East in *The Road Home*

If E.R. Braithwaite's *To Sir, With Love* and *Paid Servant* are among the first novels depicting the experience of Windrush Generation immigrants in Britain, the novel *The Road Home* (Tremain, 2008) by Rose Tremain, first published in 2007, is one of the first literary responses in

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[22] I am using here Gilroy's definition of conviviality as describing not 'the absence of racism or the triumph of tolerance' (P. Gilroy, 2004) but rather 'the processes of cohabitation and interaction that have made multiculture an ordinary feature of social life in Britain's urban areas' (idem).

English literature[23] to the migration from Eastern Europe to Britain after the admission into the European Union of the East European countries. Comparable to Braithwaite's novels, *The Road Home* illustrates this migration in its incipient stage, when emerging diasporic and transnational migrant networks fuelled a spiralling of nativist attitudes, similar to those emerging during the 1950s, among a significant number of natives who tended to exaggerate the newcomers' number and cultural differences. Being Rose Tremain's first novel set in modern-day Britain[24], it captures with precision aspects of the reality of its time, which was heavily informed by the myth of a East European migrant invasion and scepticism to the European Union membership. In 2008, *The Road Home* won the Orange Prize, the panel arguing that "Tremain's insight into the experience of East European immigrants in the UK - one of the largest migration periods in history - had captured the nation's *zeitgeist*" (Totaro, 2008).

The novel's narrative revolves around the main protagonist, Lev, an East European migrant driven by bereavement and economic dire straits in an unnamed post-communist country, who tries to eke out a living in a bloated, sometimes hilariously superficial London. The top-down configuration of the novel's narrative (Tonkin, 2007) captures a sophisticated community of prominent chefs, salient musicians, and infatuated avant-garde artists, who, in a milieu pervaded by material plenty and emotional dearth, act condescendingly in relation to Easter European immigrants. The novel is thematically rich, dealing with loss and separation, dependence and self-reliance, community dissolved but also re-defined, identity (re)-configuration, discrimination and rejection, but also solidarity and a sense of cosmopolitan conviviality. The plot development overlaps with Lev's transformation as a character; the narrative is informed by a constant, peripatetic movement from the protagonist's native village to London, through the intricate spaces of the metropole where Lev has different jobs, to the asparagus fields of Eastern England, back to the city and eventually back to the protagonist's home country. These experiences supplement the hero's competences but also disclose what it really feels like to be an East European economic migrant in Britain in this particular time.

Tremain's novel captures with precision how rigid social norms and old prejudices entrenched in British postcolonial mind-set re-emerge in the new context, causing difficulties for East European migrants to integrate in British society and forcing them to perform the roles prescribed to them by society and its members. Comparable to Braithwaite's novels, *The Road Home* also engages in the debate over the role of migration myths in this context informed by intense

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[23] My investigation of the literature related to the topic could not reveal any examples of previous publications.
[24] All works published by Tremain since her debut in 1976 are historical novels.

interaction between natives and migrants. It is significant to notice that, unlike Braithwaite, whose novels are inspired by his personal experience as a migrant, Tremain gives expression to the migrant experience seen from the perspective of a native British author, who thus negotiates the effects of migration myths in British society on the behalf of immigrants. Through the convergence of various expressions and narrative perspectives, *The Road Home* conveys a complex picture about migration, challenging the influence of migration myths in the formation of nativist attitudes and foregrounding the function of dialogue, empathy, and tolerance in a context of expanding intercultural contact.

Some similarities that transpire when comparing representations of migrant alterity myths in Braithwaite's novels and *The Road Home* refer to the characters' positioning in various social contexts. Since in both cases the protagonists function as focalisers most of the time, they inextricably become involved in situations where the novels debate the position of the migrant in British society. The constellation of native characters created by Tremain revolves around Lev and is divided between those who uphold nativist views and those who are open towards cosmopolitan dialogue. A particularly interesting way of highlighting this disparity is the juxtaposition of characters according to patterns of social class. Throughout this vertical disposition of characters, to which Tonkin refers (Tonkin, 2007), Lev navigates his way between the cultural extremes of society, experiencing by turn the callous effects of nativist attitudes, which permeate the higher social strata, but also a comforting sense of inclusion and solidarity among representatives of British working class.

A symptomatic example of othering related to East European migrants is depicted when Lev meets Sophie's high-end friends. Intrigued by Lev's exoticism, Andy Portman, an infatuate playwright, intends to explain to him his "thesis on theatre" (119), which refers to "forcing people to look at their dark side" (120). As his mastery of English at that time is rather basic, Lev gets confused and replies rhetorically "Dark side?" (120), but Andy continues his condescending exposition about "the cutting edge" (121) character of British art. Andy's conduct transpires an obvious sense of superiority, nurtured by the conviction of belonging to a higher-ranking culture: "in your country, you've got a lot of catching up to do, art-wise" (121). He therefore concludes that intellectual subtleties such as "Stoppard and Frayn and their intellectual universes, (…) the clever-clogs vogue for whirling the play outside the societal and domestic space" (120) exceed Lev's sphere of understanding – "you probably wouldn't get it anyway" (120), which makes Lev draw the bitter conclusion: "This is how these people see me – as a turnip with no intelligence and no voice" (120). Andy Portman's attitude in this scene signifies a genuine conviction of a

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hierarchical classification of cultures, which, in his view, justifies the stereotyped perception of East European immigrants as a culturally inferior 'other'.

The binary division between the 'barbarian' and the 'civilised' native that can be derived from such narratives implies a constructed image, which, however, goes uncontested when entering the realm of myth. Since such 'truths' are no longer questioned by the agents adhering to the myth (Barthes, 1972, 143), images about the 'other' as inferior are conveyed and understood by myth adherents as a natural truth. The narrative portraying migrants' cultural primitiveness, which in *The Road Home* transpires from the attitude of high class Londoners towards Lev, represents a relevant example of how the mythology that intends to reify the image of East European immigrants as primitive attempts to simplify reality by reducing the representation of migrants to one-dimensional, dehumanised elements. Such representations as inferior and unintelligible (Nail, 2015, 54) are meant to push immigrants towards culturally peripheral positions in relation to the cultural centre that the metropole supposedly represents.

A significant feeling of peripherality is experienced again by Lev when attending the premiere of *Peccadilloes* at the Royal Court Theatre in Chelsea. Accompanied by Sophie, he makes another effort to integrate into London's elitist cultural space and "breath that rarefied, celebrated air" (Tremain, 2008, 201). Yet, the intermission of the play brings Lev's definitive and symbolic break with the British high culture, as he decides to polemicize on the topic of *Peccadilloes* with Howie Preece, a prominent art critic whose performance throughout the novel signifies the leitmotif of cultural antagonism between his and Lev's worlds. What Howie, along with Sophie and the audience consider "brilliant […] cutting edge" (201) art, Lev judges as obnoxious, absurd depiction of incestuous paedophilia; "it's shit" (201) he declaims, in defence of his position as father of a small girl. Lev's antagonist positioning projects him once again in the eyes of the local elite as the primitive 'other,' descended from, in Said's words, "the land of the barbarians" (Said, 2003 [1978], 54). If the previous attempt to access the sophisticated sphere of British high culture triggered Andy Portman's conclusion that former communist countries are culturally backward, this time Howie Preece reinforces the myth of a primitive cultural space when stating ironically: "Well, there's a downer for Andy! […] The man from a distant country thinks Peccadilloes is a piece of —" (Tremain, 2008, 210). Following Paul Gilroy's critique on the origins of contemporary British nativism (P. Gilroy, 2005), this form of 'othering' connoting East European migrants as primitive can be explained through the reflexes of representing colonial immigrants as inferior 'others' developed in the post-war migration period, and which is rooted in the colonial myth of racial hierarchies.

Lev's experience at the Royal Court Theatre, which illustrates the cultural arrogance specific to a category of British natives, has political implications that go beyond the concrete events. Lev starts to "lose touch with where he was" (211), leaving the theatre at intermission after a harsh fight with Sophie. His disruptive gesture signifies a rejection of the attributes of inferiority attached to him, which, as Thomas Nail contends, can be said to be all "kinopolitical designations since they naturalize the link between the geography, mobility, and political inferiority of the migrant" (Nail, 2015, 54). The perpetuation of a mythology that intends to naturalise such disparities hinders the possibility of establishing a dialogue between both individuals and cultures, making the interaction between natives and migrants to look like a game of keeping the 'barbarian' newcomers outside the metropolitan history and topography.

Nevertheless, despite including several native characters who endorse the heterosterotypes claiming a sense of cultural and intellectual inferiority of East European migrants', Tremain shows a clear intention to criticise the mythology upholding a binary division between British natives and newcomers. By this, she seems to suggest to her readers, particularly British ones, that theirs is not the only culture attaining the standards of artistic excellency. She therefore attempts to deconstruct the idea of cultural hierarchy by including in the constellation a series of characters original from Lev's country, either immigrants themselves or sophisticated cosmopolites, who, through their performance, destabilise the attempts to reify an image of East European cultures as primitive. On the bus trip to London, Lev meets Lydia, an English teacher with aspirations for the cultural high life, whom he befriends and who would later become pivotal in his integration in the new society. Lydia's youth friend, Larissa, a yoga teacher and art connoisseur who lives in London and is involved in transnational cultural networks, facilitates her connection with Pyotor Greszler, a "genius conductor" (Tremain, 2008, 63) and world-wide celebrated musician. As 'Maestro' Greszler was preparing a great concert at the London Festival Hall alongside the London Philharmonic Orchestra and "genius Mstislav Rostropovich" (91) as soloist for Elgar's cello concerto, Lydia would start working for him as an interpreter, since "Pyotor is quite old and his English is very bad" (61), and later become his mistress.

Lev is distributed in the role of connector between the two worlds of high culture, as he has access both to the universe of British postmodern art, high cuisine, and avant-garde theatre and to that of classical culture, associated with the elite of his own country. By juxtaposing symbols of the cultures from West and East, signified by the concert's programme, which includes Elgar and Rachmaninov, and by the association of British orchestra and East European conductor and soloist, the novel seems to suggest that a cosmopolitan dialogue is possible across cultures, when

differences are not considered as obstacles, but rather are accepted, valued, and converted into communication tools. Different cultural manifestations, the narrative of *The Road Home* implies, should not represent a terrain for contestation and judgement; the prevalent dialogic structure of the novel, as well as the stimulation of empathy towards migrant characters intend to challenge Andy Portman's presumptuous remark on the necessity of "a lot of catching up to do, art-wise" (121) by East European cultures. From his assumption that only innovative art can be considered valuable transpires a deterministic view about art and, since the British theatre of the twenty-first century subscribes to this pattern, this represents a reason to devalue other cultures. This attitude is criticised in the text through the employment of emphatic and pretentious language that caricaturises Andy's diatribe.

If certain migrant characters from Lev's country are depicted as integrated into the cosmopolitan cultural elite, the protagonist himself fails, however, to gain access to this world. Sophie, who attempts to introduce him in the intellectual circles of London avant-garde, proves to be an unsuccessful facilitator. Lydia's attempt also fails in similar way; when insisting that Lev should attend the concert conducted by Pyotor Greszler at the London Festival Hall, she unintentionally exposes him to a disturbing experience. Lev's presence in the concert hall, and symbolically his attempt to negotiate his place among the cultural elite, is disrupted, just when "the beautiful music was going to begin" (97), by the inopportune sound of his mobile phone, which the conductor construes as a sign of cultural incongruence: "'Mobile phones off'! he yelled. 'Please, please! No Barbarians in here" (98).

The protagonist's repeated failures to negotiate his integration in the upper class circles represent an interesting trope that Tremain employs in *The Road Home*, as this suggests an association of anti-migrant mythology with the values of the upper class. Cast between two antithetic worlds, Lev gradually learns to acknowledge his social condition - "I don't belong in those places," he said. "Muswell Hill. Festival Hall. That is not my world. I work in kitchen!" (94). Nevertheless, in contrast to the nativist attitudes of upper class characters, the novel also provides the perspectives of many reflector characters belonging to the British working class, who resist the influence of myths professing the alterity of East European migrants. In the environment representing the base of the vertical axis mentioned by Tonkin (Tonkin 2007), namely the British working class culture of the early 2000s, Lev succeeds in negotiating successfully the mythology that kept him outside the social fabric of the British elite. After receiving a kitchen dish washer job and entering "the English proletariat" (Tremain, 2008, 67), he meets Christy Slane, a divorced Irish plumber who resents his upwardly mobile ex-wife and pines for his daughter by whom he,

just like Lev, was reluctantly separated. Lev rents the room left available in Christy's house after the divorce, but their relationship develops beyond mere tenancy terms. Although lacking the refinement of Sophie's friends and being himself a character marked by obvious flaws, Christy turns out to be a successful cultural mediator, in the sense expressed by Greenblatt (Greenblatt et al., 2009, 251), acting in the novel as a character who displays empathy towards Lev and a genuine interest in the cultural space of his native country.

The cultural transfer signified by the relationship between Lev and Christy is non-hierarchical and bi-directional since they display equal interest in learning about each other's personal experiences and cultural practices. Through this relation, the novel seems to suggest the possibility of cosmopolitan conviviality among representatives of the working class in a globalised world, in the form of what Pnina Werber termed as "demotic cosmopolitanism" (Werbner, 2008, 12), which implies an approach 'from below' in the construction of fruitful migrant-native relations. If Lev failed to integrate in the cultural elite, he establishes a successful dialogue with working class native British, which is informed by a sense of conviviality built on "empathy, toleration and respect for other cultures and values" (Werbner, 2008, 2). Forced to leave the kitchen job in GK Ashe's restaurant, Lev moves later in the novel to Suffolk to work in Longmire Farm for the summer season, where he succeeds in extending his multicultural network. The friendship he develops here with Midge Midgham, the farm owner embodying the archetype of British rural working class, is another example of successful interaction between natives and migrants informed by working class solidarity.

This relationship, as well as the later example of Lev's successful integration among British colleagues and service users at the at Fernandale Heights elderly home where he obtains a kitchen chef job, signify the novel's proclivity for representing instances of an emerging cosmopolitan culture from below in the early 2000s in Britain. The celebration of trans-cultural working class solidarity can be interpreted as a comment that Tremain makes on the rather positive perspective on labour immigration to Britain informing the first decade of the twenty-first century. Encouraged by the permissive policies of the Labour administration during 1997 and 2010, which allowed a significant number of migrants from Eastern Europe to live and work in Britain, immigration became in this period a driver for Britain's economic development (Geddens & Scholten, 2016, 36), as well as an important factor in the emergence of the original form of British multiculturalism to which Ashcroft and Bevir refer (Ashcroft & Bevir, 2019, 26).

Nevertheless, the juxtaposition of elitist British values and those of working class subscribes to the novel's overall binary structure, creating a narrative frame that facilitates a critique of the anti-

migrant mythology pervading the British upper class. This way, the novel succeeds in criticising the attempts of the cultural elite to confiscate the definition of Britishness, which in this case subscribes to a mythical pattern of cultural normativity and ethnic homogeneity. If E.R. Braithwaite's novels insist on the critique of anti-migrant mythology by claiming the rights of colonial migrants to be a part of a standard, narrowly defined Britishness, in *The Road Home,* a novel published half a century later, we encounter a conflict between two antithetic views on Britishness. The anachronistic, nativist perspective intending to reduce the nation to a community defined by rigid cultural conventions and standards is opposed by a more liberal, inclusive view, which opens the concept of national identity towards the incorporation of elements from different ethnical or social subcultures. It is in this cosmopolitan space, inhabited by the Muslim kebab shop owner Ahmed, the British-African kitchen co-worker Simone at Fernandale Heights elderly home, or the Irish plumber, Christy Slane, that myths which sustain migrants' alterity are successfully negotiated. Such characters, by expressing an unprejudiced perspective on migration, function in the text as intermediaries between cultures, as well as agents facilitating the integration of immigrants like Lev.

The constellation of characters, as well as the relations establishing among them in *The Road Home,* may be said to reflect the structure and functioning of British society in the first decade of the 21st century, similar to how *To Sir, With Love* and *Paid Servant* depict the realities of the 1950s. This comparison, however, is informed by significant particularities determined by the specific socio-historical contexts that the novels depict, as well as by their aesthetic features. The semantisation of the cultural space in Braithwaite's novels is informed by uniformity, as they convey the idea that, for avoiding discrimination, it was desirable for colonial migrants to adopt the conventions of what was generally accepted as the official British cultural standards. The adoption of this strategy was conditioned by the author's propensity for acculturation but also by the inchoate multiculturalism informing the British society of that era. By contrast, the social-historical reference frame in which *The Road Home* anchors its narrative bears the signs of decades of the post-war multiculturalism and the societal transformations it has engendered.

The vantage point from which Tremain negotiates the mythology that intends to keep migrants outside the British cultural space is therefore characterised by a more flexible vision of Britishness. It can be said that, to a certain extent, the myth of the culturally and ethnically homogeneous 'motherland' governing the relations between British natives and the colonial migrants in the 1950s is juxtaposed in the early 2000s with the myth of a 'new Britain', which, under the influence of constant influx of new migrants, developed into a more cosmopolitan,

pluralist, and inclusive society. Braithwaite himself can be said to have contributed, alongside the other Caribbean writers and producers of the *Caribbean Voices* programme on BBC World Service[25], to this broader understanding of Britishness as we know it today and which is comprehensively depicted in *The Road Home*.

The openness towards a wider definition of Britishness and cultural diversification is also noticeable in the type of language Tremain employs. At the textual level, language functions in *The Road Home* as a means of empowerment and participation, as well as a constitutive force in the creation of a demotic cosmopolitan milieu. If Braithwaite uses standard English to resist the centrifugal forces of working-class English and Caribbean dialects, thus sustaining, for reasons already discussed, the same narrow definition of Britishness as that promoted by the myth of British cultural superiority, Tremain deploys narrative strategies that position varieties and dialects of English on equal footing with standard English. The form of *heteroglossia* informing the narrative of *The Road Home,* realised through the inclusion of international English, spoken by all migrant characters, of the Irish dialect used by Christy Slane, or of various working class dialects, as those spoken by Midge Midgham or Simone, facilitates the construction of polyphonic narratives by which the novel deconstructs the myth of a unifying, homogeneous British culture. In Tremain's novel, the omniscient third person narrator uses standard English throughout the novel, but the dialogues involving migrants and members of the local working class capture the dialectic particularities of their cultural and social background. Christy Slane's use of Irish English, which is signalled through an authorial comment on his pronunciation - "I'm Christy. I'm Irish, in case you hadn't noticed. Baptised Christian, but that was too much to bear, too much of a yoke" (Tremain, 2008, 69) – is a representative example in this sense. The phonetic peculiarity which confuses Lev is hinted at by the author's explanation - "he hadn't understood all of what Christy Slane had been saying" (69). Other examples of *heteroglossia* are textually represented, as in the dialogue between Lev and Simone at Fernandale Heights elderly home: "Ma Vig didn't know nuvvin' about cookin'," she said. "Dunno why she got this job, because she didn't deserve it" (305).

Perhaps the most suggestive use of *heteroglossia* refers to the menu that Lev creates at Fernandale Heights together with Simone. The language they use in describing the courses

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[25] The show has contributed, according to James Procter (Procter, 2021), to the creation of a Caribbean cultural identity through the promotion of aspiring authors such as Samuel Selvon, Edward Kamau Brathwaite, V. S. Naipaul, Derek Walcott, John Figueroa, Andrew Salkey, Michael Anthony, Edgar Mittelholzer, or Sylvia Wynter. Many of these integrated into their work Caribbean dialects or creole as innovative literary techniques, thus challenging the status of standard English and legitimising the inclusion of varieties and dialects of English from the colonies in the English literary canon.

implies a juxtaposition of terms that Lev transfers from GK Ashe's high class kitchen jargon and colloquial words that make the meaning of the linguistic structures accessible to all residents:

> Wickedly lovely free-range chicken breast stuffed with mushrooms, shallots and herbs, served with a totally brilliant juice, or
>
> Chef's fantastic fish gratin with zero bones and non-crap crumb, and
>
> Choice of non-frozen broccoli or beans or both if you want
>
> Crème brûlée jacket by Chef from a recipe at GK Ashe, or
>
> Watermelon sorbet with no black seeds or rubbish in it (Tremain, 2008, 325)

The merging of terms from high-end cuisine lingo into everyday English represents an eloquent image of the positive effect of cultural diversity; the native residents of the institution, a signifier of tradition and homogeneity, find the menu as "a lot of fun" (327). The atmosphere in the institution becomes more cheerful and "the more extreme the language, the more the ancient occupants of Fernandale Heights liked it. It was as if the language gave the dishes savour" (325). Lev captures in an inspired sentence the ethos of the place: "in the new menus we try to describe how everything is fresh" (326). This freshness, either if referring to linguistic innovation or cultural hybridisation, signifies a mode of challenging, at the textual level, the monopoly of standard English in literary production, but equally suggests the societal transformations migration brings and the fact that Britain has become culturally heterogeneous.

Tremain distributes her protagonist in a role that allows him to occupy such pluralistic spaces, where the exploration of new cultural and personal experiences is instrumental for his evolution and integration. Lev, however, is not depicted as a passive character in his milieu, but he constantly attempts, through a combination of adjustment and persistence, to bend it to his will, to convert the cultural gap between migrants and natives into an accessible "third space" (Bhabha, 1994, 56). Lev's performance in the kitchens of GK Ashe's high-end restaurant or Fernandale Heights elderly home, as well as in the asparagus fields of Longmire Farm, may epitomise diligence, dedication, and loyalty; in similar way, by helping Christy to fight alcoholism and re-build the relationship with his daughter, or by supporting Vitas, a co-national young worker who struggles to integrate with the team at GK Ashe's restaurant, Lev displays commitment, strength, and altruism. This manner of character construction represents a sustainable counteraction of nativist myths, which, by constructing an image of migrants as de-humanised, inferior strangers, attempt to justify the impossibility of dialogue between individuals and cultures. It can be said that Tremain, like Braithwaite, portrays Lev as a character who subscribes to a multitude of positive stereotypes usually associated with myth of the 'good migrant'.

Nevertheless, unlike Braithwaite's protagonist, who embodies the struggle of exemplary individuals challenging nativist prejudices and attitudes, Lev is nothing of the hero who transforms the people he meets or the places he inhabits through irrefutable argumentation, display of eloquence, or utmost moderation. Moreover, he refuses to acquiesce to the normative narrative claiming the superiority of British cultural standards conveyed by characters such as Andy Portman or Howie Preece. Tremain's protagonist is more hesitant, wavering between acknowledging the differences between him and locals - "I don't belong in those places. […]. That is not my world." (94), although never endorsing attributes of alterity, and negotiating the repressed position in which prejudiced natives intend to place him. Through this convincing depiction of her protagonist, Tremain elevates the subject of migrant integration beyond its outlines by making Lev not a statistic or a caricature or the standard-bearer of a trend, but simply a fully embodied being. His noble, as well as ignoble acts are presented without exaggeration, without excessive praise or condemnation. The myth of the good migrant in *The Road Home* is not constructed through a display of indisputable personal qualities and constant accomplishments as in Braithwaite's novels, but it takes the form of a narrative of achievements that are the result of arduous work, perseverance, and a realistic sense of negotiating one's position in society. Lev becomes a successful, respected chef, who takes control of his own life by opening his own restaurant. Nevertheless, above his personal achievements lies the process of becoming, with his responses, either adequate or imperfect, to the challenges he encounters throughout the story, and this is what makes him a reliable protagonist.

The overall dual narrative structure of *The Road Home* informs greatly the representation of the setting, as well. Lev perceives Britain as a space pervaded by contradictions, whose inhabitants are disposed on a vertical coordinate delineating the society's divisiveness. In this context, physical and social mobility becomes a recurrent trope, as Lev has to navigate an uncanny topography, being tossed between Lydia's temporary high end residence in Muswell Hill and his rented room in Turnfell Park, between the exclusive restaurant of Clerkenwell and the asparagus fields of Suffolk, or between the sophisticated Royal Court Theatre in Chelsea and a common fair on the beaches of Silverstrand, where he spends a weekend together with Christy and his daughter. Lev engages in negotiating his position in these spaces and becomes aware that places associated with British cultural elite are pervaded by a culture of rejection and division, which makes them inaccessible to labour migrants like himself. The idea of a transgressive cultural crossover, or of entry into the living space of the 'other', be it physical or cultural, is therefore represented in *The Road Home* through interactions at the micro level, in spaces inhabited by

native characters with propensity to regard the migrant as a complex individual, informed both by qualities and flaws, however, a real human and not a mythical construction. Christy Slane's house in Turnfell Parks is such a location, being inconspicuously situated "on the shaded side" (67) of Belisha Road, a street "with choky little houses" (67) where "the pavement was cracked and lumpy and stained" (67). The house's interior is also humble, with "bare minimum of furniture" (68), which allows Lev to identify himself as an insider within the metropolitan working class subculture, where the intimacy of the space and the class camaraderie generate a liminal contact zone that facilitates social inclusion and cultural pluralism.

Lev experiences a similar sense of acceptance each time he visits Ahmed's kebab shop or Panno's Greek tavern, where the trope of multicultural gastronomy plays an important role in facilitating cultural exchange and contact across ethnic, religious, or class boundaries. Furthermore, Longmire Farm in Suffolk functions as a liminal contact zone in which native characters cohabit cordially with migrant workers. The close interaction between Midge Midgham and his migrant employees while working together or socialising stimulates a sense of commonality beyond the myths and stereotypes which Lev found to be prevalent in places occupied by the cultural elite. Midge, unlike Andy Portman or Howie Preece, sees Lev's human and professional qualities that make them similar, instead of focusing on or exaggerating potential differences between them. Such attitudes of mutual acceptance and cultural exchange turn Longmire Farm into a symbolic convivial space. The evenings Lev and Midge spend together in Midge's dining-room are depicted as a ritual of reciprocal recognition, which is built around mugs of tea and shots of vodka, pop music that both like, and countless anecdotes from their past. Midge's utterance "Sorry to lose yew, I am" (264), when Lev decides to move on at the end of the farming season, signifies not just the disappointment for losing a competent co-worker, but also functions as a recognition of the value that cross-cultural contact may add to people's life quality.

The association of liminal spaces with characters in *The Road Home* suggests that such milieus that facilitate contact and dialogue may stimulate British natives to transgress epistemological boundaries upholding nativist ideas and attitudes. By providing extensive focalisation on such spaces, Tremain seems to specialise in creating inclusive worlds for her migrant characters to inhabit. All these milieus that facilitate migrant inclusion and cosmopolitan conviviality, as well as the prevalence of unprejudiced native characters inhabiting them, suggest that Britain in the early twenty-first century, despite the resistance displayed by a category of its inhabitants, is a society prepared to acknowledge its multicultural condition.

The prevalent dual structure of the novel and, above all, the duality of the protagonist, works in *The Road Home* as a trope for the possibility of constructing a European identity in the sense expressed by Ulrich Beck, in which cosmopolitanism becomes a reality of European consciousness (Beck, 2006, 11), which, in the frame when the novel was written, (still) had relevance in British context. The juxtaposition of liminal spaces of dialogue and hermetic spaces of exclusion in the novel corresponds to the expression of two essential myths that significantly informed the reality of the early 2000s in Britain; on the one hand, the myth of a united, inclusive, and cosmopolitan Europe and the myth of British exceptionalism (P. Gilroy, 2005), one heavily nurtured by parochial nationalism, on the other hand. Through the high frequency of these antithetic representations, Tremain, along with other British scholars and fiction authors of her generation, seems to suggest that the emergence of a cosmopolitan community is an intricate and thorny process that the British society underwent at the beginning of the 2000s.

4.2.5 Conclusion

This chapter has investigated several literary responses to the propagation within British society of myths claiming that immigrants from former Caribbean colonies and from Eastern Europe represent a form of cultural alterity that makes them incompatible with the allegedly superior British culture. The circulation of such myths in connection with the migrations investigated in this study succeeded in raising a generalised feeling of rejection in connection to migration and immigrants. Building on colonial discourse, which deems colonial subjects as intellectually and culturally inferior, infra-human barbarians, migrant alterity myths transfer this way of perception into the context of migration to Britain. They construct derogatory images about immigrants with various cultural backgrounds, which prove to be influential in the way many Britons relate to migration in the entire post-war period.

A significant number of novels about Windrush Generation and East European migrations take a dim view of these myths, as presented in this chapter. Among these, E.R. Braithwaite's *To Sir, With Love* and *Paid Servant,* as well as Rose Tremain's *The Road Home,* represent suggestive examples of novels engaging with myths about migrant alterity. These novels negotiate myths that intend to isolate migrants from the local community and uphold the idea of a 'natural' severance between the native in-group and the migrant out-group, exposing them as unreliable and artificial discursive constructions. Narratives that overemphasize migrants' alterity are incorporated in the

texts through specific narrative techniques that the authors deploy, such as depiction of nativist characters' actions and attitudes and institutionalised practices of migrant discrimination and rejection. Nevertheless, the novels display a clear tendency to challenge such discursive constructions of a migrant 'other' and persistently reassert the contingency of their frames of meaning. The narrative structure of the novels, as well as the employment of specific narrative strategies and literary devices, enable a re-evaluation of the image of the migrant, providing alternatives to that of an incomprehensible stranger and a societal threat.

The analysis performed in this chapter highlights how the novels in focus engage critically with migrant alterity myths, underlining both diegetic and contextual similarities, but at the same time, acknowledging specific features that are distinctive for each case. All three novels follow similar narrative structure, as, after moving to Britain, the protagonists struggle to integrate into a society which they had expected to be open and tolerant. Despite the legal status and a generalised demand of migrant labour force, in both cases the protagonists find themselves cast in positions of social and cultural periphery and are compelled to negotiate their integration. These novels equally manage to depict comprehensively the ethos of their age, one informed by ideological divisions between natives who reject and those who favour migration.

When comparing these novels, a series of particularities can also be noticed, generated by the context of their production, as well as by stylistic features. Braithwaite's novels are autobiographical, thus highly influenced by his personal migrant experience. This does not apply in Tremain's case, as her work does not subscribe to the tradition of literature written by migrant authors. Despite these distinctions, an important feature that connects these novels is the common underlying logic of the major theme the authors choose to negotiate, which is the tension caused by the co-existence of nativist and cosmopolitan positions among British natives. By employing similar narrative strategies, such as highlighting the resemblance between native British characters and migrant characters and increased focus on instances of cultural compatibility, the analysed novels by and large succeed in deconstructing the image of the migrant 'other', which anti-migrant myths attempt to reify. Both Braithwaite and Tremain build their protagonists as transgressive characters who, through their performance, promote a sense of defamiliarization and provoke the readers to experience new and different perspectives on migration and the possibility of a pluralistic, cosmopolitan vision of the world.

4.3 Migrant Invasion Myths

4.3.1 Preliminaries

Race relations and immigration after the second World War have consistently represented an important topic of social and political debate in Britain. However, a particular event marked profoundly and irreversibly the way British natives relate to migration, turning immigration from "just another political issue to *the* issue which dominated politics and the media" (Walker, 1977, 109) for decades: the speech that Enoch Powell delivered at the meeting of the Conservative Political Centre in Birmingham on the 20th of April 1968 (Powell, 1968). The gloomy vision about Britain's future he pictured in the speech encapsulated the tensions and anxieties accumulated over the two decades since the first Windrush Generation migrants settled and equally set the ground for future developments, influencing the vision of many British natives, as well as the development of official policies regarding migration. Even though the phrase from Virgil's *Aeneid* that made the speech famous, which also inspired its title – "As I look ahead, I am filled with foreboding; like the Roman, I seem to see "the River Tiber foaming with much blood" (Powell, 1968, n. pag.) – is considered by many to have been the key to Powell's successful rhetoric, other commentators (Atkins & Finlayson, 2013; Crines, Heppell, & Hill, 2016) consider that the rhetorical tool that had had the strongest impact on Powell's audience was the anecdote about the old lady from Wolverhampton.

> Eight years ago in a respectable street in Wolverhampton a house was sold to a Negro (sic). Now only one white (a woman old-age pensioner) lives there. This is her story. She lost her husband and both her sons in the war. So she turned her seven-roomed house, her only asset, into a boarding house. She worked hard and did well, paid off her mortgage and began to put something by for her old age. Then the immigrants moved in. With growing fear, she saw one house after another taken over. The quiet street became a place of noise and confusion. Regretfully, her white tenants moved out. (Powell, 1968, n. pag.)

This is how Powell describes in dramatic terms a situation that was far from real. The story he presented was a fabrication, but this had little importance; what mattered in that time, and we still notice its consequences today, was the myth that Powell articulated. The powerful narrative delivered in dramatic language, an essential feature that, as Henry Tudor contends, makes myths believable, (Tudor, 1972, 17), was not just believed by Powell's followers, but it has simply engrained in the collective subconscious the idea that Britain was under assault. The myth of a migrant invasion, which had been brewing for years, was now articulated, consolidated, and put to work.

This chapter performs a critical analysis of representations in the selected primary sources of the myths claiming that Britain is subject to a migrant invasion. Section 4.3.2 examines the most significant patterns of constructing migrant invasion myths, which recurrently disseminate narratives claiming that the territory of the motherland is insidiously infiltrated by foreign incomers who occupy the living space of the natives, take over jobs, social positions, and privileges, such as welfare benefits or medical care, which should be reserved for natives. The following section (4.3.3) investigates representations of these myths in the entire corpus, signalling the continuity of the invasion mythology throughout the social-historical periods that the texts address.

The last section (4.3.4) proceeds to scrutinizing the aesthetical expressions by which migrant invasion myths are denounced in two representative novels: *Small Island* (Levy, 2004)*,* by second generation Caribbean immigrant Andrea Levy and *Perfidious Albion* (Byers, 2018) by contemporary English author Sam Byers*.* Both novels explore the anxieties that arise among natives when immigrants from the Caribbean after World War II (Levy) and from Eastern Europe in the post-Brexit years (Byers), respectively, struggle to integrate in local British communities. Imbued with *zeitgeisty* energy, these novels capture the implacable emergence of nativism among a category of British natives who perceive the act of migrant settlement as a claim to their domestic space and a threat to the social, moral, and economic order of their community. Through artful development of intertwining subplots, depiction of complex, situationally adaptive characters, and ingenious employment of narrative techniques and aesthetic devices, both novels provide a trenchant critique of the mythology that projects an aura of besieged fortress over British local communities, thus raising awareness about the dangers that the perpetuation of such mythology in British social imaginary represents.

4.3.2 Unpacking the Migrant Invasion Myths

In many texts analysed in this study, fear about a migrant takeover of the physical and symbolic space of the metropole represents a major topic of contention. Literary representations of instances of interaction between migrants and British natives capture meticulously the intricate mechanisms leading to the creation and dissemination of a mythology that exaggerates the proportions and the effects of migration over the native society. The analysed novels rebuke myths professing an alleged invasion of the motherland in numerous narrative situations in which

certain native characters express concerns about the societal transformations caused by immigration, debunking recurrent narratives which spread fear that areas in which immigrants settle would be transformed into alien territories.

The myth of a migrant invasion threatening to take over the national territory and destabilise social order, in the way professed by Powell, proved to be an efficient instrument exploited by nativist actors to produce moral panic and a sense of besieged fortress in both historical periods addressed in this study. Such official statements have significantly contributed to endorsing a powerful mythology claiming that the infiltration of migrants in the national territory represents an existential threat, which justifies the need to defend against such intrusions. The rhetoric of the invasion myth has recurrently tapped into the feelings of those natives who tend to fetishize the national territory and imagine it in terms of a "sanctuary that deserves to be defended" (Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2002), thus coagulating strong anti-migrant sentiments and justifying nativist attitudes.

The increased immigration ensuing the adoption of BNA 1948, as well as the EU extension in 2004, triggered overstated anxieties among a large sector of the British native population in what concerns its impact on local society, as previously discussed in Chapter 3.3 of this thesis. In both cases, immigration was perceived differently by various groups of the native population, but the generalised popular perception was that too many immigrants were allowed into the country and this fuelled the belief that immigration was at an unprecedented levels (De Haas, 2005). The adherence to this narrative and the alarmist feeling accompanying it generated the belief that the country was exposed to a migrant invasion of an exceptional magnitude, which threatened the national territory, as well as the ethnic and cultural structure of the nation.

A major trope that the novels negotiate, one infusing urgency and immediacy in the invasion narrative, is the notion of home. Although often depicted through the imagery of a house or a neighbourhood, as concrete living spaces, the concept of home is detached in nativist imaginary from its real location, connoting a sacralised dimension in which the connection between dwellers and space manifests through ritualistic acts meant to prevent any intrusion of alien elements. This way of perceiving home is inextricably linked to the sense of belonging to a cultural space of identitarian comfort in which immigrants "must appear as antinomies to an orderly working of state and society" (Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2002, 309). In illustration of this widespread perspective, the texts depict many instances in which the settlement of migrants in communities inhabited by British natives, either as tenants or as house owners, is deplored by native dwellers as

an invasion that disturbs the nearly mystical ethnic, social, and cultural cohesion of British society.

Besides the anxiety produced by a presumable overtaking of living spaces by immigrants in a context already affected by the hysteria of housing shortages in Britain, the panic about a migrant invasion can also be connected to narratives expressing concerns about local communities' social cohesion and economic security. The debate about immigrants' housing and welfare entitlements, especially in periods of increased immigration as those representing the backdrop of this study, was commonly held in terms that mystified reality, constructing an image about immigrants that ranged between unintegrated aliens and downright swindlers who deliberately migrate to drain the British system of social security (Finney & Simpson, 2009; Hayter, 2004). Such beliefs have coagulated the myth that immigrants destroy the isomorphism between people and community-as-solidarity-group, since they "are not meant to be part of the system of social security (…), because they come 'from outside' into the national space of solidarity" (Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2002, 309). This myth has been highly politicised, serving the promotion of what Cas Mudde called a welfare-chauvinistic agenda (Mudde, 2012, 12), which claims that welfare programmes should exclusively be the privilege of the natives. This myth builds the argument that the country's resources are limited, therefore a migrant invasion of the proportions Britain was experiencing jeopardises the access of natives to the welfare privileges to which they are entitled.

In addition, matters concerning the social cohesion and economic wellbeing of local communities in the context of an alleged migrant invasion materialised in the proliferation of narratives claiming that immigration engenders unfair competition on the job market. The widely believed myth that immigrants take jobs away from natives has had a strong impact, especially among the British working class, producing unjustified fear and a sense of threat concerning the availability of jobs for locals (Hayter, 2004). True or not, the mere perception of a causal connection between immigration and economic and social insecurity professed by this myth represents one of the important factors behind the high prevalence of anti-migrant sentiments and attitudes. As James Walvin contends, like in many other situations, "myth can prove as influential as reality, when enough people come to believe that the immigrants and their descendants are the cause of prevailing social and economic problems" (Walvin, 1984, 144), and a large segment of the British population, in moments when it conjectured that its privileges were threatened, has shown proclivity towards favouring emotionally backed explanations over rational arguments.

Speculations about an alleged debasement of natives' social and economic prerogatives and the privileging of immigrants have also engendered the narrative that a certain category of politicians

are responsible for the so-called migrant invasion in Britain. The contexts created by the adoption of the BNA, which favoured immigration from the colonies, as well as Britain's accession to the European Community in 1973, which granted free movement of labour for European citizens were interpreted in nativist circles as a betrayal of the political elites (Geddens & Scholten, 2016; Hansen, 2000; Walvin, 1984). Although Britain's commitment to these legal conventions compelled the authorities to secure equal status to immigrants on the labour market and in terms of welfare services, this was perceived by some members of the majority group as confirmation of their fears about having their social and economic security jeopardised. Such suspicions, strongly nurtured by populist politicians like Powell and Farage, as well as by tabloids such as *The Sun*, the *Daily Star*, or the *Daily Mirror* (Threadgold, 2009), have favoured the spread of the myth that an alleged migrant invasion of Britain was happening with the tacit consent of political leaders and economic elite. The effects of this myth were not only felt in the dynamics of community relations at neighbourhood scale, but they equally inflected the course of British politics. Among the results were the advent of populist politicians in the forefront of British politics, the adoption of restrictive migration policies, and Britain's exit from the European Union.

4.3.3 Albion Under Assault. An Overview of Migrant Invasion Myths in the Novels

The emergence of a migrant invasion myth is connected to the overlapping crises that Britain was undergoing in the aftermath of World War 2, as the reconstruction effort after the war and the restructuring of economy and society represented painful experiences that affected all strata of British society. At the same time, these processes were happening simultaneously with the readjustment of the international political order, which involved the dissolution of the colonial empire and a reassessment of Britain's position in the world. The colonial ethos, however, deeply ingrained in the collective mentality, professed the idea that British colonialism was not a form of invasion or intrusion in the colonies. The arrival of immigrants, which was facilitated by the adoption of the BNA of 1948, triggered instead a defensive rhetoric which described migration in terms of a menacing invasion. Many British natives, who had been educated to view their reality through the lenses of imperial power and to act accordingly, found it disconcerting to "now accept former colonial subjects as their social equals and near neighbours" (Walvin, 1984, 135).

The tensions already permeating the relations between migrants and locals from the moment of the first arrivals in the 1950s were also skilfully speculated by populist politicians who channelled

the popular discontent towards immigrants. This way, they succeeded in articulating a mythology that has ever since explained and justified the hardships Britain was facing. As James Walvin claims, nativist populist politicians like Powell, or UKIP prominent figures in recent years, "studiously chose [their] timing and topics […] to tap the deep wells of popular racial antipathy" (Walvin, 1984, 133). Claims made by political leaders, which can only be justified by opportunistic cynicism, have contributed to reinforcing the mythical narratives about an alleged migrant invasion. Previous to Powell's shocking speech in 1968, conservative MP, Peter Griffiths, had won the seat in the industrial West Midlands constituency of Smethwick during the 1964 general elections on the racist slogan "If you want a nigger for a neighbour, vote Labour" (Geddens & Scholten, 2016, 26). In similar manner, the UKIP party leader, Nigel Farage, declared in 2014 that he would not be happy if Romanians moved in next door to him (31).

Emerging initially from in the context of migration from British colonies after World War II, the invasion mythology was integrated into a coherent nativist discourse, which is sometimes described as Powell's legacy (Earle, 2018; Sweney, 2018) and which was suggestively encapsulated in one of Enoch Powell's statements:

> From these whole areas the indigenous population, the people of England, who fondly imagine that this is their country and these are their home towns, have been dislodged. (…) I do not believe it is in human nature that a country, and a country such as ours, should passively watch the transformation of whole area which lie at the heart of it into alien territory. (Quoted in Sinfield, 1989, 149)

Such alarmist approaches to migration, which intentionally inflict a sense of panic in the face of an imagined foreign aggression are skilfully denounced in many novels that this study analyses. In the following, this section provides an overview of representative cases of myths that are extracted from the novels and grouped in the typology of migration myths under the category of migrant invasion myths.

The narrative that too many immigrants were coming to Britain was already spreading after the first arrivals of Caribbean migrants, thus fuelling the myth that immigration implies an invasion of the country. Sam Selvon, one of the most representative authors of the Windrush Generation, exposes in *The Lonely Londoners* (Selvon, 2006 [1956]) the absurdity of this myth through ironical comments expressed in the text through the authorial voice:

> And this sort of thing was happening at a time when the English people starting to make rab about how too much West Indians coming to the country (…), and big discussion going on in parliament about the situation (…) to clamp down on the boys or to do anything drastic like stop them from coming to the Mother Country. But big headlines in the papers every day, and whatever the newspaper and the radio say in this country, that is the people Bible. (Selvon, 2006 [1956], 2)

Selvon's comment expressed in this fragment captures utterly the atmosphere of the epoch in which Caribbean immigrants were perceived by some members of the local community as a threat, also providing a pertinent explanation of the sources generating the invasion myth. Myth scholarship argues that the mythological system of a society is in part spontaneously generated by its members and in part shaped and directed by opinion makers, such as authorities, political leaders, or the mass media (Bottici, 2007; Guevara, 2016). In line with this view, Selvon suggests that the myth of a migrant invasion emerged in Britain based on emotional impulses, as fear permeated the masses when immigration was constructed in scaremongering terms by the populist mass media.

A similar comment on the manner the migrant invasion myth emerges and is disseminated can be found in Laura Wilson's *The Riot* (Wilson, 2013). The main headline 'The Coloured Invasion', which the protagonist, inspector Stratton, reads on the front page of the *Black and White News* encapsulates the narrative that, as the leader of the *White Defence League* and author of the article claims, "we are merely reflecting the views of a sizeable – very sizeable, I may say – percentage of the population" (78). This way of constructing an imagined threat often has a strong impact on the collective behaviour of large groups, since, as Elias Canetti argues, masses are predisposed to perceive a sense of threat when they interact with culturally and ethically different groups. Canetti considers that the feeling of persecution is an attribute of the masses, who behave "like a besieged city", fearing the presence of "enemies before its walls and enemies within them" (Canetti, 1978, 23).

Narratives that overestimate the proportions and the social impact of immigration from Eastern Europe after 2004 are also challenged in many novels engaging with this migration, as it is the case with Sam Byers' *Perfidious Albion* (Byers, 2018). Darkin, a dweller of the Larchwood social residence, who epitomises the British commoner heavily influenced by nativist mythology, insists to convince Robert Townsend, a journalist who was writing an article on the topic of social housing, that a frightening invasion is under way: "'The cities are full', said Darkin. 'Been going on for years. Read the papers'" (Byers, 2018, 51). Like Sam Selvon, Byers decries the way immigration from Eastern Europe is rehashed by nativist media, and believed by large masses of British natives, as a migrant invasion, a narrative that proved influential in the Brexit debate.

The unfounded crises caused by the invasion narrative is similarly approached by Tracey Mathias in the novel *Night of the Party* (Mathias, 2018) in relation to East European migration. One of the protagonist's friends, Lewis, runs in the student mock elections on a platform that resonates the Brexit campaign, as well as the nativist discourse of the 1950s and 1960s. He is an

eager promoter of the myth that Britain resembles a city under siege: "It's *common sense.* Look. We're a small island. We've got limited resources and limited space. (…) We're getting overcrowded. Overrun. There are too many people coming in" (Mathias, 2018, 161).

The myth of an alleged migrant invasion is reinforced in many cases by the alarmist narrative professing that the excessive number of immigrants jeopardises the social and economic stability of the country. The construction of this myth often employs imagery related to home as a sacred space meant to emphasize the danger of an alleged overtaking by immigrants of natives' dwelling spaces. References to the relation between home and natives have the effect of injecting urgency and importance to the message this myth conveys. Laura Wilson's *The Riot* is a novel that negotiates the influence of the migrant invasion myth among London natives in the period preceding the race riots of 1958. In a dialogue with inspector Stratton, Gleeson, the fictitious leader of the White Defence League, persuasively upholds the narrative of a 'coloured invasion' that corrupts the social structure of British communities. In Gleeson's vision, immigrants' settlement transforms local communities into hostile surroundings, in which the natives "live in fear that their homes will be sold over their heads to coloured people who will drive them out in order to house their friends and relatives" (Wilson, 2013, 78). Colin MacInnes denounces in *Absolute Beginners* (MacInnes, 2011 [1959]) the same narrative claiming that "it was not unknown for coloured landlords to evict white tenants – often old-age pensioners – by making their lives impossible" (149), which is rendered through an article in the fictional newspaper *Mrs Dale Daily,* an innuendo to the same *Black and White News* that is mentioned in Laura Wilson's novel. The insertion in the texts of the migrant invasion myth in this form is certainly not unintentional; this myth was evidently circulating in the epoch, as its incorporation in Enoch Powell's speech suggests, and by challenging this narrative throughout the novels, both Wilson and MacInnes provide a pungent literary response to the nativist attitudes of certain British people who vehemently called for immigration stop in the late 1950s.

Housing, migrant settlement, and community became a fiercely contested terrain during the CEE migration of the 2000s, as well, and literary texts engaging with this topic provide a multitude of situations that negotiate the myth professing an invasion of natives' dwelling spaces by immigrants. In *Perfidious Albion,* an article that Darkin reads in the fictitious populist newspaper *The Recorder* inflates the fear that "those who have grown up here (in Britain N/A) have to share their hard-fought space with those who have just arrived" (Byers, 2018, 26). Such references to the idea of home, which Darkin considers "rousing stuff" (26), delineate the homeland of citizenry (Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2002, 309) as an exclusive privilege of natives

and a sanctuary that deserves to be defended from 'alien intrusions'. In a similar way, the myth fetishizing the national territory as a privilege of British natives is incorporated in the doctrine of the fictitious nativist party *Britain's Great* in Douglas Board's novel *Time of Lies. A Political Satire* (Board, 2017). Alan, one of the party's leaders, professes that "standing up for British homes for British citizens" (47) represents a sacred duty that all British people ought to assume.

The myth that immigrants infiltrate the national territory and its social space is in some cases permeated by welfare chauvinistic attitudes. In Laura Wilson's *The Riot,* the narrative that council houses and social benefits are abusively distributed to Caribbean immigrants at the expense of British natives is alleged in the "appeal to 'The white people of Notting Hill'" (Wilson, 2013, 76) that is displayed in the shopfront of the *White Defence League's* headquarters. The appeal claims that the 'coloured invasion' is responsible for "Increasing the Housing Shortage; Costing a huge sum in National Assistance; Endangering the employment of British workers" (76). The noxious societal effects of this myth are reflected in the depressing litany of prejudice and irrationality that inspector Stratton can read in the testimonies of young British men who were arrested for assaulting Caribbean immigrants during the Notting Hill riots: "you can't get a job because the darkies take them all (…); I don't like that they take our women (…); they live on council's money" (Wilson, 2013, 75).

Economic and social security was a sensitive matter for British natives in the context of immigration from East European countries, as well. The myth that East European immigrants represent a burden for the British welfare system transpires in *We Come Apart,* as a mechanism that influences the formation of anti-migrant attitudes for a significant number of British natives. Terry, the female protagonist's stepfather, bemoans what he considers a misappropriation by immigrants of the country's resources:

> They're only here five minutes
> and the council's putting them in houses
> down Lordship Lane.
> It's disgusting.
> Taxpayers' money
> putting up scroungers
> who'd pimp out their
> own kids for a pound. (Crossan & Conaghan, 2017, 136)

Terry's incrimination of immigrants as "scroungers" living on "taxpayers' money" (136) subscribes to the widespread nativist narrative claiming that immigrants are bogus welfare beneficiaries. This myth is debunked in the text, which reveals that Nicu's family, the migrant protagonists in the novel, work hard and live in a self-rented flat.

In similar way, the protagonist of the autobiographic novel *Jamaican Migrant* (Collins, 1965) decries a "great deal of hate, which sometimes voiced itself as that these black bastards come over here and pinch our jobs, our house, and our women, bringing Britain down to the dogs" (60). Wally's story, which *Jamaican Migrant* tells, revolves mostly around the topic of integration of Caribbean immigrants in Britain's post-war economy, revealing a powerful mythology that was created in relation to the state of the job market. Collins' protagonist, like most immigrants of the Windrush Generation, took jobs that most native Britons declined. Yet, the myth that the employment of Caribbean migrants engendered a form of dispossession had a powerful impact in the development of race relations in Britain for decades. This myth is debated by Sam Selvon, as well, when Moses, the protagonist of *The Lonely Londoners,* instructs the newly arrived Sir Galahad about the tensions that pervaded London's job market: "English people don't like the boys coming to England to work and live (…) and they frighten that we get job in front of them, though that does never happen" (Selvon, 2006, 20).

The narrative that the establishment favours immigrants on the job market is reiterated after 2004 with reference to East European migrants. Sam Byer's *Perfidious Albion* negotiates this myth, as right-wing columnist, Hugo Bennington, insidiously writes in the *Recorder* that, although unemployment is rife among working Britons, yet "time and again we hear that companies must have quotas to ensure that for every white Englishman they employ they must also hire three foreigners" (Byers, 2018, 25). Such xenophobic allegations about an ongoing migrant invasion that jeopardises economic and social stability are uncritically accepted by newspaper readers like Darkin: "Then you're living in a fantasy land. Don't you read the papers?" (50), he berates a more hesitant Robert, who, influenced by his contact with Darkin, realises that he can capitalise on the power of journalistic propaganda and eventually becomes himself a nativism activist.

The myth claiming that East European migrant workers destabilise the labour market   is also negotiated in *Missing Fay.* One of the protagonists, Howard, has a fairly similar story to Darkin's. He is a resident in a nursing home in Lincoln and his daily life is tormented by the nostalgia for his youth days and by the sorrow of losing his wife, Diane. Yet, in opposition to Darkin, Howard is a transgressive character who denounces the entrenched racism of his fellow residents, who are dismayed by the narratives promoted in far-right media, which depict an image of Britain as a country devastated by "[f]loods of immigrants [and] the demise of indigenous" (Thorpe, 2017, 50). Moreover, the presence of a Romanian social worker, Cosmina, enhances the residents' conviction that immigrants represent a threat to local workforce: "Stolen someone's job,

she has. Someone native" (51) is a refrain that Howard often hears. The arguments that he puts forward in Cosmina's defence – "[t]he Romanian one is the best, in terms of efficacy and general all-round charm" (51) – have no effect, as the deeply engrained convictions of Howard's co-residents make them regard this as "an exception" (51) among the hordes of immigrants invading the country.

If the previous examples negotiate the propensity of lower class native Britons to adhere to the myth of migrant workers invasion, in the *Poles Apart* (Courtney, 2008)*,* Courtney Polly exposes the effects this myth has among high flyers in London's financial district where protagonist, Marta Dabrowska, aspires to achieve a career. The attitudes towards Polish immigrants that Marta encounters are heavily influenced by the mythology professing an 'invasion' of Polish workers who "are taking all the English people's jobs, especially in plumbing and construction" (Courtney, 2008, 287), as her office mate, Marianne, inconsiderately claims during a social gathering.

Many of the myths that were examined in this section have also been the topic of highly politicised public and official debates, as the belief that liberal politicians are accomplice to the so-called invasion permeate the narrative universe of many of the analysed novels, and nativist political slogans or narratives purporting such a conspiracy are challenged at the textual level. In addition to the above-mentioned examples, which profess the privileging of migrants over locals in providing social housing or jobs, Caryl Phillips hints in *The Final Passage* (C. Phillips, 2004) to the famous episode that marked the general elections of 1964, when Peter Griffiths won the constituency of Smethwick helped by the racist slogan 'If you want a nigger neighbour, vote Labour', which a horrified protagonist, Leila, can read on a wall while riding the bus through London (103).

The narrative that liberal politicians favour the immigrant settlement in Britain is also negotiated by post-Brexit novels *Time of Lies. A Political Satire* (Board, 2017)*,* which ridicules the myth promoted by populist politician Bob Grant. During a political rally, he purports that "this government, the one before that, and the one before that" (Board, 2017, 27) invite immigrants to exploit the country: "(…) help yourself, mate, to my job, my home, my bank account, my country" (27). Bob Grant's rhetoric aligns with the nativist propaganda spread by tabloid press; the novel mentions a fictitious article in Daily Mail which claims that "Britain will be swamped after European chiefs bring in an extra 20 million migrants" (80). Such exaggerations on which the novel insists are not mere stylistic devices meant to enhance the satire tone of the novel, but also function as poignant social comments on the manner the *Leave* campaign promoted its

message. The success of *Britain's Great* in the 2020 elections[26], as well as Bob Grants' overall political achievements, are a clear reminder of the referendum result. Besides, by setting the plot in a near post-Brexit future, *Time of Lies. A Political Satire* provides a serious disguised-in-satire warning about the devastating consequences that the persistence in running politics 'Brexit-style' may bring.

4.3.4 Resisting the 'Invasion' in *Small Island* and *Perfidious Albion*

The extended moral panic built around the myth of a migrant invasion has significantly affected the way British people have perceived immigration and its impact in (re)-shaping society and local topography since the settlement of the first Caribbean migrants until today. Fictional responses that call into question various narratives which profess an invasion of Britain by migrants represent a suitable ground for critical reflection on the way these myths have emerged and functioned. Therefore, the ensuing section performs an extended analysis of the literary strategies employed by Andrea Levy and Sam Byers to negotiate migrant invasion myths in the novels *Small Island* (Levy, 2004) and *Perfidious Albion* (Byers, 2018), respectively.

4.3.4.1 Constructing a Common Home of Britishness in *Small Island*

Most works that fictionalise the encounter of Windrush Generation migrants and Britons and which are considered to have established the literary canon of the Windrush Generation were produced by authors who had settled in Britain in that period, such as Sam Selvon, Andrew Salkey, E.R. Braithwaite, Beryl Gilroy, or George Lemming. Andrea Levy, however, belongs to the second generation of writers of Caribbean descent, who were brought up and educated in Britain. Unlike authors of the first generation, who were mainly preoccupied with depicting the formation of inchoate diasporic bonding or economic and social integration of migrants (Evelyn, 2013, 129), Levy's work explores intrepidly uncomfortable questions that arise from the interaction between Caribbean migrants and British natives, documenting such phenomena as discrimination, rejection, and racism in their full brutality. *Small Island* (2004), which is Levy's fourth and most successful novel, approaches retrospectively the significant transformations that

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[26] The novel's plot sets the general elections in 2020, although in real life the elections took place in December 2019.

Britain underwent under the influence of immigration from the Caribbean colonies in the era ensuing the end of World War II. It is a polyphonic novel, which alternates and contrasts the stories and perspectives of four characters, two Jamaican and two British, on events that unfold in two different time periods: during the war and in 1948. The stories narrated by the four focalising protagonists interweave, delivering, as Mike Phillips contends in his review of the novel, a "historically faithful account" (M. Phillips, 2004, n. pag.) of the tense atmosphere characterising the inchoate interaction between British natives and Caribbean immigrants in the late 1940s.

The novel switches between narrative times and locations, depicting meticulously the most significant events defining the profiles of the four protagonists and establishing their place in the story. Gilbert Joseph, a former RAF serviceman from Jamaica, arrives in Britain on-board the famous *Empire Windrush* in 1948, planning to make for himself and his family a future in the 'mother country'. The expectations of a quick and smooth integration are, however, sorely dashed, as war time solidarity has vanished and a large number of British natives bemoan the arrival of immigrants from overseas. Gilbert finds lodging in the house of an English woman whom he had met during the war, Queenie Blight, who lives alone in the decrepit house she and her husband, Bernard, own in London. As Bernard delays his return after the end of the war, Queenie subsists by renting out rooms to Caribbean immigrants, which draws the exasperation of her neighbours and, later, Bernard's irritation upon his return. The fourth protagonist, Hortense, joins her husband, Gilbert, having high expectations to pursue a teacher career in Britain, just to have her plans undermined by Britons' widespread nativist attitudes and systemic racism.

In this hostile environment, Gilbert and Hortense attempt to adjust not only to a new country but also to each other. The promising prospects of their marriage, as well as the amiable relationship that establishes between them and Queenie, are disrupted by Bernard's unexpected return. Throughout the novel, he is the main nativist voice conveying the anti-migrant attitudes characterising so many British natives at that time. The conflicting situations that arise, which signify the tensions developed between natives and migrants as these communities started to collide, are resolved when Queenie gives birth to a child who resulted from a relationship she had had with a black Jamaican named Michael Roberts, Hortense's second cousin and teenage love interest. The climax that the novel reaches at this point descends into a sudden, unexpected denouement, comprising equal measures of irony and castigatory satire; despite the adversities they had to face, Hortense and Gilbert consent to adopting the baby and relocate to a new house, which a Jamaican friend of Gilbert, Winston, had bought and shares with his co-nationals.

The structure of the novel lends itself well to the message it conveys, as all four protagonists take turns in telling their stories and the heading of each chapter bears the name of the narrator. The employment of this technique destabilises and fragments the idea of a singular, authoritative narrative of post-war Caribbean migration to Britain and allows readers to examine from different perspectives the development of inter-group relations established between the members of these interacting communities. At the same time, Levy conceives her characters as symbols of the groups they represent. The tensions caused by the ideas of race, nation, and society are encapsulated in the voices of her four protagonists, who contribute to increasing the complexity of the narrative through the different ways of expressing themselves and through adding each her or his perspective on events and on the ideological effects of the encounter.

A major plot device that Levy employs in continuation of the Windrush literary tradition refers to the passage that Caribbean migrants take to the 'motherland' after the war, lured by what Susheila Nasta describes as "the idea of London as an illusion, as a dream built on the foundations of the colonial myth" (Nasta, 1988, 80). Levy touches on the historical event of the arrival of *Empire Windrush,* by placing Gilbert Joseph, one of the protagonists*,* among the passengers enticed by the opportunities that British authorities were promising to empire's subjects who were willing to contribute to the metropole's post-war reconstruction. A parallel can be noticed in the employment of this motif by both Levy and E.R Braithwaite, in the novels analysed in the previous chapter, whose protagonists arriving to Britain share the illusion of a return home after having served in the British army during the war. At the same time, as Kathleen Paul explains, "the populations of the West Indian isles had been encouraged to think of Britain as home, as the cultural and political centre of 'their' empire" (Paul, 1997). Nevertheless, like Braithwaite's protagonists, the Caribbean migrants of *Small Island* experience blatant racially motivated discrimination and downright rejection. The bewildering unrecognizability of the 'mother country' is indicatively expressed through Gilbert's reflections: "Soon you will meet Mother. [but] The filthy tramp that eventually greets you . . . offers you no comfort . . . No welcome. Yet she looks down at you through lordly eyes and says, 'Who the bloody hell are you?" (Levy, 2004, 116). Gilbert's meditation epitomises the disappointment of countless Caribbean migrants who, as Kim Evelyn contends, were sharing the myth that had taught them to exalt Britain and think of themselves as British, but had to face the reality of Britain's reluctance to accept its black subjects (Evelyn, 2013, 134).

It can be said that characters like Gilbert and Hortense's claim to a place in the social fabric of the 'Mother Country' is grounded in the myth of imperial solidarity. Nevertheless, their attempts

to integrate reveal a native British community pervaded by another powerful myth, which claims that the metropole is subject to a migrant invasion that jeopardises the nation's cohesion, as well as the idea of Britishness itself. As shown above, this mythology was denounced by many authors dealing with Windrush migration, but the way Andrea Levy's negotiates the myth of migrant invasion in *Small Island* is particularly interesting, since she approaches aspects of the Windrush Generation migration from the vantage point of an author writing from a historical perspective. Her reliance on both personal experience and on meticulous research of historical evidence gives Levy, as Mike Phillips contends, "a distance which allows her to be both dispassionate and compassionate" (M. Phillips, 2004, n. pag.). Therefore, unlike most authors of her generation, who are mostly preoccupied with aspects of migrant subjectivity and hybridisation, Levy chooses to revisit topics specific to Windrush Generation migration, which might be considered obsolete and irrelevant by second generation migrants, but, as the nativist rhetoric of our times demonstrates, still have a major significance in the contemporary debates about migration in Britain.

Among the themes that Levy skilfully approaches, the physical and symbolic space of the metropole, which represents a pivotal trope in *Small Island,* is depicted as a ground of contention. What immigrants consider a legitimate claim to a domestic and social space in the metropole of the empire to which they belong is interpreted in a nativist key by many British natives as an invasion of their ancestral motherland. This myth, claiming that a migrant invasion is unfolding, is explicitly articulated by Queenie's neighbour, Mr. Todd, who approaches her, displaying a "motley mixture of outrage, shock, fear, even" (Levy, 2004, 112), and bemoans "[h]ow respectable this street was before they came" (112). He also insidiously blames Queenie that she has facilitated the invasion of their neighbourhood: "Darkies! I'd taken in darkies next door to him. But not just me. There were others living around the square. A few more up the road a bit. His concern, he said, was that they would turn the area into a jungle" (113). The drama and tension caused by change and the illusionary fear of dispossession eventually determine Mr. Todd and his sister to sell the house and move out, as he is convinced that "[t]he street has gone to the dogs. What with all these coloureds swamping the place. Hardly like our country anymore" (436). Before that, another neighbour and old friend of Queenie named Blanche – how ironic – and her family move out, telling Queenie it was her husband's decision because "[t]his country no longer feels his own [and] she had her two little girls' welfare to think of (…) Forced out, she felt. All those coons eyeing her and her daughters up every time they walked down their own street" (115).

Such narrative instances depicting characters who deplore the 'swamping' of their country by undesirable aliens and profess a destabilisation of the social order are all too recognisable for the historically aware reader. As Kim Evelyn argues, through her depiction of neighbourhood racism as an extension of national views on race and nationalism and Queenie's status as landlady, Levy echoes the rhetoric of two of the most prominent anti-immigrant British politicians of the twentieth century: Enoch Powell and Margaret Thatcher (Evelyn, 2013, 139). There is a striking similarity in the manner the migrant invasion myth is expressed in these politicians' discourses and in Levy's text. The word "swamping" that Mr. Todd uses recalls a famous comment Thatcher made in an interview in 1978, that Britons were "really rather afraid that this country might be rather swamped by people with a different culture" (Thatcher, 1978, n. pag.). The same character's belief that the neighbourhood looks "[h]ardly like our country anymore" (Levy, 2005, 436) resonates in Powell's speech when he speaks of "homes and neighbourhoods changed beyond recognition" (Powell, 1968, n. pag.), while the moment when Blanche and her husband move out resembles Powell's description of the old-age pensioner's drama of losing her neighbours as "[s]he saw one house after another taken over [and] her white tenants moved out" (ibid.).

As Levy writes the story in retrospect, she benefits from a vantage point which provides historical evidence that Powell was wrong. History has shown that Powell was cynically capitalising on the fears of people when he, by rehashing the myth of the country's invasion and rendering it in an articulated form, legitimised a mythical anti-migrant discourse which was already permeating the British public sphere and thus introduced it in the official political debate. In *Small Island,* Levy comments upon the narrative promoted by Powell by constructing the core narrative of the novel to resonate the story of a presumably fictitious old-age pensioner who, as Powell claims in his speech, after having lost her husband in the war, resorted to renting out rooms as a means of subsistence until "the immigrants moved in" (Powell, 1968, n. pag.). The supposedly catastrophic meaning underlying this poignant sentence is pivotal in Enoch Powell's narrative to express the situation of the woman and, by extension, of the entire nation. Starting from this point, Levy skilfully performs a deconstruction of the migrant invasion myth by, as Graham MacPhee explains, rewriting the story recounted by Powell in his 'Rivers of Blood' speech about the white war widow who refused to rent rooms to non-whites and found herself undermined by bureaucratic council staff and 'savage' immigrants alike (MacPhee, 2011, 162).

The myth of migrant invasion, like any myth, extracts its power from the one-sidedness of the narrative it promotes and relies on the adherence of the members of a group who are ready to

follow its message (Tudor, 1972, 17). Nevertheless, the technique of shifting perspectives that Levy employs in *Small Island,* which allows a multitude of voices to express different and even antagonistic viewpoints on events and relations in which the characters are involved, facilitates the destabilisation of the narrative professing a migrant invasion. Multiperspectivity is not new in Windrush literature, as parallels can be drawn between Levy's novel and George Lamming *The Emigrants* (Lamming, 1954) or Sam Selvon's novels, which use what Ron Matti describes as "a decentred polyphonic narrative" (Matti, 2018) to depict the collective experience of largely working-class black migrants in the process of settlement in London. However, besides giving a voice her migrant protagonists, Hortense and Gilbert, the innovation that Levy brings refers to juxtaposing the perspectives of native characters who share either cosmopolitan or nativist views on immigration. Through such characters as Queenie and her husband, Bernard, Levy succeeds in establishing a dialogue of opposing ideologies both across and inside ethnic and cultural groups meant to expose the restricted and biased narratives of migrant invasion myths. As Ron Matti contends, in contrast to Braithwaite, where one character is in almost total possession of all the novel's socio-political insight, Levy diffuses such insight among the "plurality of consciousnesses making up her novel, tasking the reader to then piece the multifarious (and sometimes contradictory) elements of this polyphony together in order to create meaning" (Matti, 2018, 135).

By taking Caribbean tenants, Queenie stands in stark contrast with most of the native characters, such as Bernard or her neighbours, Mr. Todd and Blanche, who act in the novel as adherents to the migrant invasion narrative promoted by Powell two decades after the events described in the novel unfold. Like the widow of Powell's story, Queenie decides to rent rooms after having lost her family in the war, as her father-in-law was accidentally shot by off-duty American soldiers and Bernard was missing after demobilisation. Nevertheless, the paralleling of the stories ends here, as she defiantly repudiates the nativist mythology which had already spread extensive panic throughout the members of the local community and cordially lets rooms to Caribbean immigrants in need. Through this transgressive act, for which the neighbours "blame her for singlehandedly ruining the country" (Levy, 2004, 112), Queenie is delineated as a character capable to cross the rigid interpretative frames of anti-migrant mythology and to intermediate the contact between immigrants and natives in an environment heavily informed by segregation and discrimination.

In the meticulous construction of her protagonist, Levy also explores the sources of Queenie's propensity to displaying cosmopolitan attitudes. As a farm girl from the North of England, Queenie visited the British Empire Exhibition at Wembley in 1924, where her perspective on race

relations changed radically and irreversibly. Instead of being impressed by the superiority of British civilisation and the primitiveness of its colonial subjects, the unexpected eloquence and politeness of "a 'big nigger [sic] man' in the African pavilion" (Levy, 2004, 5) made "these large-scale organising frameworks begin to fray" (MacPhee, 2011, 161) for Queenie. By inserting this flashback, Levy not only signifies the mendacity of the colonial mythology that professed a superior British civilisation and justified its 'civilising mission', but also suggests that unmediated contact between different cultures and individuals has the potential to dispel epistemological boundaries that intend to reify the idea of severed communities. Released from the racist mind-frame of the British imperial ethos through this childhood experience, Queenie unhesitantly houses three Caribbean RAF pilots during the war, because they "deserve a bit of home comfort" (Levy, 2004, 257) and their courtesy, as well as the romantic involvement with one of them, Michael Roberts, enhance the way she perceives Caribbean newcomers after the war and influence her decision to accept them as lodgers in her house.

Apart from repudiating the nativist values that other characters embrace, Queenie is depicted as a liminal character who intermediates Hortense's and Gilbert's integration in the local community beyond the act of offering them a dwelling place. The scene when she accompanies Hortense to do the groceries is emblematic in this sense. Levy consciously employs an allusion   to anti-segregation symbol Shirley Temple[27], whose films both heroines enjoy and appreciate (Levy, 2004, 231), in the context when Queenie confesses to Hortense that inter-racial friendship is acceptable for her, despite general conventions and the public disapproval of the community: "It's all right. I don't mind being seen in the street with you. You'll find I'm not like most" (231). This symbolic association with the American film star marks Queenie's position between black and white as an intermediary character, paralleling her story with Shirley Temple's, who, by adopting the name Shirley Temple Black after the second marriage, became an international symbol of racial liminality.

The above-mentioned scene also refers to another technique that the novel employs to denounce the myth of community invasion, namely the reconfiguration of the local topography that immigration entails. Queenie proves to be a promoter of cosmopolitanism as she negotiates the metropole's social space on behalf of her migrant tenants when she amiably helps Hortense to familiarise with the shopping customs in her new environment. The comprehensive depiction of

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[27] American actress Shirley Temple reacted to interdiction of performing on stage a double act with a black dancer in the southern states. Later, she gained the name Shirley Temple Black, after her second marriage and during the 1970s she held the position of US ambassador in Ghana.

the shopping tour as an act of initiation prefigures the emergence of a multicultural community in Britain, highlighting the instrumental role that liminal agents, a role that Queenie assumes in the novel, have in challenging the racial discrimination permeating the metropole. Given how Levy depicts this scene, she positions her protagonist in stark antithesis with Powell's pensioner who, as he insidiously claimed, was "becoming afraid to go out" in the public space which immigrants and locals were starting to share. In defiance to her neighbours', and, one may say, to Powell's attitude, Queenie negotiates the transformation of the public space, represented by the shops and the streets that she and Hortense cover, from a space over which nativists claim exclusivity into a liminal space of tolerance, contact, and intercultural dialogue.

The negotiation of myths about a Caribbean migrant invasion in *Small Island* does not address only the fear about a 'contamination' of the public space, but also touches upon the sensitive issue of the housing crisis which Britain was experiencing after the war. The house that Queenie inherited from her husband's family has a central place in the deconstruction of the take-over narrative, which Powell ominously proclaimed in his speech with the phrase: "She saw one house after another taken over" (Powell, 1968, n. pag.). Through this, the novel touches on one of the most important tropes of British-Caribbean literature, since the house, as Brigitte Bönisch-Brednich and Catherine Trundle explain, "remains a deeply contested and symbolically rich site in which to constitute the self through the micropolitics and everyday rituals of place-making" (Bönisch-Brednich & Trundle, 2010, 1).

In *Small Island*, Queenie and Bernard's house represents the pivot around which the narrative revolves, as, in symbolic parallelism with the 'mother country', the protagonists seem to ineluctably come towards it, either from the colonies, as Hortense and Gilbert, or returning from the war, which is the case with Bernard. It is the point in which both spatiality and temporality intersect, as different generations of dwellers coming from different places interact. The depiction of characters and events that the house accommodates in various temporal settings, each one marked by its historical conditions, allegorizes Britain's tumultuous history of the first part of the twentieth century, signifying the major transformations the country underwent in this period. The house is depicted as the site of Bernard's idyllic childhood, reverberating the feelings of security and serenity that Britannia's alleged permanence ensured: "Those cosy times up here with Ma. A chair in front of the roaring fire. A pot of tea, a muffin each. That was nice" (Levy, 2004, 472). But the house is also described as a place of distress and destruction caused by the war, then followed by a time of reconfiguration and reconstruction, when its space is inhabited by Queenie

and newcomers from colonies who work jointly to renovate it, a symbolic act of reconstructing the past and renegotiating colonial relations.

As the narrative's main focus is on the period following the arrival of Windrush migrants, the house is represented both as a heterotopia, in the sense explained by Foucault (Foucault, 1986), and as a battleground which signifies the ideological clash between British natives and Caribbean migrants, where cultures and individuals clash in a symbolic process of negotiating space. In *Small Island,* the house is artfully represented as a metaphor for the ideological embodyment of the 'mother country', which, in the described context, makes the object of two conflicting mythologies. On the one hand, animated by the colonial myth by which Susheila Nasta (Nasta, 1988, 80) explains the readiness of many West Indians to migrate to Britain, the newcomers claim a legitimate place and the right to integrate in the centre of the empire for which they fought in the war and of whose citizens they are. On the other hand, many British natives are captive of the myth claiming that the territory of the 'mother country' is invaded by migrants.

Through juxtaposing antagonistic viewpoints on the idea of who is entitled to reside in the house, the novel is able to raise crucial questions and issues about the ideas of nation and belonging. The dispute over accessibility and control over the space of the house that arises between the Caribbean couple and Bernard after the latter's return is representative in this sense. In Bernard's absence, the house was transformed into a contact zone and a space of cohabitation, as Queenie managed to make it a functional homeplace, accommodating peacefully both English landlady and Caribbean lodgers. After returning from the war, Bernard embodies the figure of a stereotypical British nativist, transferring the myths and the attitudes of the neighbours from the street into the house. A first confrontation with Gilbert gives Bernard the opportunity to express his attitude toward migration and national belonging:

> The recipe for a quiet life is each to their own. The war was fought so people might live amongst their own kind. Quite simple. Everyone had a place. England for the English and the West Indies for these coloured people. The English knew fair play. Leave India to the Indians. [...] Everyone was trying to get home after the war to be with kith and keen. Except these blasted coloured colonials. I've nothing against them in their place, but their place isn't here. (Levy, 2004, 469)

The irony implied in Bernard's reflections on the nature of British imperialism, migration, and nationhood represents a harsh critique of the hypocrisy accompanying colonialism in general, and Britain's relations with its colonies in particular. Bernard's double standards with reference to national belonging are debunked as the inconsistency of his argument transpires from the statement "I've nothing against them in their place" (469). By looking at colonial relations from the vantage point of native Britons, he is supportive of the nativist idea claiming that national

territory and ethnicity must overlap and immigrants would rather stay in their place, while obliviously referring in the same sentence to the British presence in the colonies. Through the double meaning that is implied in that statement, the novel subtly criticises the British colonial ethos, suggesting that if the British had indeed been loyal to their principles, as Bernard falsely claims with the phrase, "England for the English and the West Indies for these coloured people" (469), then their presence in the colonies should be considered abusive and illegal, as it actually was.

Bernard is the protagonist in the novel who conveys most persistently the idea that colonisation was completely fine, whereas an insignificant number of immigrants represent an invasion. By merging Bernard's attitude towards national belonging with his view of domestic exclusivity, the novel criticises, as Kim Evelyn argues (Evelyn, 2013, 144), the ideological overlap between homes and nations as possessions with territorial borders. The dispute over the rights each side has over the space they share, where like in Powell's pensioner's story, home becomes an extension of the nation, re-emerges when Gilbert and Hortense catch Bernard ferreting around in their room. Gilbert reacts to this intrusion into the couple's privacy and claims that the room belongs to him on contractual basis, as long as he pays the rent. Yet, from Bernard's reply – "This is my house. […] I can go anywhere I please in my own house. […] I've got a key to every room. […] I fought a war to protect home and hearth. Not about to be invaded by stealth."(Levy, 2004, 470) – transpires the idea that, like many of his British contemporaries, he considers that the right to live in the house, and by extension in the country, is an exclusive privilege of the natives.

Bernard's comment that he and his British co-nationals fought in the war "to protect home and hearth" (470), an allusion to the Battle of England, when British forces repelled the Nazi invasion, expresses the most direct link between the house and the nation by drawing upon the domestic metaphor of the nation as a house. Giving expression to the nativist mythology that emerged concomitantly with the first migrant arrivals, Bernard claims, just like Powell, who used imagery of the war to parallel the danger of a migrant invasion with that of Nazi Germany, that "home and hearth" are again in danger "to be invaded by stealth" (470). The starkly disproportionate comparison is meant to infuse a sense of urgency in the narrative and thus inhibit any attempts by immigrants to claim a space of their own. Despite Bernard's claim that ownership of the place provides him the right to dispose of any section of the house as he pleases, Gilbert challenges his landlord and the dialogue in which they engage represents a suggestive metaphor for the negotiation of a place that migrants claim in the space of the metropole:

> Cheeky blighter tells me that this room - at the top of my house – does in fact belong to him. […] According to this darkie I could not just come into his room. Somehow I needed his permission. I think not. 'I can go anywhere I please in my own house,' I told him. […] Said he paid plenty of rent. 'I'm not interested in what you pay,' I said. 'This is my house.' The conversation was over as far as I was concerned. He, of course, had other ideas. Had the nerve to ask me how I got into the room. […] My house, and I've a key to every room. […] Still told me to get out. (Levy, 2004, 470)

Kim Evelin considers that in the dispute over the right to a living space, like in Powell's story, Bernard believes that Gilbert's claim to a space of their own is unfounded (Evelyn, 2013, 144). Nevertheless, Gilbert tenaciously negotiates the right of Caribbean migrants to "a chance of a decent life" in the 'motherland' as "he, too, had fought in the war" (Levy, 2004, 471) on equal foot with all the other British subjects.

The negotiation of the right to inhabit the house in which the protagonists of *Small Island* engage signifies the complex processes by which Britain transformed into a multicultural society during the second half of the twentieth century. An important aspect of this transformation implied the contestation of the myths that intended to reify the idea that a homogenous (white) Britain was threatened by a migrant invasion. The novel touches on important questions regarding these societal transformations through the allegorical depiction of the interaction between the homeowners and the Caribbean tenants, which eventually results into a resolution of the residence rights dispute. The turning point in this sense is reached when Gilbert, in confrontation with Bernard, defends the legitimacy of migrant presence in Britain and predicts an unescapable future marked by cohabitation and cooperation: "Listen to me, man, we both just finish fighting a war – a bloody war – for the better world we wan' see. And on the same side – you and me. […] We can work together, Mr. Blight. You no see? We must", to which Bernard replies simply and conclusively – "I'm sorry" (Levy, 2004, 525). The significance of this scene is enhanced by the symbolic presence of Queenie's mixed-race baby, a harbinger of hope for a multicultural future, whom Bernard has gradually accepted and even agreed on adopting as his own son. Queenie, however, insists that the baby would be adopted by Hortense and Gilbert, and the consensus of all four protagonists on this represents a recognition of the possibility to create a future marked by cosmopolitan conviviality, in the sense expressed by Paul Gilroy (Gilroy, 2004, xi), in a multi-ethnic and multicultural society.

By offering an alternative history of the present to that conjured by Powell, the novel's ending may be interpreted as the establishment of a foundational myth of a new, multicultural Britain. This vision of Britain challenges the narrative of invasion of the 'motherland', which had powerful impact on the way a large majority of the British natives perceived immigration and race

relations during the late 1940s and after. Cynthia James suggests that, by using the Windrush 1948 moment as a narratological marker for before and after Britain's identity transformation, *Small Island* emphasises the importance of Caribbean immigration in the irreversible transition towards a new kind of shared future. Put side by side, the 'Before' and '1948' chapters convey a history made from the same 'mother country' experience, in which two antagonising world views and mythologies intersect, are negotiated, and prompt a reinterpretation of the relations between migrants and natives, as well as a reconfiguration of the ideas of nationhood and belonging in a post-nationalistic key.

Homemaking is a special preoccupation of *Small Island* and homes are depicted as sites of both promotion and resistance to anti-migrant mythology. The sensitive issue of housing crisis that Britain faced after the war nurtured the spread of a migrant invasion myth that provoked social panic and stimulated the increase of nativism. Nevertheless, besides addressing issues connected to dwelling spaces, the novel also touches on another form of expression that the invasion myth takes, namely the claim that Caribbean immigrants represent a threat to the social and economic order of the nation. In the context of post-war overlapping crises, economy became a sensitive matter for British natives and the debate over the distribution of resources achieved mythical dimensions.

A significant manifestation of welfare chauvinism transpires in the dialogue between Queenie and Mr. Todd, who expresses the fear that Caribbean immigrants come to Britain to claim services to which they are not entitled and thus overload the welfare system: "For the teeth and glasses. That was the reason so many coloured people were coming to this country. The National Health Service – is pulling them, Mrs Blight. Giving things away at our expense will keep them coming" (Levy, 2004, 111). Mr. Todd's reproduction of nativist stereotypes claiming that immigrants threaten the hard-earned resources of the nation, echoes Powell's allegations that immigrants entering the country come "instantly into the possession […] of privileges and opportunities eagerly sought [including] free treatment under the National Health Service" while Britons "found themselves made strangers in their own country [and] their wives unable to obtain hospital beds in childbirth" (Powell, 1968, n. pag.). By creating a myth about immigrants misusing the NHS, itself a symbol of Britain's successful distribution of national resources, nativist actors like Powell managed to arouse strong negative feelings about immigration as well as delude large masses of Britons into believing that unpatriotic politicians favour immigrants and dispossess natives of their hard-earned rights. As Powell states, "a one-way privilege is to be established by act of

parliament; a law which cannot, and is not intended to, operate to protect them or redress their grievances" (Powell, 1968, n. pag.).

Powell's ominous remark, which was meant to connect social policy issues, such as access to health services, with a vision of belonging based on cultural identity, is satirised in *Small Island.* Levy infuses Queenie's sceptical reply to Mr. Todd's allegations with telling sarcasm: "He might have had a point except, according to him, they were all cross-eyed and goofy before they came here. 'I don't think so,' I said. 'Oh, yes,' he assured me. 'But now, of course, they've got spectacles and perfect grins'" (Levy, 2004, 111). In a similar context, irony is employed to denounce the false narrative that migrants abusively deplete the resources of the country. In another conversation between neighbours, Mr. Todd unknowingly assumes that Jean, a young tenant in Queenie's house who was out every night, is a recipient of welfare benefits which, he suspects, she squanders in dishonourable night activities. Queenie's clarification represents an example of ingenious employment of satire to expose the absurdity of Mr. Todd's assumption: "I told him she was a nurse – you know, on night duty. Chocked on his cup of tea before enquiring if I was very sure of that" (112). This way, Levy places once again her protagonist in the position of a crossing character, who, through sensible assessment of immigrants' intentions, attitudes, and acts, denounces myths by which her nativist counterparts intend to reify an image of migrants as a reprehensible burden on society.

Another important factor behind the high prevalence of nativist sentiments and attitudes that the novel negotiates is the myth that immigration engenders social and economic insecurity for native workers through the competition that immigrants generate in the job market. And even though the Caribbean migrants came to Britain in response to the government's call to fill vacancies on the labour market, a large majority of the people perceived their arrival as an invasion of the domestic economy by undesirable colonial migrants, which destabilised the social cohesion and economic security of the local families and communities.

Gilbert comes to discover a reality of the work environment heavily informed by such racist attitudes and prejudices already on his first day on duty as a postal worker, a job below his qualification for which he nonetheless had to struggle to obtain. While collecting the mail from the train station, a group of native workers refuse to acknowledge his commission. One of them says: "There's decent Englishmen that should be doing your job" (Levy, 2004, 318), and the racial remarks they produce testify the source of their hostile behaviour. Kim Evelyn explains that, just like Levy's migrant protagonists, the migrants arriving on board *Empire Windrush* had to experience a complex social reality: a country that needed them for labour, yet found their

presence problematic, as the cosmopolitan acceptance of Britain was clashing with the racism that built its empire (Evelyn, 2013, 130).

The meticulous depiction of Hortense's and Gilbert's development as characters testifies the antagonisms that Kim Evelyn highlights in her critique. Despite a relatively high level of education and skills and a real need for their labour, they repeatedly find themselves excluded from work or must accept jobs below their qualifications and the status they had enjoyed back in Jamaica. Like Gilbert's experience presented above, Queenie's high expectations about getting a teacher position, nurtured by her education in the British imperial system and letters of recommendation, collide with the blatant racism permeating the local bureaucracy: "You can't teach in this country. […] Have you not understood me? It's quite simple. There is no point you asking me anything else" (Levy, 2004, 454-455). Such experiences on which Levy signifies, like E.R. Braithwaite, Beryl Gilroy, and many other Windrush authors had done before her, and which overlap with the real experience of countless Caribbean migrants, raise serious questions about the truthfulness and rectitude of myths professing that immigrants represent a threat over natives' privileges or social space and, as Powell claimed, to making "themselves strangers in their own country" (Powell, 1968, n. pag.).

4.3.4.2 Brexit, or Britain's Way to Withstand the 'Invasion' in *Perfidious Albion*

The moral panic that permeated British society during the 1950s and 1960s diminished to a certain extent in the decades that followed, since, as shown in Chapter 3, immigration from former colonies was strictly regulated through legislation. The myth professing that Britain was subject to a migrant invasion has also become less relevant, after nativist propaganda having Enoch Powell in its forefront lost much if its appeal. Andrea Levy touches on these transformations in *Small Island,* writing retrospectively a story of Britain's struggle to accept the presence of immigrants from its former colonies and to acknowledge its multicultural condition. Nevertheless, the course on which Britain seemed to engage in 2004, the year *Small Island* was published, took a significant and ironic turn the same year, when eight countries from Eastern Europe joined the European Union. As citizens of these countries received access to the common labour market, a significant number of workers arrived in Britain, a phenomenon that triggered the re-emergence of nativism and anti-migrant discourses in both the public and political spheres.

Migration thus became once again a prevalent topic of contention in British society, and themes, slogans, and images that were at the core of the anti-migrant discourse of the 1950s and 1960s were reclaimed by nativist actors to promote the narrative of a migrant invasion. In relation to this, many literary works dealing with this new migration reflect Britain's divided nature in the period before and after the 2016 referendum and, by featuring explicit references to myths about an invasion of immigrants from East European countries, challenge their deceptive character and offer alternative narratives to nativist ones. Among the texts that explore the role of migrant invasion myth in the structures of feelings exploited in the Brexit discourse, Sam Byers' *Perfidious Albion* (2018) is one of the most representative. This novel engages comprehensively in negotiating crucial aspects that contributed to the success of the Brexit campaign, such as imperial nostalgia, the mendaciousness of political discourse in a post-truth era, and the mythification of migration's proportions and character.

Sam Byers' second novel, *Perfidious Albion,* was characterised by Justin Jordan in his review in The Guardian as "a furiously smart post-Brexit satire" (Jordan, 2018, n. pag.) in which the "nebulous anxiety about the approaching future" (ibid.) permeates the entire story. The novel's plot is built on several levels, depicting the near-dystopian post-referendum experiences of several inhabitants of the fictitious small provincial community of Edmundsbury. In this |micro-universe, the controlling ambitions of global high-tech corporations interlacing with local politics, internet saturation, and the anxieties of common people about an alleged migrant invasion prompt societal polarisation and the unleashing of disproportionate hostility among antagonising camps. Although Edmundsbury is a community imbued with Brexit ethos, the focus of the novel is not on Brexit itself, which is mentioned only once in the novel. The narrative focus is rather on distilling the social, political, and economical structures that have made it possible, such as the way the media, both conventional and new, and populist politicians manipulate people's affective responses to issues regarding immigration and their reactions to the transformations it entails.

The novel takes the reader on a journey to find answers to a quasi-rhetorical question raised by a mysterious organisation who call themselves *The Griefers.* A randomly re-occurring slogan - "What don't you want to share?" (Byers, 2018, 14, 31, 70, 347), which is displayed on every public appearance of the organisation, resonates like a leitmotif throughout the entire novel. Byers structures the novel around this question, exposing by turn each of the protagonists to an ethical interrogation, where all aspects of their intimacy are scrutinised, secrets are revealed, and unpleasant truths emerge to surface one by one.

The plot development follows journalist, Robert Townsend, a self-proclaimed left-wing intellectual who writes for the progressive blog *The Command Line,* but whose ideas promptly move to the opposite side of the political spectrum, as, influenced by personal experiences, he discovers the spellbound power that far-right populism can provide. His transformation provokes the dissolution of the already superficial relationship with his partner, Jess, who copes with her emotions of rage and aversion by creating multiple online personas that she uses to lambaste Robert's articles. Meanwhile, a multinational tech company called *Green* exercises great influence on every aspect of the town's life, by slowly infiltrating people's privacy in the digital world in an attempt to influence their choices and let ideas being generated only "by those whose position in the hierarchy allowed them to think" (Byers, 2018, 90). Trina, a black woman involved in a polyamorous relation and *Green* employee, becomes victim of digital totalitarianism after she sends the uninspired, sarcastically meant tweet "#whitemalegenocide. Lol" (137), in response to the misogynistic assertions of populist journalist, later turned politician, Hugo Bennington.

But it is not only the middle class, digitally disturbed young people of Edmundsbury who have their lives affected by hyperreality, in the sense of Jean Baudrillard (Baudrillard, 2014 [1981]). A frail widower residing in the crumbling Larchwood housing estate, Alfred Darkin, is portrayed as a victim of disinformation promoted in *The Daily Recorder* by Hugo Bennington. Darkin is stubbornly clinging on to his decrepit Larchwood flat, resisting the dubious redeveloping plans for the Larchwood estate proposed by the local company *Downton*, as he genuinely believes that the gentrification project is a pretext for the settlement of "immigrants and scroungers" (Byers, 2018, 106). The plot line following the nearly organic relationship between Darkin and Hugo Bennington is one that provides the most comprehensive commentary on Brexit Britain and on the nature and effects of nativist populism throughout the entire Brexit process. The character Hugo Bennington, a far-right populist politician whom John Harris characterised in his review in The Guardian as "essentially 70% Nigel and 30% Boris Johnson" (Harris, 2018, n. pag.), epitomises such leaders standing at the head of nativist populist movements, somehow embodying through his discourse and deeds the political *zeitgeist* of his time. His agenda represents a simple and straightforward path to political success: "Brexit was over, but the energy it had accumulated had to be retained. Fears needed to be redirected. Hatreds needed to pivot" (Byers, 2018, 119).

The word *Albion* to which the title alludes implies a nostalgic, mythical view of England and Englishness, which has regularly surfaced in the Brexit debate, as well. Byers, however, by appealing to the syntagm *perfidious Albion* to title his novel, a pejorative expression with a long history meant to signify England's deceitful character in international politics, want to draw

attention on the duplicity of his contemporaries in relation to immigration and to Britain's relationship with the European Union. The incisive scrutiny of Edmundsbury and its inhabitants reveals a community in which disinformation and manipulation are the driving forces of the entire social fabric, with the town acting as a metonymy of the Brexit Britain, in which archetypal characters representing both camps of the debate are clearly delineated.

In this climate, Darkin's story epitomises the dangers to which society is exposed when people become captives of myths that are created and disseminated by unscrupulous, influential leaders and partisan media. Darkin is portrayed as a weak, frustrated British native, an epitome for the class of 'left-behinds' (Ford & Goodwin, 2017, 4), ostensibly neglected by society and main-stream politicians. His vision of reality is heavily influenced by his choice of newspaper, *The Daily Record,* which suggests that the novel means to signal the important role that mass media played in the Brexit campaign. Darkin's nearly mystical belief in the articles he reads daily in the newspaper reverberates Benedict Anderson's comments on the character of printed media as a product that contributes to the construction of an imagined community between all readers who, by consuming simultaneously the same product as a "mass ceremony" (Anderson, 2006 [1983], 35), find themselves reassured that they belong to a larger group, the nation, who shares the same values and beliefs.

In the introductory scene of the novel, Darkin enacts the 'ceremony' of reading *The Daily Record,* a fictitious tabloid that is a satirical amalgamation of many of the UK's 'red top' tabloids. The lead article he reads portrays Britain as an invaded nation, a country "overrun, under threat, increasingly incapable [with] hordes of immigrants massed at its borders" (Byers, 2018, 24). From the pages of *The Daily Record,* it appears that a war is going on between native British and 'migrant invaders', as "those who have grown up here [must] share their hard-fought space with those who have just arrived; and those who deserve their place, to share it with those who merely envy it" (26). The lexicon linked to war and invasion, such as the terms "hordes" and "hard-fought", hints to the discourse of politicians who tend to exploit martial terminology to infuse a sense of danger and urgency in their message. Nigel Farage, for instance, started the referendum campaign with the statement "We will win this war" (Earle, 2018, n. pag.) and designated politicians who opposed Brexit as 'quislings', a reference to collaborators of the Nazis during World War II.

The emotional form in which the narrative of invasion is conveyed in *The Daily Record* beguiles Darkin, who finds the ideas in Bennington's article to be "rousing stuff" (Byers, 2018, 26). The invasion myth works fundamentally on Darkin's perception of reality and his self-

interrogation – "[w]hat was left to share?" (26), which integrates the character in the novel's overall discussion on the subject of 'sharing', reveals his anxiety about an imminent take-over by immigrants of an indefinite something that "little Darkin had left" (26). The adherence to the narrative professed by the newspaper relating to an alleged foreign invasion also commits Darkin to an imagined community of native British readers who, as he is convinced, must embark, in an act of national solidarity, on a crusade to claim back their rights and to fight for the preservation of what he putatively considers belonging to them: "housing, jobs, benefits" (106).

The fact that Darkin never leaves his flat and thus fails to connect directly to other people with different perspectives than his own leads him to constructing a delusional reality deeply influenced by the articles he reads in *The Daily Record.* This is obvious during the encounter he has with Robert Townsend, who intends to write for his blog an opinion piece on the proposed demolition of the Larchwood Estate and, while collecting his material, visits Darkin's flat. The conversation they attempt to establish turns dialogue into a parody that figures upon the impossibility of communication between individuals and groups representing antagonistic camps in the Brexit debate. This hallucinating dialogue is informed by fragmentation, as Darkin interrupts any attempt by Robert to present facts or to develop arguments:

> 'Because they can't give it to you, can they?'
> 'Because…'
> 'Because they've got to give it to a foreigner. Quotas, isn't it?'
> 'Well, I don't think …'
> 'Look around here', said Darkin.
> 'OK.'
> 'These used to be for local people. How many local people do you think live here now?'
> 'Well, hardly anyone lives here now.'
> 'But who do you think is going to live here?'
> 'Rich people,' said Robert. 'That's the point. They're decanting – '
> 'Decanting shit. They're making room.'
> 'Making room for – '
> 'For all the foreigners.' (Byers, 2018, 50)

When Darkin talks about the Larchwood situation, he basically parrots the discourse of the newspaper, as both the ideas and the vocabulary, such as the reference to "quotas", come directly from Bennington's articles. The novel comments on this type of aggressive rhetoric that resists rationality, deploring the power of mythical discourse to pervade large social groups and thus reinforce the emergence of group positions resting on strong feelings and conjunctures, rather than evidence and critical reasoning. Darkin's anxiety is genuine as long as he blindly believes the narrative that Britain is subject to a massive, inordinate migration; moreover, his intention to save Robert from his ignorance is genuinely earnest:

> 'You know how many foreigners come to this country every year?'

'About –'
'Too many, that's how many.' […]
'But there's no –'
'The cities are full,' said Darkin. 'Been going on for years. Read the papers […].'
'But if you look at the statistics …'
 'Lies,' said Darkin. 'All lies. You cannot trust statistics.' (Byers, 2018, 51)

Robert's attempts to appeal to statistics to sustain his arguments proves futile, since Darkin believes that the narrative provided in Bennington' article, which, as Christopher Flood explains, reduces complex social realities to a comprehensible simplicity (Flood, 2002, 8), is more trustworthy than any sophisticated, evidence-based reasoning. This part of the dialogue between Darkin and Robert provides a genuine example of the polemic between the discourses of *mythos* and *logos,* where the powerful affective component of Bennington's narrative "adds to a simple story the emotional underpinning typical of myth" (Bottici & Challand, 2013, 90) and secures the authority necessary to make a story believed and revered despite being contradicted by evidence.

The Daily Record's narrative on migration seems to pervade Darkin's life, affecting the way he connects to the reality around him and how he reacts to events. The novel portrays Darkin as a two-dimensional character, who unequivocally believes in the alarmist narrative of an ongoing migrant invasion. Consequently, he solemnly engages in what he trusts to be the patriotic duty of preserving the "hard-fought space" (Byers, 2018, 26) of the 'motherland' from being invaded by foreigners by stubbornly refusing to sell his flat to Downton Corporation. Therefore, the decrepit Larchwood flat becomes for Darkin an ideological battleground signifying the physical and symbolic space of the motherland, which, according to the stories he reads in *The Daily Record*, is under siege as "[i]mmigration had increased hugely, and suddenly they [the British] were being asked to move out" (94).

By describing Darkin's near-mystical connection to his flat, *Perfidious Albion* resonates Andrea Levy's story of the house in *Small Island,* but also Powell's story about the pensioner from Wolverhampton. Darkin's position in the debate over the dwelling space places him somewhere between Bernard and Powell's pensioner, who believe it is their duty to resist an alleged invasion of "home and hearth"(Levy, 2004, 240) by immigrants from the Caribbean. Similar to them, Darkin refuses to 'share' his living space with the immigrants of the new century. If, however, Levy reverses the logic of Powell's story by placing Queenie at the centre of the housing debate and thus offering an alternative story to that of Powell, Byers, by contrary, reverses Levy's story by re-casting Darkin in the role of Powell's widow. Through this narrative strategy, *Perfidious Albion* provides a harsh political comment on what appears to be the role of

Powell's legacy in the continuity of nativism in Britain, and, implicitly, to denounce the revival of a strikingly similar anti-migrant mythology in the context of contemporary immigration.

The resistance of nativist characters to cosmopolitan conviviality in a 'shared' space represents a major theme that both Levy's and Byers' novels approach. Nevertheless, the two novels employ different narrative strategies to negotiate migrants' right to a living space; if *Small Island* distils the invasion mythology by constructing the story in a manner that provides access to opposing perspectives, in *Perfidious Albion,* the physical presence of immigrants in the plot is eliminated and implicitly any opportunity to negotiate their position in the community of Edmundsbury. The employment of ellipsis in the conversation between Darkin and Robert – "But if you look at the statistics …" (Byers, 2018, 51), which suggests the exaggeration of the migrant presence is supplemented by the intervention of the omniscient author, who, by providing Hugo Bennington's reflections on his political plots, discloses the inconsistency of the invasion myth:

> But the powers of paranoia and oversimplification were, Hugo found, more pervasive than he could have imagined. The more Downton leaned on tenants in the Larchwood, the more convinced the tenants became of their own victimization, and the easier it was for Hugo to point the finger elsewhere, a phenomenon that explained the apparent anomaly in Edmundsbury's opinion polls: Edmundsbury was home to fewer immigrants than almost anywhere else in the country, yet anti-immigration sentiment had never been higher. (Byers, 2018, 106)

By depicting Edmundsbury as a space of exclusion, in which extensive fear of immigrants is discursively constructed, the novel provides a pungent comment on the pervasiveness of anti-migrant myths in small, provincial communities, where migration is virtually non-existent, yet narratives of an alleged migrant invasion produce polarisation and moral panic. Edmundsbury is therefore a metaphor for such a space, one invaded, not by immigrants, but rather by a blatant, yet efficient, anti-migrant mythology.

It can be said that, although migration is one of the prevalent themes in *Perfidious Albion,* this is a novel in which the migrant voice is not represented, but migrants are rather talked about. The migrant thus becomes in the novel a quintessential mythical character who, even though not physically present, 'inhabits' both the narratives and the social imaginary of the native population. Such a representation is actually in line with Henry Tudor's evaluation of the way myths function, when sustaining that the lack of direct contact between the myth's subject and its recipients does not devalue the myth's potential to be believed, but, by contrary, empowers it (Tudor, 1972, 17). Byers seems to keep deliberately the migrant voice out of the narrative to emphasize Britain's Brexit imbued ethos in the wake of the referendum and thus to draw a warning signal about the

extent to which events can be manipulated and reality discursively constructed to obtain desired reactions in relation to major political issues.

The absence of immigrant characters or of native crossing characters who, as in *Small Island,* should negotiate anti-migrant myths, does not make *Perfidious Albion* a nativist novel by any means. The only character displaying potential to challenge the pervasive anti-migrant mythology is Robert Townsend, who attempts to counter Darkin's beliefs during their first encounter, but eventually fails to be consistent and gradually lapses into the temptation of populism. Nevertheless, the narrative's overall gist connotes a comprehensive contestation of nativism as the novel negotiates anti-migrant myths through extensive employment of irony and by caricaturing the most representative nativist protagonists. Darkin, for instance, accommodates a series of inconsistencies that undermine his credibility, calling into question his viewpoints, attitudes, and ways of acting. His unassailable conviction that the migrant invasion is authentic makes him act as a self-confident promoter of an indisputable truth in his dialogue with Robert. Nevertheless, it is clear to the reader that Darkin's statements merely reproduce the rhetoric of a nativist populist newspaper and when Robert challenges him to utter his personal viewpoint about immigrants, he replies: "Not that I've got something against them personally" (Byers, 2018, 51). This reveals the fact that Darkin is captive in the parallel reality that is discursively constructed by nativist populist actors like Hugo Bennington, in which the induced fear of an abstract migrant invasion governs people's lives.

Unsurprisingly, Darkin genuinely believes that he is under constant threat to be attacked in his flat by "men in balaclavas" whose "voices would be Polish or black"(Byers, 2018, 36), immigrants whom he perceives as menacing 'others,' coming to take from him precisely what he 'doesn't want to share'. His credibility is, however, ridiculed as the plot line following his relation to Hugo Bennington beyond the communication channel represented by *The Daily Record,* reveals Bennington's true intentions and the schemes he designs and co-ordinates. Byers uses dramatic irony to unravel the aberrant relationship between Bennington and Darkin, as the reader knows that the real source of Darkin's tribulations is the alliance between Bennington and Downton, who plot the eviction of Larchwood residents in order to gentrify the area, and not the immigrants. Darkin, however, never comes to know that he is manipulated, and he eventually sells his flat to Downton frightened by Bennington's scenarios which claim that, sooner or later, immigrants would anyhow assail the flat to take by force what "should have been rightfully his" (Byers, 2018, 106).

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With Darkin fervently following Hugo Bennington and parroting his rhetoric, *Perfidious Albion* figures upon the symptomatic relations that tabloid media and populist politicians have cultivated with dissatisfied groups of native Britons during the Brexit debate. Several novels analysed in this study touch on this topic, but in *Perfidious Albion* it represents one of the main themes, as Hugo Bennington is the protagonist who receives the highest degree of focalisation. Both his behaviour and the rhetorical strategies used to convey his message place Bennington in the gallery of populist politicians who appeal to nativist discourse to provide a convenient scapegoat in the form of immigrants and pose as the saviour of the community, while stealthily acting against people's interest, manipulating their opinions, and helping the elite to gain more power.

Perfidious Albion is therefore the only novel in the analysed corpus that performs a comprehensive examination of the mechanisms of creation, dissemination, and reception of anti-migrant myths. Hugo Bennington, both as a journalist and a politician affiliated with the *England Always* party, a clear allusion to UKIP, embodies Ernst Cassirer's *mythmaker* (Cassirer, 1946); a prominent political figure who responds pragmatically to a concrete situation informed by ideological contradictions and social tensions by providing convenient, although hardly plausible explanations to the circumstances, the origin, and the consequences of events, and accordingly sets the objectives of the group to whom the myth is addressed (Cassirer, 1946, 282). The appeal to myths is thus a pragmatic option for Hugo, as the narratives about migration professed by him are turned into instruments of ideological manipulation, social fragmentation, and radicalization. This, nevertheless, facilitate the achievement of his goals by increasing his popularity and political endorsement among myth recipients, here symbolically represented by Darkin.

Although Hugo Bennington pretends to distance himself from ideas of "segregation or ethnic cleansing or whatever it was" (Byers, 2018, 316), he promotes an image of Britain as a country invaded, corrupted, and made unrecognisable by immigrants who exploit its resources and profit from its tolerance. In a television interview, he sustains that "Britain has in the past however many years seen the biggest rise in immigration since the Second World War" while "the ordinary white, working-class people of Edmundsbury had been forgotten, and what should have been rightfully theirs – jobs, housing, benefits, and the like – was now all going to immigrants and scroungers" (Byers, 2018, 256). The explanations for the state of present Britain, which Bennington's columns and speeches depict as "near-dystopian" (24), are, nevertheless, uncomplicated. The force of his discourse relies on framing his message in terms of urgency; in

this sense, the appeal to welfare chauvinism proves to be a key for xenophobic mobilisation and a code for political success.

Since most of the plot revolves around Hugo Bennington, the novel deploys significant resources to delineate him as an unreliable character and to denounce the insubstantial character of the myths he promotes. Early in the novel, he is already mentioned when Darkin ritualistically begins his day by reading Bennington's columns in *The Daily Record,* and the dramatic tone imbuing the text of the column gives the impression of a fanatic patriot whose answer to the question '[w]hat don't you want to share?' would be a "historical England, which had once made him proud and secure" (Byers, 2018, 103). Both his xenophobic views and the nostalgia for "the England of his childhood, of his frustrated and bitter dreams, an England in which he once again felt at home" (119) recommend him to be the novel's embodiment of the 'saviour of the nation' myth. The reader's access to this straightforward perspective on Bennington is filtered through Darkin's dim outlook. Yet, as the novel's narrative development brings him into spotlight, the reader has access to a comprehensive description of a Hugo who "operated in a complicated state of balance" (75), oscillating between the "Outspoken Hugo" who says things "he wasn't supposed to say" (75) and "Restrained Hugo", whose deeds should rather be kept away from the public eye.

Byers seems to establish early in the novel a relationship with his readers that grounds a shared understanding of the character's duplicity, as Hugo's description is informed by irony and a succession of contradictions that are juxtaposed in such way as to ridicule his pompous chauvinistic allegations. 'Outspoken Hugo' acts in the public sphere as the mouthpiece of *England Always* party, attracting extensive admiration among people with nativist views and increasing the party's approval rate through a discourse that blends anti-migrant mythology with tropes depicting him as the representative of the 'silent majority'. He engages in a campaign that formally criticises Downton's redeveloping of the Larchwood estate, using the situation to promote the image of a country invaded by migrants who are about to take over the dwelling space meant for British natives, while he secretly receives campaign money from Downton in exchange for help to evict all the Larchwood residents. Meanwhile, the same 'Restrained Hugo' is at the core of movements such as the "self-styled 'militia' called Brute Force" (Byers, 2018, 84), a fictional equivalent of *English Defence League,* placed in the service of the *England Always* party to carry out the "street-level race war" (84).

Although the depiction of such situations and stances in which Hugo Bennington is involved may indicate a high level of tension, the narrative tone is by and large sarcastic. Byers positions characters like Bennington, but also Darkin, *England Always'* president, Alan Elm, or *Brute Force*

leader, Ronnie Childs (irony intended) in rather childish situations, yet in which they pretend to act with the gravity of serious, responsible statesmen. The depiction of a meeting between Bennington and party's executive, Alan Elm, represents a compelling sample of militant irony, by which Bennington is exposed as a character with, in his own words, a "high ability to navigate the modern moral mishmash of equivocations and evasions" (Byers, 2018, 121). Even though both party leaders share similar nativist values, they, obliviously or not, seem to have no problem to meet "over pints of beer and curry" (119) in an all-you-can-eat Indian restaurant to discuss strategic decisions for the party's future. Sarcasm is emphasised in this scene through the repeatedly mentioned association of "beer and bhaji" (120) that the interlocutors enjoy, which for liberal contemporary Britons may simply represent a symbol of Britain's cosmopolitanism, but in these circumstances suggests a dissonance between the values the protagonists promote and their deeds. By this, the novel raises questions about both the morality of the characters and the truthfulness of their discourses.

As the number of pints grows, what was supposed to be a strategic talk is reduced to Alan saying to "no one in particular", after "he took a long, extravagant sigh: 'Fucking niggers' [sic]" (Byers, 2018, 120), while Hugo moves the discussion further towards a digression by which he rather attempts to convince himself that he is not a racist by "pointing to the valuable contributions assorted ethnic minorities have made to this country, such as Indian food and Thai massage" (120). By denouncing the hypocrisy of populist actors, this scene contributes to the novel's systematic critique of nativist views promoted by characters like Hugo Bennington and his followers. The way the novel ends also endorses this idea, as, despite the overall dystopian atmosphere, a sparkle of hope shines through along with Bennington's downfall. His total discrediting, which implies a refutation of the ideas he promotes, is completed when Deepa and Trina, two women who react to Bennington's chauvinism, release on Internet compromising images that reveal him as a sexual predator. He is thus identified by the wide public for what he really is and at the same time the readers receive the true answer to the question the novel addresses to Hugo Bennington: 'what don't you want to share?'.

4.3.5 Conclusion

This chapter has provided a discussion of how literary responses to immigration can challenge myths about an alleged migrant invasion in Britain. By analysing novels that address this issue in two different historical moments, the chapter has explored how literary works negotiate the

production and function of migrant invasion myths that have permeated British society since the end of World War II. The analysed texts successfully denounce the ways these myths amplify the fear that immigrants invade local communities, taking over the living space and social privileges that should exclusively be reserved for the native population.

A review of myths in this category in the entire corpus was followed by a close examination of how the novels *Small Island* and *Perfidious Albion* engage with the migrant invasion mythology. Both novels are informed by a sense of decline and progress, as they parallel histories of the decline of the British Empire (*Small Island*) with Britain's troublesome relation to the European Union that culminated with Brexit (*Perfidious Albion*), but at the same time juxtapose them with an imagery that sustains the possibility of achieving a cosmopolitan cohabitation.

Andrea Levy depicts in *Small Island* the migrant experience of the Windrush Generation from the vantage point of the 2000s, thus providing an unmitigated commentary on racism as underlying framework for the anti-migrant mythology that impacted significantly race relations and migrant experiences in Britain during the first decades following the war. The novel negotiates a series of migration myths that generated panic among many locals, represented by characters like Bernard Blight and Mr. Todd, whose vision of Britain is that of a besieged fortress that is insidiously infiltrated by undesirable immigrants. At the same time, the novel denounces the absurdity of the invasion narrative, as Levy meticulously constructs the text so that the readers also have access to perspectives expressed by characters who share a cosmopolitan vision of community.

Nonetheless, the novel's retrospective perspective not only responds to a historical reality of which some may believe that British society has overcome, but equally represents a powerful comment on the permanence of what today is ominously described as Powell's legacy (Earle, 2018; Sweney, 2018) and which continues to inform significantly the British social imaginary. In this respect, although the novel's setting and events reflect the reality after World War II, *Small Island* is, as Graham McPhee points out, a "much more contemporary novel [since] there are plenty of big ideas here, but set within social experience they are tested, reconfigured, replaced or reinvented" (MacPhee, 2011, 161).

And if the optimistic message informing the denouement of Levy's novel proved to shatter after 2004, when nativism re-emerged in Britain after the arrival of migrants from Eastern Europe, it can be said that Sam Byers' *Perfidious Albion* takes over the scrutiny of similar themes from where Levy has left them. Byers focusses primarily on the relationship between Hugo

Bennington, an archetype of the populist leader always prepared to appeal to nativist rhetoric in order to achieve endorsement, and Alfred Darkin, an archetype of the middle class left-behinds, who firmly believes that prophetic leaders are there to protect his privileges as a native against ostensible hordes of immigrants. And even though Byers chooses not to represent any migrant character as negotiator of anti-migrant mythology, he successfully challenges the foundations of such myths by representing with irony the features and deeds of his nativist characters.

Both novels link plot events and characters to historical events, historical figures, and ideological positions that have marked British society during the past decades, thus taking a determined critical stance on the politics of exclusion and discrimination that often characterised the interaction between immigrants and natives in Britain. A major common theme that both novels engage is the sense of victimhood and besieged fortress, which, through clear allusions, is linked to the nativist legacy of Enoch Powell. It can be said that characters like Bernard, one of Powell's 'left-behinds', professed the fear of a Caribbean migrant invasion in the wake of World War II, while decades later, Darkin, one of Nigel Farage's 'left-behinds', revives the same type of discourse. Assumably, they both decry their fear not for a real take-over of social and economic benefits by immigrants, but, indeed, a fear for the loss of the privileges secured in the time of the empire by their Anglo-Saxon whiteness. Therefore, Powell's endorsement in the 1960 or the pro-Brexit vote five decades later, can be said to represent a statement of support for the re-establishment of racial hierarchies for which many native Britons are still nostalgic.

4.4 Endangered Culture and Identity Myths

4.4.1 Preliminaries

As discussed in the previous chapters, the moral panic engendered by narratives purporting a massive invasion of immigrants with allegedly radically different cultures and inferior values became one of the main expressions of the antagonisms informing the interaction between migrants and locals in Britain during the past seven decades. Moreover, in the post-imperial context, a major narrative underpinning an inflexible opposition to migration was caused, as Robert Ford and Matthew Goodwin contend, by its public perception "as a source or symbol of rapid social change that threatens traditional identities and values" (Ford & Goodwin, 2017, 6). Therefore, the sense of crisis built around the fear of an invasion of the 'motherland' by migrant 'others' has also been enhanced by the dissemination of a mythology claiming that immigrants

represent a threat to British national identity and a source of contamination for an allegedly ethnically and culturally homogeneous nation. As Paul Gilroy signals in *Postcolonial Melancholia,* nativist discourses about immigration in Britain have played with these "powerful feelings of aggression, guilt, and fear and articulated them as a violent racist politics" meant to 'prevent' the so-called 'catastrophic outcome' for Britain, resulting from the attempts to mix races and cultures (P. Gilroy, 2005, 101).

In this chapter, the focus is on investigating how some the selected novels negotiate myths about Britain's allegedly endangered-by-migration culture and identity. The first section (4.3.2) describes the most significant patterns of configuration of myths in this category, which include narratives about a homogenous (white) British community, informed by a shared cohesive set of values that are set in connection with a glorious past. At the same time, myths in this category allege that the nation's pre-eminence is endangered by the infiltration of immigrants, which engenders miscegenation, cultural degradation, and a debasement of British identity. This discussion is followed by a review of the most significant representations of endangered culture and identity myths in the primary sources (section 4.3.3). Their brief examination substantiates the pervasiveness of these myths in British nativist circles and highlights the continuity of some patterns of these myths in both social-historical periods with which the novels engage.

The last section of the chapter (4.3.4) investigates how the novels *Absolute Beginners* (MacInnes, 2011 [1959]) by British novelist and journalist Colin MacInnes and *Middle England* (Coe, 2018) by contemporary British author Jonathan Coe negotiate various forms of expressing the myth that immigration from the Caribbean in the late 1950s (MacInnes) and from Eastern Europe since 2004, respectively (Coe), represents a threat to the ethnic and cultural homogeneity of the national community. Both novels filter a series of narratives that intend to project an image of immigrants from both periods as significantly different 'others' who, by interfering with the British way of life, threaten to dismantle a historically established ethnically and morally coherent world. The proliferation of such myths within British nativist circles is insightfully negotiated by the two novels in focus through narrative techniques and use of aesthetic devices that facilitate an open interpretation of events and characters and create a textual potential to undermine the dominant tendencies of meaning creation specific to myths.

4.4.2 Unpacking the Endangered Culture and Identity Myths

It can be argued that in post-war Britain, populist rhetoric has confiscated the nativist principle of the natives' pre-eminence and merged it with the 'common-sensical' idea of defining the 'people' exclusively in ethnic and cultural terms. In addition, populist actors have efficiently exploited the long-ingrained fears and fantasies related to the dangers that immigration represents, arousing a sense of crisis around the narrative that immigrants, who do not belong to the core in-group, the 'true people', jeopardise the group's ethnic and cultural homogeneity and precipitate the country's decay from its position of world power.

Exclusionary attitudes towards migrants can thus be said to emerge in post-war Britain from a tradition of imagining the nation as a community whose homogeneity relies on a taken for granted ethnic and cultural stability, at least, as Stephen Greenblatt argues, "in their original [so-called] natural state, before being disrupted or contaminated" (Greenblatt et al., 2009, 3) through interaction with incoming migrants. British nativist discourses of the past seven decades have constantly claimed that the presence of immigrants on the national territory is problematic not only because they represent a competing force in the distribution of material and symbolic resources, in the sense debated in the previous chapter, but also because they signify an essential 'other' altering the native community's composition and traditional way of life.

A key term that becomes debatable in this context is that of British 'core culture', in the sense promoted, among others, by Migration Watch UK, which purports the existence of a series of concrete and identifiable cultural traits that are stable in time and permeate the entire body of the nation (Migration Watch UK, 2006, n. pag.). References to a 'core culture' in the sense described above acquire through obsessive repetition the status of an ethnic myth, which nativist discourses in Britain have extensively promoted to justify anti-migrant attitudes and policies. The impression that traditional norms and values are rapidly disappearing as immigration increases is meant to reinforce the rhetoric of a 'core culture' being endangered by immigrants who fail or refuse to integrate. Nevertheless, a critical scrutiny of the claims about the existence of a 'core British culture' raises questions referring to the possibility of defining culture as essentially homogeneous and continuous and implicitly challenges the thesis of its disruption caused by immigration.

The myth of a body politic characterised by ethnic and cultural homogeneity is often embedded in British nativist imaginary in the metaphor of the 'heartland'[28] as an "idealised conception of the community" (Taggart, 2004, 274), which is built upon deep emotions and idyllic representations of people, spaces, and events rather than on objective descriptions and historical facts. The many references to 'heartland' in the novels investigated in this study are connected to nativist characters who invoke the existence of a mythical place of geographical and social purity, which also bears the promise of cultural and ethnic homogeneity. However, this idealised territory differs from standard utopias, as Paul Taggard argues, in the sense that they are not directed towards the future but at the past in an attempt to "(re)construct what has been lost by the present" (Taggart, 2000, 95).

The passéist dimension attached to the 'heartland' in the British social imaginary of the post-war period has a special connotation as the desirable ethnically and culturally pure community that the heartland signifies is overlapped with an assumably glorious past associated with Britain's imperial history. This way of perceiving the past leads to the construction of a myth that conflates Britain's supremacy with ethnic and cultural homogeneity, a myth that is instrumental in both explaining and deploring Britain's decay after the war as a consequence of the 'contamination' of the body politic and dilution of the 'core culture' caused by immigration. In such circumstances, the idea that any contact with aliens generates anxiety about a possible interference of otherness in the domain of the 'self' appears justifiable; therefore, diversity, pluralism, and cosmopolitanism are presumed as problematic and thus rejectable.

If the homogeneity of the past provided strength and solidarity, then the weakness and confusion of the present can be explained through the loss of unanimity. Consequently, in the logic of British nativism, rejecting migration may seem to alleviate or even eliminate the problems of the present. For this reason, the narrative professing an exclusionary ethos and the proscription of any form of multicultural cohabitation is connected in British social imaginary with what Paul Gilroy describes as a "culture of melancholia and the pathology of greatness" (Gilroy, 2005, 90), which implies a reorientation towards a past informed by homogeneity, allegedly a "place or moment before the country lost its moral and cultural bearings" (90).

The myth of the 'heartland' as guardian of a homogeneous British core culture not only offers a nostalgic vision of the nation at the ostensibly apogee of its glory but implicitly generates the

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[28] The term 'heartland' is used with a rather similar meaning in the USA to refer to the Midwestern United States, as an area where political conservative and cultural traditional values predominate (Cayton, et all., [2006], 71-73), and from where its use was transferred into British context.

promotion of narratives meant to raise panic about immigration as a source of cultural and ethnical 'contamination'. The formulas by which such myths are expressed in the analysed novels resonate Enoch Powell's rhetoric during the 1960s and 1970s, which, as Paul Gilroy argues, speculates the idea that immigrants were exclusively responsible for the "disruption of an old experience of home, and a loss of enchantment which made home a place of safety and consolation" (Gilroy, 2005, 114). In the tradition established by Powell, migration is always understood through the categories of culture and ethnicity as a destructive event, a threat to the 'national character'. This is because, as he dramatically declares, British society "was likely to be undermined by the presence of migrants from a different cultural, racial and religious background" (Powell, 1968 n. pag.). The construction of myths claiming that British culture and identity are endangered appeals to an imagery that juxtaposes migration, as the epitome of alterity and threat, to a narrative evoking and invoking continuity. The 'heartland' is perceived in this context as a pivotal space that provides the means to purify and re-homogenise the body nation through a return to the mythical condition that preceded migration.

In the light of imagining the nation organically, the visceral fear of altering the national identity and the communities' way of life stems from real or imagined changes in the racial and ethnic composition of the nation. This fear of miscegenation is embedded in the depiction of inter-racial relationships, which predominantly imply male immigrants and native females, and which are construed by many natives as a key element of the migrant intrusion into the national body. If women are traditionally a metaphor for nature and home, associated with stability, reliability, and authenticity (Massey, 1994, 180), in nativist discourse, womanhood and nation, as elements symbolising a patriarchal position of responsibility and domination, are conflated in a way that suggests an overlapping of patriarchy and patriotism. In this context, references to miscegenation signify not only the risks of disintegration of a mythical ethnic, cultural, and social order that allegedly existed before immigration, but, as Powell emphatically framed it, the "race suicide" of a British nation that was "busily engaged in heaping up its own funeral pyre" (Powell, 1968, n. pag.).

4.4.3 The Power and the Glory of a Lost Empire. An Overview of Endangered Culture and Identity Myths in the Novels

The colonial era represents a historical period that many Britons regard as the apogee of British civilisation, therefore, the continuous decline of the empire after World War II was perceived not just in terms of a diminution of the country's economic and political prominence, but also as a process that impacted the mechanisms of self-identification of the citizens of the metropole. At the same time, this process was significantly influenced by the arrival of immigrants from former colonies, a phenomenon that contributed to the reconfiguration of culture and society. And as the radical transformations proved too difficult to endure for many Britons, immigrants often served as explanations for the shortcomings the society had to undergo.

In such periods marked by difficulties, British nativist discourses have successfully instrumentalised various migration myths that reinforce each other by creating the sensation of a connection between the narratives they promote. Myths about an invasion by radically different and inferior migrant 'others', which are analysed in the previous chapters, may function for many British natives as a justification to defend the national territory against such 'alien' intrusions. And if through alterity myths an overdetermined, dehumanised image of immigrants is constructed and instilled in the collective subconscious, myths purporting a migrant invasion contribute to triggering a sense of crisis built around the fear of immigrants who represent a threat to the community's cultural and ethnic cohesion and to the national group's collective identity. The proliferation of such myths during the 1950s and the yearly 1960s, and again during the first decades of the twenty-first century, generated increased anxiety among many native British who felt threatened by the changes immigration entailed. Many of the literary responses to migration investigated in this study engage in denouncing myths in the category of *endangered culture and identity myths,* and this section provides an overview of most representative examples.

Andrea Levy's *Small Island* (2004) is a novel that depicts with detachment and irony the effects of incipient interactions between Caribbean migrants and British natives in a historical moment when the idea of British national identity was undergoing a process of redefinition. Characters like Mr. Todd or Bernard Blight, who embody a traditional mode of cultural and ethnic identification, act as promoters of the myth claiming that immigrants jeopardise the authentic core culture of the community. Mr. Todd's vision is rather bleak in this sense: "His concern, he said, was that they would turn the area into a jungle" (Levy, 2004, 113). This exaggeration implying obvious racist connotations is visibly grounded in the fear that changes in the ethnic composition

of British communities would trigger a deterioration of the ostensibly superior cultural standards of natives. In a different context, he articulates the same feeling when referring to his neighbourhood as a place that looks "hardly like our country anymore" (436), a description that aligns with Enoch Powell's vision when he speaks of "homes and neighbourhoods changed beyond recognition" (Powell, 1968, n. pag.).

Mr. Todd's fear that immigrants disrupt the nation's traditional way of life is also upheld by Bernard. He claims that immigrants cannot appreciate, understand, and integrate into the superior culture of the metropole as "[t]hese coloured people don't have the same standards. (…) Nor used to our ways. When in Rome … They know no better, like children" (Levy, 2004, 469). The novel touches further on the drama of change and possession affecting Bernard when it depicts his evocation of childhood memories: "Those cosy times up here with Ma. A chair in front of a roaring fire. A pot of tea, a muffin each. That was nice. To look at it now made my blood boil" (Levy, 2004, 472). This reference to the ritual of tea drinking in front of the fire, which in British social imaginary is sometimes considered a core element of British culture, projects an idyllic perspective on the past that is imbued with nostalgia for a time and space informed by a sense of stability and homeliness. The juxtaposition of an idyllic past to what Bernard perceives as a dystopic present, signified by a degradation of the sense of home after Queenie allowed migrants to move in, nurtures the myth that migration engenders a disintegration of a so-called genuine British national identity.

The novel *Jamaican Migrant* (Collins, 1965) by Wallace Collins debates extensively the deceitful character of the myth professing that migrant workers deteriorate the long-established British work ethics. The novel's protagonist, Wally, is often exposed to remarks implying that Jamaican migrants fail to meet the standards of British professionals because of their low morals and natural indolence. The narrative that migrants "came up on a banana boat to lower the morals of dearly beloved England" (Collins, 1965, 64), which speculates that the alleged primitiveness of immigrants corrupts the locals' superior way of life, is convincingly denounced by Collins throughout the novel. He depicts his protagonist in stark opposition to this narrative, as a diligent, dynamic character, who progresses in his career as a professional cabinetmaker, gaining the respect of his employer and of most of his co-workers.

Claims to a degradation of morality caused by Caribbean migrants are also negotiated humorously in Sam Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* (Selvon, 2006 [1956]). When Sir Galahad tries to catch a pigeon in the park to cook it, "one of them geezers who does always wear fur coat come through the entrance with little Flossie on a lead, to give the little dear a morning

constitution" (118) fulminates against him: "'Oh you cruel, cruel beast!' the woman say (…) 'You cruel monster! You killer!'" (118). Selvon's use of irony in this scene creates a contrast between the woman's claim to moral principles as defender of the pigeon and her wearing a fur coat, a symptomatic case of using double morality when judging the Trinidadian immigrant and herself. By this comment on the woman's hypocrisy, Selvon subtly exposes such preconceived claims to superior morality as a mere racist reflex.

Myths professing that migration has a negative impact on British culture also pervade the novels engaging with the recent migration from Eastern Europe. A critical approach to the effects of this myth is taken by Tracey Mathias in the novel *Night of the Party* (Mathias, 2018)*.* In the dystopian society that Britain becomes after the Brexit referendum, the narrative that "the country needs to preserve *our* culture, *our* values" (Mathias, 2018, 168) against alien interferences is institutionalized in the official doctrine of the ruling *Party.* The myth professing that migrants jeopardise the nation's unadulterated cultural identity underpins the common effort of state authorities and 'true people' to keep migration at bay, serving as a justification for ethnic cleansing and forced deportation of illegal, that is virtually all, immigrants. The harsh critic that Mathias renders in *Night of the Party* comes in response to the widely accepted mythological vision of the nation as a homogeneous body advocated by prominent figures in the Brexit debate. Prime Minister David Cameron, for instance, has declared of himself to be a "'one nation' conservative" who was construing "national identity in terms of a shared and cohesive set of values" (Ashcroft & Bevir, 2019, 35). It is therefore no surprise that he had been promoting throughout his term the mythology that migration and the "failed doctrine of multiculturalism" (Cameron, 2011, n. pag) have caused the "weakening of our collective identity," (idem), a vision reflected widely in the official doctrine of the *Party* in Mathias' novel.

A similar fictional response is provided in Sam Byers' *Perfidious Albion* (Byers, 2018)*,* in which the mythology promoted by the nativist populist politician Hugo Bennington is exposed to a thorough critique. The vision of a ruined-by-migration Britain that Hugo promotes in his political discourse is that of a despicable, dystopian country, in which what "was at threat was not simply the day-to-day security of a small English town, but a way of life, and the extent to which this way of life was or was not defended had wide-reaching and potentially ruinous implications for the whole country" (Byers, 2018, 210). Consequently, Hugo's ideal of Britain, like that conceived by Cameron, implies a (re)turn to its 'past glory', which inevitably entails the rejection of anything that does not fit this image, as he reflects: "When he talked of present-day England and the ways in which it both disappointed and terrified him, he made it clear he was

regarding it in contrast to another, historical England, which had once made him proud and secure" (Byers, 2018, 103).

Hugo's nostalgic longing for a historical, pre-migration Britain represents a desire for the re-enactment of the 'heartland' ideal, one that allegedly secures the nation's strength and enables "recapturing its pre-contemporary pomp" (119). This mythicized version of Britain, expressed through references to the British Empire or the Second World War as signifiers of the past glory, is denounced in similar terms in Jonathan Coe's *Middle England* (Coe, 2018). The yearning for an ethnically and culturally homogeneous Britain represents for Helena, a retired widow living with her son in a typical British rural community, both a form of reassurance and a reason to repel the structural changes caused by what she considers an infiltration of immigrants in the British traditional way of life. She cannot come to terms with the fact that the new shopkeeper in the local store is an East European migrant and that the agency has assigned her a new cleaner, also an immigrant from Lithuania (Coe, 2018, 73). In a conversation with Sophie, her son's fiancé, Helena bemoans the decay of the traditional community, which, after the arrival of immigrants, has lost the sense of solidarity to the point when "[w]e don't look after our own anymore" (166).

Some representations of endangered culture and identity myths identified in the novels also speculate about the hazards of 'racial contamination' and 'racial degeneration' caused by migration. The nativist discourse in Britain, mostly during the 1950s and 1960s, incorporated what James Walvin described as a "traditional dislike of miscegenation, which encompassed a range of biological and genetic myths" (Walvin, 1984, 81) that have their roots in Britain's colonial history and stretch further into the post-war inter-race relations. The fear of miscegenation, however, was also regarded by British nativists in terms of social values and political organisation. As Paul Gilroy mentions when referring to Powell's speech, "the catastrophic outcome of all Britain's mistaken attempts to mix the races" would engender the "even more terrifying prospect of a wholesale reversal of the proper ordering of colonial power" (Gilroy, 2005, 101).

Myths claiming the dangers of miscegenation are denounced in many of the novels dealing with the Windrush Generation immigration, as for instance in Andrew Salkey's *Escape to an Autumn Pavement* (Salkey, 2009 [1960]). In this novel, the dangers of changes in the racial and ethnic composition of the nation are articulated in a pamphlet of the *White Defence League,* which reads:

> This country's greatest treasure has been its native stock, its Anglo-Saxon blood. Its great achievements have not been accidents of nature, but results of the character of our race,

results of the quality of the British stock. Every mile of Britain, every moment of her history, every facet of her national life has been stamped with the character of her native white folk. Our greatest concern must, therefore, be the preservation of her native blood. Accordingly, the White Defence League has been formed to awaken the British people to Britain's foremost problem, the Coloured invasion, of an effective and immediate policy to keep Britain White. (Salkey, 1960, 127-128)

Such visions of Britain, expressed through a myth that conflates British supremacy with ethnic and racial purity, are negotiated by Salkey through the employment of irony in every textual reference to the *White Defence League.* Native characters ridicule the message and tenets of the organisation, as it is the case with Fiona, a white British woman, who defies the league's political programme by being involved in a romantic relationship with the novel's protagogonist, Jonnie Solberg. A similar approach is noticed in Laura Wilson's *The Riot* (Wilson, 2013)*,* whose protagonist, inspector Stratton, takes a dim view of the same *White Defence League's* messages, this time published in its newspaper, *The Black and White News.* The nativist propaganda piece warns about the dangers that "Producing a Half-Breed Population" represent for society and urges the British natives to "KEEP BRITAIN WHITE" (Wilson, 2013, 76).

Criticism of the myth about miscegenation also transpires in Beryl Gilroy's *Black Teacher* (B. Gilroy, 2021, [1976])*.* Facing the prospects of a mixed-race marriage, the novel's protagonist reflects on the powerful conditioning to which she herself has fallen victim: "I worried, too, about my child to be – the product of what was called 'miscegenation'. It wasn't its colour or the texture of its hair that bothered me, but its wholeness. Might there not be some flaws in the chromosomes? Again, the society in which I now live has conditioned my way of thinking" (B. Gilroy, 2021, [1976], 145). However, the protagonist's speculative misconceptions are dispelled by her white husband's unwavering attitude, who assumes the role of a liminal agent, "a buffer between this society and myself and as someone who could interpret its subtle nuances for me" (139).

The trope of mixed-race marriages is also revisited by E.R. Braithwaite in *To Sir, With Love* (Braithwaite, 2014, [1961])*.* As he intends to propose, his fiancé's father, this time a representative of the British liberal middle class, expresses concerns that the children resulting from the marriage "will belong nowhere, and nobody will want them" (Braithwaite, 2014, [1961], 124). Such concerns about the unintegrability of mixed-race children in the white majority community prompt the protagonist's reflections on the formation of the 'community', which he describes as "a blanket word, like 'nation' or 'club'", a fluid structure in which its members "contribute to those prejudices as much by not protesting against them as by deliberately acting in agreement " (102).

A final example of negotiating the myth professing that miscegenation causes the debasement of the British national community that I want to mention is extracted from Colin MacInnes' *Absolute Beginners* (MacInnes, 2011, [1959]). The protagonist of the novel, a young white British man with cosmopolitan views, is abhored by the litany of detrimental myths about Caribbean migrants promoted by the nativist newspaper *Mrs Dale Daily* in a leading article. Among others, the article claims that "mixed marriages (…) led to a mongrel race, inferior physically and mentally, and rejected by both of the unadulterated communities" (MacInnes, 2011, [1959], 155). This obssesive fear of racial contamination and racial degeneration pevades MacInnes' novel as a represention of society's link to Britain's imperial past, which the protagonist repeatedly confrunts. A particularly significant scene in this sense figures at the end of the novel, when the protagonist, after having decided not to emmigrate, welcomes a group of newly arrived African immigrants with a defiant, exuberant embrace and offers to assist them in their integration in Britain.

4.4.4 Re-assessing Britishness in *Absolute Beginners* and *Middle England*

Immigrants arriving to Britain after World War II have constantly been confined within the intricate social networks of the new homeland, drifting between the contrasts of integration and rejection, sometimes embodying the desirable vector of economic growth, whereas sometimes epitomizing the exotic 'other' that allegedly disturbs the nation's ethnic and cultural homogeneity. The way the image of migrants has been constructed in British social imaginary has, in most cases, been informed by strong tendencies to exclude immigrants from the national body through the promotion of myths overstating the hazards that migrant integration represents for the nation's moral and political status. Two novels included in the corpus provide a distinctive critique of such narratives, negotiating their function in the process of imagining a perpetuation of British imperial supremacy, as well as refuting the anxieties about ethnic alteration and cultural dilution caused by migration as mere justifications of nativist attitudes and policies. In the subsequent sections, the attention draws towards the novels *Absolute Beginners* (MacInnes, 2011, [1959]) by Colin MacInnes and *Middle England* (Coe, 2018) by Jonathan Coe, examining how they challenge the myths professing that migration jeopardises Britain's etnhic and cultural homogeneity and precipitate its debasement.

4.4.4.1 Initiating the White Anti-racism in *Absolute Beginners*

Most fiction works that deal with themes related to migration in Britain in the aftermath of World War II were written by migrant authors who have experienced migration themselves, but a notable exception from this trend is represented by British born novelist and journalist Colin MacInnes. His writings, which engage with the changing reality of the 1950s, are driven by, as MacInnes himself confesses in the article *A Taste of Reality* (1969), the imperative of bringing to fore those unrepresented voices and positions about whom the majority of Britons "know little of (…), the new race of English born coloured boys, (…) the millions of teenagers (…), the multitudinous Commonwealth minorities in our midst" (MacInnes, 1986, [1961], 206). MacInnes was aware that many aspects of the social dynamics of the 1950s, a decade which he believed would be remembered for having fostered more social changes than any before it (206), lacked transparent representations from the Briton's perspective in both journalism and literature (Bentley, 2004, 151). He therefore involved, through his journalistic and literary work, in filling this gap as an attempt to provide a critique of the dominant discourses that (re)presented immigration and ethnic minorities as a threat to traditional British identity.

MacInnes' interest with youth and black immigrant culture during the 1950s was manifested in a series of journalistic articles which were published in 1961 in the collection entitled *England, Half English* (MacInnes, 1986, [1961]), in which the above mentioned article was included. In the seminal book *Postcolonial London: Rewriting the Metropolis* (McLeod, 2004), John McLeod describes MacInnes as a significant journalist and a BBC broadcaster who represented "an important anti-racist public figure during the 1950s and 1960s who attempted to challenge myths about newcomers" (McLeod, 2004, 43). Much of the social critique MacInnes advanced in his journalistic texts also informs his fictional work which makes up the so-called *London Trilogy,* consisting of the novels *City of Spades* (1957), *Absolute Beginners* (1959) and *Mr Love and Justice* (1960)*.* One of the major issues that MacInnes negotiates in these novels is the social inertia that hindered the average citizen from comprehending the reality of a dismantling British Empire, which engendered a re-definition of Britain's position in the world, as well as of British national identity. In this context, MacInnes scrutinises the juxtaposition of a traditional political culture that clings onto the old imperial hierarchies with an emerging youth culture, which seems to accept easier the undeniable impact of the black colonial migrants in the (re)making of the post-war social fabric and the inevitable transformation of the nation's ethnic structure and cultural manifestations.

These contradictory attitudes towards the nature of British national identity are overtly marked in MacInnes' fiction by the inculcation of the British collective consciousness with an anti-migrant mythology that intends to reinforce the colonial ethos and maintain the existing social order. In this context, the novel *Absolute Beginners* (MacInnes, 2011, [1959]) represents a literary response that attempts to de-mystify the outlook on migration from colonies in its incipient stage, by deconstructing nativist narratives that represent immigration as a threat to the national community's cultural and ethnic homogeneity and by articulating an alternative utopian vision about nation and community inspired by cosmopolitan values. The novel figures extensively on the burgeoning cultural cosmopolitanisation emerging within the post-war British youth subculture, depicted through the narrative voice of an unnamed teenager referred in the novel as the Beginner.

The plot structure of the novel is linear, and it follows the protagonist's uncomplicated route through various locations in London where he encounters friends, family members, customers, local hustlers, and partygoers, to return invariably to the point of departure; his rented flat in the slum of Napoli, a fictional renaming of Notting Hill. The Beginner chooses to live here on his own, away from the conventions of a British traditional household, not because he must but because the multicultural and relaxed atmosphere of the area affords him freedom. The teenage protagonist is a professional photographer and his interest in recording events, places, and persons foregrounds the apparent documentary nature of the text (Bentley, 2003). Nevertheless, the trope of photography represents a plot device that triggers the Beginner's reflections on different topics, from patriotism to sex, music, the relation between education and morals, or the nature of racism and its defining role in the configuration of the British post-war reality. The insertion of lengthy and winding digressions through which the Beginner expresses his thoughts related to his direct experiences foregrounds the text's reflexive character. This functions as an indication of MacInnes' impulse to express a radical social critique of the official discourses promoting a false understanding of the societal transformations that immigration engendered in relation to race, nation, and identity. Through the voice of the young protagonist, the novel reveals and negotiates the identitarian anxieties produced by the dissemination of an anti-migrant mythology, which was beginning to surface in the mainstream discourse of contemporary media and of nationalist extremist organisations during the 1950s and which gained public expression in the so-called race riots of Nottingham and Notting Hill in the summer and autumn of 1958.

A major narrative technique employed by MacInnes in constructing the novel is represented by the juxtaposition of antithetic perspectives about Britain's present and past identification in relation

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to its position in the new world order ensuing the war. This tension is reflected through a contrast of visions between the older generations, who refuse to renounce the idea of Britain as a major colonial power, and a young generation that grew up after the war and whose interpretation of the actual situation is more anchored in reality. *Absolute Beginners* distils this identitarian dilemma through the teenage protagonist's consciousness, who questions aspects of national identity reflected in traditional forms of Britishness, such as the myth of the Second World War as the 'nation's finest hour'. In one of the countless arguments the Beginner has with his elder half-brother, Vern, a former war veteran and enthusiastic defender of Britain's colonial history, he takes a critical stance towards what Paul Gilroy named "the pathology of greatness" (Gilroy, 2005, 90), which, the Beginner comes to realise, conditions the outlook on reality of "all oldies" (MacInnes, 2011, [1959], 26) of the previous generation:

> "The war," said Vern, "was Britain's finest hour."
> "What war? You mean Cyprus, boy? Or Suez? Or Korea?"
> "No, stupid. I mean the real war, you don't remember."
> "Well Vernon," I said, "please believe me I'm glad I don't. All of you oldies certainly seem to try to keep it well in mind, because every time I open a newspaper, or pick up a paperback, or go to the Odeon, I hear nothing but war, war, war. You pensioners certainly seem to love that old struggle. (MacInnes, 2011, [1959], 26)

The juxtaposition of a mythical vision about Britain's role in the war with historical events that undermine Britain's pretence to international prominence represents a pungent comment on the lack of realism characterising the self-image held by many Britons of the older generations.

The stagnation in an unrealistic mythical past of many of the characters with whom the Beginner interacts is further criticised through a comment on the race relations extracted from the colonial past and which continued to govern the outlook on immigrants from the colonies when they settled in Britain in the 1950s. In order to foreground the importance of this topic, the author chooses to entrust an apparently unbiased character, Mannie Katz, a "Southwark Shakespeare" (MacInnes, 2011, [1959], 77) whose opinion the protagonist highly values, to provide a commentary that widens the Beginner's perspective on colonial power relations. The "problem with this country", Mannie reflects, is "the total flight from reality in every sector (…) For centuries (…) the English have been rich, and the price of riches is that you export reality to where it is you get your money from. And now that the marketplaces overseas are closing one by one, reality comes home again to roost, but no one notices it, although it's settled in to stay beside them" (77). This passage highlights the hypocrisy regarding Britain's decaying status as head of the multi-national Commonwealth, which still dominated the British self-image in a time when the country's shifting political position transformed it into a destination of migration.

Nevertheless, MacInnes insists on pointing out that the ill-treatment of former colonial subjects, now turned migrants, endures in the new context and he puts it in connection with the unrealistic approach of many of his fellow citizens who refuse to the accept the world as it is and continue to exist in a mythicized past.

The insidious inculcation of such residual forms of Britishness in the collective consciousness by and large fails to accommodate realistic explanations, just as the novel articulates through Mannie Katz's voice, for the nation's diminished status in the post-colonial world. In the social-historical context which the novel depicts, one pervaded by what Paul Gilroy describes as 'postcolonial melancholia' (P. Gilroy, 2005) and day to day anxieties provoked by the repeated crises Britain was experiencing, the explanation that colonial immigrants are responsible for the nation's decay becomes a favourite narrative of solace for many disoriented Britons. This phenomenon could be already noticed in relation to the arrival of first Caribbean immigrants on board *Empire Windrush* in June 1948, an event which received particular connotations due to the manner it was depicted in the British media. In the decade that followed, the media continued to promote a mythology that portrayed "immigrants and black people in general as a threat and a problem" (Walvin, 1984, 140) in times of social tranquillity and as "being responsible for the confusing social situation" (140) in times of economic, political, and social decline.

As a keen observer of race related matters, especially of their erroneous representations in the media, MacInnes commits his work to challenging the propagation of anti-migrant myths. As John McLeod points out (McLeod, 2004), he struggles through his work to increase public awareness about dangers of the historically and socially determined nativist attitudes directed to migrants from the colonies. In *Absolute Beginners,* he condemns the hypocrisy of the British contemporary media in depicting the relations between migrants and native British, when the Beginner, disgusted but also scared by a random episode of racial violence he witnesses, returns to his home in Napoli for a soothing respite in the company of his friend and neighbour Big Jill. However, his attention is drawn to a pro-establishment editorial in the fictional newspaper *Mrs Dale Daily*, which decries the alleged grievances provoked by immigrants.

The article explicitly articulates a self-fulfilling narrative, which claims that "unrestricted immigration, particularly of coloured persons, was most undesirable" (MacInnes, 2011, [1959], 153) for reasons that should be self-evident to the commonsensical citizen. The myth of racial inferiority is the first mentioned as part of a litany that intends to justify how migration is the source all of the problems that are threatening the very fibre of British society: "England (…) was an old and highly civilised nation, but the countries of Africa and the Caribbean were very far

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from being so indeed" (154). As a continuation of the racist comment, the article also bemoans the alleged deterioration of social conventions and practices: "Then there was the matter of different customs. By and large, said the article, English people were renowned for their decent and orderly behaviour. But not so the immigrants" (154). The sense of social urgency produced by such narratives also underpins the obsession to preserve the nation's ethnic and cultural homogeneity. Therefore, miscegenation is presented in the article as a symbol of degeneration that calls forth the nation's debasement: "mixed marriages – as responsible coloured persons would be the very first to agree themselves – were most undesirable. They led to a mongrel race, inferior physically and mentally" (155).

MacInnes' choice to reproduce precisely in the text the litany of myths as conveyed in a media article, a narrative technique also adopted by other authors treating this subject matter[29], is meant to highlight his concern in engaging with the role of nativist media in disseminating detrimental narratives about migrants. The novel denounces the array of anti-migrant myths by mentioning, in the words of the article's author, that "the chief thing was that we must be realistic, and keep a proper sense of due proportion" (MacInnes, 2011 [1959], 153). The use of irony here, when referring to 'realism' and 'a sense of proportion' in a (con)text heavily informed by inconsistency, deceit, and absurd fabulation is meant to undermine the credibility of such narratives. The sense of irony is enhanced even more by contextualisation, as the article's appeal to rationality was happening in the exact moment when white teenagers were attacking black immigrants for no apparent reason in the streets of Nottingham.

Another major narrative strategy employed in the novel to denounce myths of endangered culture and identity refers to the construction of the novel's main character as an exponent of a category of British natives who withstand the effects of dominant discourses. The fact that the Beginner is a photographer who documents many of the events he witnesses, some alluding to actual events and practices of that time, has attracted the commentary that *Absolute Beginners* is a text that functions as a sociological documentary (Bentley, 2003). However, the function of the protagonist in the text goes beyond the mere fact of narrating events or describing teenage fashion and the specific and multiple identities within youth culture of the 1950s. As John McLeod observes, the teenage narrator of *Absolute Beginners* is far from simply being a mouthpiece for MacInnes' optimistic and progressive vision of youthful London, but a character created primarily for the purpose of critique (McLeod, 2004).

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[29] Relevant examples of using the same technique can be seen in Laura Wilson's *The Riot*, Sam Byers' *Perfidious Albion*, and Andrew Salkey's *Escape to an Autumn Pavement*.

The strength of the character derives primarily from the manner he recounts the story. Being a homodiegetic narrator, the Beginner gives the sensation that he owns the story, but in fact he represents a voice of his generation, who constantly negotiates various conflicts engendered by the transformations Britain undergoes. He appears to be in a permanent dialogue with both his interlocutors and with the subcultures that clash in this changing society. The fact that he characterises himself as a beginner, an attribute also foregrounded by the novel's title, does not place him in a position of an ignorant novice, but rather suggests his propensity to innovation, change, and utter societal progress. Since the 1950s represent a decade in which British identity underwent a thorough reappraisal and re-negotiation, the Beginner assumes the role of an initiator and negotiator of a new Britishness, one that takes seriously the articulation of utopian visions of Britain and the possibilities of cosmopolitan conviviality (McLeod, 2004, 16).

The protagonist's propensity towards tolerance and multicultural coexistence is also foregrounded through the depiction of the neighbourhood where he lives. The Beginner chooses to abandon the comfort of the domestic space, one informed by cultural stability and ideological conformity and rents a flat in the slum of Napoli, an area that has been transformed by the settlement of migrants. Through the description of Napoli, a figuration of the Notting Hill of the 1950s, as a distinct community in which freedom is granted by the tolerant approach to cultural diversity of its inhabitants, the novel articulates a utopian vision of Britain. As John McLeod argues, this vision "takes seriously the possibilities of diasporic living" (McLeod, 2004, 16) and is frequently bound up with the critical advocacy of cosmopolitan conviviality. In this space, the Beginner's depiction as a dynamic character, signified by the trope of recurrent new beginnings that he undergoes, becomes a recurrent motif or a key metaphor expressing the expectations of the young generation of Britons who embrace the transformative potential that living with difference entails. This form of acceptance of cultural and ethnic diversity represents for the protagonist an expression of freedom, as he states in his reflections: "But the real reason, as I expect you'll have already guessed, is that, however horrible the area is, you're free there! No one, I repeat it, no one, has ever asked me there what I am, or what I do, or where I came from, or what my social group is (…)" (MacInnes, 2011 [1959], 41). Described as a fluid space that counters the narrative of cultural and ethnic homogeneity, Napoli is meant to represent a contact zone that anticipates the future cosmopolitanisation of the country in a historical moment when myths about the nation's homogeneity still prevailed in British public discourse. As John McLeod emphasises, such figurations should not be presumed as a guarantee that new versions of Britishness spring into concrete existence immediately when they are voiced, or that the social divisions magically

disappear at the moment when they are semiotically challenged (McLeod, 2004, 1). They rather represent forms of contestation of a static vision of nation and nurture the potential to transform the configuration of the space that British natives share with the newcomers from the former colonies.

A major trope that figures in the novel as an attempt to challenge the myth of cultural and ethnic uniformity is represented by the jazz club, where jazz music functions as a metaphor of a unity brought about by different voices and where the ethnically diverse London youth meet to experience a sense of solidarity specific to heterotopic spaces. Understanding the potential of popular culture to dissolve the ethnic tensions that emerged in post-war Britain with the arrival of colonial migrants, the author envisions the jazz club as a junction point where different cultures interact in harmony, a metaphor for the utopian, cosmopolitan community, which he projects to emerge in a near future. The jazz club thus represents an alternative, liminal space, where cultural, but also social and political borders, can be crossed since, as the protagonist says:

> […] the great thing about the jazz world, and all the kids that enter into it, is
> that no one, not a soul, cares what your class is, or what your race is, or what your
> income, or if you're boy, or girl, or bent, or versatile, or what you are – so long as you
> dig the scene and can behave yourself, and have left all that crap behind you, too,
> when you come in the jazz club door. (MacInnes, 2011 [1959], 48)

Such idealised cosmopolitan cohabitation that the 'jazz world' facilitates remains however confined inside the heterotopic space of the club, since the protagonist himself realises the impossibility to leave "all that crap behind" (48) once he re-enters the real world. A symbolic representation of the boundary between the space of the club and the outside world is the depiction of Maria Bethlehem's concert where, after joining the "hundreds of English boys and girls, and their friends from Africa and the Caribbean" (145) who dance alongside each other, the protagonist's illusions that "human beings are a damn fine wonderful invention after all" (145) are shattered as he exits the venue, just to receive the news of the race riots in Nottingham.

Nevertheless, despite remaining faithful to his critique of the vision about nation as homogeneous community, MacInnes keeps a wary approach in *Absolute Beginners,* pondering the contradictions that rest at the heart of his utopianism (McLeod, 2004, 48), as well as the difficulties in constructing a new version of post-imperial Britishness. He therefore adds a nuance of scepticism to the novel's overall gist by depicting his protagonist in collision with the harsh realities of a society heavily informed by exclusion, racial discrimination, and unequivocal veneration of its imperial past. The contradictory attitudes towards national identity do not always follow the pattern of generational conflict, signified by the ideological clashes the Beginner has

with his older half-brother, but also emerge within the young, presumably progressive social group. The trajectory followed by 'The Wizard', one of the protagonist's closest friends, challenges the reader to reflect on the role of migration myths in shaping up the ideological stance of many generations of Britons. In the eve of the events in Notting Hill, the Beginner asks his friend to help prevent the racial trouble that eventually breaks out, but The Wizard's reaction disquiets him:

> 'There seems to be something wrong up there,' I said.
> 'An what you want me to do?' Wiz said, not very nicely.
> 'I don't know, Wiz. Maybe come up and have a look.'
> 'Why, kiddo? (…) 'What you worrying about, anyway, boy? You're not a colour problem. (MacInnes, 2011, 127)

The Wizard's initial reluctance to defend the migrants' cause turns later into downright nativist activism. By the time he reappears the day after in the riot scene, he has thoroughly been transformed by racist prejudices and ends up participating in a rally along with the "mugs" of the 'White Protection League', a reference to the far-right *White Defence League,* which was active in Notting Hill at the time, yelling "Keep England White!" (MacInnes, 2011 [1959], 176).

The reflexive character of the novel is therefore foregrounded by the critical engagement with "all the crap" (48) existing in the outer world in the form of preconceptions of race, culture, and ethnicity and which the Beginner himself cannot ignore. The fact that Britain in the late 1950s is a society still permeated by nativist values, which triggered the outbreak of violent attacks against migrants in the summer and autumn of 1958, leads the protagonist to express his downright rejection of the entrenched forms of Britishness and utter that "[he]'d fallen right out of love with England" (181). This is a revealing moment in the narrative as it signifies the failure of the protagonist's struggle throughout the novel to promote his vision of a tolerant, cosmopolitan community. The outburst of violence in Notting Hill in August 1958, on which *Absolute Beginners* figures extensively[30], draws a significant change in the Beginner's way to act; as Nick Bentley argues, "at this point in the text he ceases to be an external observer and becomes part of the action, refusing to exploit the culture he is part of in favour of direct action within it" (Bentley, 2004, 159). The story therefore comes across another 'new beginning' in the protagonist's evolution, one accompanying radical societal changes that occurred, not coincidentally, on the dawn of the Beginner's nineteenth birthday. His transgressive attitude is captured most

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[30] In *Postcolonial London: Rewriting the Metropolis,* John McLeod describes *Absolute Beginners* "as one of the most important narratives of postcolonial London from the decade, as it is the only novelistic representation of the Notting Hill riots of August and September 1958 written in the immediate aftermath of events" (McLeod, 2004).

comprehensively in the scene when he involves himself in the fray of Napoli to help a Jamaican boy escape the racist mob and giving him a lift to safety on his 'Vespa':

> So I batted along, and I tried to make conversation with the kiddo, but he just clung on and said, 'Yeh, man!' to everything I said, and as we reached the groups of bystanders we got one or two yells and whistles, and the odd brick, and a few kids ran out on the road in front of us, but I weaved or accelerated, and we got through to Blenheim Crescent without trouble. I was keyed up, expecting motorbike chases, and big mobs, but nothing happened. And that was the extraordinary thing that day in Napoli! (MacInnes, 2011 [1959], 164)

Later in the narrative, we find again the Beginner involved in street-fighting with the Teddy Boys, where he glimpses "two jazz addicts" (167) like himself struggling to protect a group of black immigrants from being assaulted by the mob. The depiction of white youth engaged in confrontation evinces MacInnes' scepticism about the lack of efficiency of the naïve apolitical utopianism of youth subcultures that celebrates cultural diversity as a form of personal liberation. As Ron Matti suggests, MacInnes intends to make a clear statement that "as well as political history, subcultural coexistence must be reinforced by political action" (Matti, 2019, 170). As the teenage protagonist comes to realise himself, the desire of social progress must be backed by activism in historical moments marked by the impossibility of leaving "all that crap behind you" (MacInnes, 2011 [1959], 48). It can thus be said that, unlike Sam Selvon just a few years before, who placed *calypso* at the centre of a heterotopic celebration of multiculturalism in Britain when depicting in *The Lonely Londoners* the fete at St. Pancras Hall (Selvon, 2006 [1956], 108), MacInnes seems to be more ambivalent about the "counter-cultural credentials" (McLeod, 2004, 52) of the emerging creolised youth pop-culture.

Nevertheless, the unhesitant political involvement of the Beginner and his 'jazz addicted' friends suggests that, while maintaining his critical stance on the efficacy of youth subcultures to dismantle nativist mythologies, MacInnes acknowledges their potential as "incubators for anti-racist political identities, provided they are infused with an appreciation for political history and practice" (Matti, 2019, 170). It thus bears repeating that the metaphor of the jazz club, as an isolated liminal space, remains a strong symbol for hope permeating the entire narrative. The jazz culture that equally brings together black artists, black migrants, and white British youth can represent a base for mobilisation, if not a political project in itself, which MacInnes has intuited to represent a future source for the emergence of a new culture of tolerance and conviviality.

Despite the Beginner's repeated failures to negotiate the effects of myths of cultural and ethnic homogeneity, *Absolute Beginners* succeeds through the utopian fusion of subcultural forms to produce, as Alan Sinfield explains, "a vision rather than a record" (Sinfield, 1989, 170) of a

transforming British society in the post-war decades. The memorable closure of the novel is significant in this sense, as it performs a deconstruction of the myth encompassed in the "Keep Britain White" slogan that the Beginner's friend, The Wizard, frantically vents at the 'White Protection League' rally (MacInnes, 2011 [1959], 176). The inner turmoil produced by the experience of the riots triggers the protagonist's disgust for his country and makes him take the cynical decision to emigrate to a country in which he was hoping to escape the predicaments caused by racism. He therefore uses the money he inherited from his father to pay for a passage to Brazil, a country of which he was told to have "the least colour thing of all" (MacInnes, 2011 [1959], 181), but lacking a transit visa to South America, he picks Norway as his destination since he "often heard from seamen Spades that they were nice to them up there" (184) and prepares to take off. The storm that sets the backdrop of the airport scene seems to remind the Beginner of the storm of racial violence that unleashed in Napoli just days before, shattering his idyllic vision of the peaceful cosmopolitan co-existence that this neighbourhood used to inspire. At the same time, the storm suggests that he leaves behind a country he had "just fallen out of love with" (181) in which many future newcomers will have to go through the storm of inhospitality.

Yet, the novel's ending is imbued with optimism; while waiting to board on his plane to Oslo, the Beginner spies on a group of black immigrants who "came down grinning and chattering, and they all looked so damn pleased to be in England at the end of their long journey, that I was heartbroken at all the disappointments that were in store for them" (MacInnes, 2011 [1959], 187). The newcomers' joviality and optimism prompt the Beginner to reassess his faith in his native country's future, thus he decides to remain and resume his involvement in building a tolerant, cosmopolitan community. The persisting storm claims a new sematic value in this context, as the Beginner interprets the torrential downpour as a symbolic cleansing of the evils his country has experienced.

> And I ran up to them through the water, and shouted out above the engines, 'Welcome to London! Greetings from England! Meet your first teenager! We're all going up to Napoli to have a ball!' And I flung my arms round the first of them, who was a stout old number with a beard and a brief-case and a little bonnet, and they all paused and stared at me in amazement, until the old boy looked me in the face and said to me, 'Greetings!' and he took me by the shoulder, and suddenly they all burst out laughing in the storm. (MacInnes, 2011 [1959], 187).

By choosing to close the novel through a symbolic 'new beginning', MacInnes seems to reaffirm his optimism related to the generation in which he had placed so much conviction prior to the riots. John McLeod considers that the protagonist's closing actions "hint at the beginnings of a process of political self-consciousness and informed commitment to making concrete his ideal of

London's progressive cosmopolitanism" (McLeod, 2004, 67). It can thus be said that, in similar fashion to Andrea Levy's *Small Island*, the final message of *Absolute Beginners* is informed by the establishment of a new foundational myth that celebrates the cosmopolitan conviviality of future Britain, as suggested by the final sound that resonates the novel's closure, a general and optimistic laughter. In this sense, the symbolic merging of different cultures and ethnicities evoked by the collective embrace in the closing scene stands in stark contrast with the symbol that the queen represents, that of imperial continuity, national unity, and ethnic homogeneity, of whom the Beginner claims at an earlier point in the novel that "her position is that she hasn't found her position" (MacInnes, 2011 [1959], 20) in a world marked by change and diversity.

4.4.4.2 Treating Nostalgia as an 'English Disease' in *Middle England*

It can be said that the myth of a culturally and ethnically homogeneous 'motherland' on which British natives often underpinned their nativist attitudes in the 1950s is, to a certain extent, less powerful today. This transformation was favoured by a more cosmopolitan, pluralist, and inclusive outlook on nation and community, which emerged through the integration of migrants arriving mostly from the former colonies during the second half of the twentieth century. As previously shown, Ian MacInnes had envisioned these transformations in *Absolute Beginners,* depicting the emerging cosmopolitanism of the 1950s as a new foundational myth of a nation that, although rather reluctantly, acknowledged the integration of migrants from former colonies into the nation's composition and even developed a distinctive British approach to multiculturalism (Geddens & Scholten, 2016, 32).

The obsessive associations between ethnic and cultural purity with the nation's glorious past, which informed the British ethos of the early 1950s, appeared to become peripheral mostly after Britain's integration in the European Community in 1973 (Ashcroft & Bevir, 2019). Nevertheless, it was, paradoxically, the EU membership debate permeating British public space after the 2004 EU expansion and the ensuing arrival of new migrants that precipitated the re-emergence of the nation's homogeneity myths as a prominent topic in the (pro-)Brexit discourse. The raise of UKIP as well as the nativist shift of traditional political parties after 2004 under the pressure of the public opinion (Geddens & Scholten, 2016) testify that the anti-migrant rhetoric that had informed the public space during the 1950s and 1960s returned in the spotlight of British politics and social debate.

Similar tropes related to the definition of nation in exclusive terms regained significance, such as references to a core British cultural identity and nostalgia for the imperial past, re-kindling nativist attitudes and ideas among large sectors of British population. As Paul Gilroy explains, the race based hierarchies of the past have been re-fashioned in this period to emphasise the cultural dimensions, which establish just as intractable and fundamental divisions as those they have replaced, precipitating a form of cultural nationalist discourse whose master narrative professes that the mistaken attempts to "mix 'alien' incomers and British indigenes or even dwell together can bring only destruction" (P. Gilroy, 2005, 142). This discourse has thus re-introduced in British social imaginary the dormant old fear that migration, this time of obtrusively white migrants from Eastern Europe, triggers a dilution of national identity and a debasement of traditional communities' ways of living.

In the period immediately before and after the Brexit referendum, the divisive atmosphere characterising British society stimulated an intense debate that also triggered substantial cultural responses, many coming from literature, which reverberated crucial events and societal developments of that period. Conceptualised as Brexit Literature or *BrexLit* (Shaw, 2018), texts featuring this subgenre represent a form of 'state-of-the-nation' literature that engages in detailing the "specific frailties and parochial trivialities of an insular and diminished small island (…) retaining a narrow focus on British society and its isolation" (27-28). At the forefront of British novelists' prompt responses to the referendum stays Jonathan Coe's *Middle England* (Coe, 2018)*,* the third novel in a trilogy following the lives of a group of friends from a Birmingham school since their childhood in the recession-hit 1970s (*The Rotters' Club,* 2001) through to the Blair years (*The Closed Circle* , 2004), and on to Brexit *(Middle England)*.

Being known as a writer highly preoccupied with engaging in socio-political commentaries, Coe addresses in *Middle England* the crisis of national identity that Britain experienced during the second decade of this century in the context of significant societal transformations ensuing the immigration from Eastern Europe to Britain. Unlike *Perfidious Albion,* Sam Byers' dystopic novel that is analysed in the previous chapter, *Middle England* attempts to grapple with concrete major historical events covering a time frame that spans from 2010 to 2018, the year of its publication, scrutinising how these events intrude into characters' lives, affecting their perception of nationhood, identity, and history. Thematically, the novel reflects upon the way a nostalgic outlook on nation is contrasted with Britain's present-day reality, denouncing the exploitation of the sense of victimhood, the feeling of loss, and the persistence of the ideal of ethno-cultural

homogeneity that pervaded the social imaginary of a large category of Britons in the time before, as well as after the Brexit referendum.

Divided in three sections, 'Merrie England', 'Deep England' and 'Old England', the novel features a complex narrative construction, dissecting the stories of a wide array of characters in close relation to significant historical events that marked the decade. The narrative events unfold in a span of time starting from the election of April 2010, which produced the Liberal Democrats and Conservatives coalition government, and ending with the outcome of the Brexit referendum in September 2018. At the core of the story are Ian and Sophie, a couple whose relationship is impacted by the divisive views on issues such as community, migration, and inevitably, Brexit, all leading to their temporary separation. While Sophie, a scholar of art history displays unwavering cosmopolitan views, Ian's outlook on reality is strongly influenced by his mother's, Helena, way of relating to the changes that society goes through. Her conservative and racist views are reflected in the rancorous remarks she voices in several disputes with Sophie, as well as in the way she relates to her Lithuanian cleaner, Grete, and to the immigrants in her village. Meanwhile, Benjamin Trotter, Sophie's uncle, lives in seclusion in his country house in Shropshire, working on a novel and nursing his aging father, Colin. The turn of events, as well as the occasional encounters with his youth friend, Doug Anderton, a left-wing journalist with connections in the political elite in London, convince Benjamin that apathy in relation to the issues polarising British society is counter-productive; he therefore involves in the *Remain* campaign, but the disillusion caused by the referendum's result prompts him to move to Southern France and establish a guest house for writers who, like himself, remain attached to European ideals.

Most of the plot events are firmly located throughout the span of eight years in London, Birmingham, and the surrounding West Midlands area, and this narrative strategy allows Coe to juxtapose not only the views of antagonistic characters but also opposite group positions related to specific subcultures. This structure influences the narrative dynamic of the novel, as well as enhances the effect of the ideological dissonance that informs the entire novel. The choice of the novel's title is relevant in this sense, as it touches on questions of culture and identity politics, beyond the geographical denotation it implies. 'Middle England' is commonly construed as a signifier that implies a socio-political dimension, often employed by Conservative Prime Ministers Margaret Thatcher and John Major in their political discourses (Easton, 2010, n. pag.), indicating the non-urban middle class in England, who hold traditional conservative views, are "neither rich nor poor, law-abiding, church-going people. In the middle." (Easton, 2010, n. pag.). Coe, however, adds a new connotation to the term, signalling a desirable middle ground between

two opposing ideological poles: on the one hand, a mythological 'heartland', in the sense of Paul Taggart (Taggart, 2004), or, in Angus Calder words, 'Deep England' (Calder, 1992), which is associated with traditional views of English identity, conservative politics, and nostalgia for the imperial past, and the liberal-progressive urban cosmopolites, on the other. The 'Middle England' that Coe invokes represents his aspiration, and perhaps hope, for a place and a time where the nation's divided factions could find a middle ground for reconciliation through sensible and constructive dialogue.

An important strategy through which *Middle England* negotiates anti-migrant mythology is the exploration of the relationship between space and identity, which reveals a divide between those characters dwelling in the rural 'heartland' and those from cosmopolitan cities, such as London and Birmingham. This divide is paradoxically fostered by a shared feeling of homelessness, which provokes a form of alienation that informs all protagonists. Helena, for instance, an exponent of nativist views on community, feels uprooted when the village where she lives, Kernel Magna, starts to transform as East European immigrants settle in, and languages other than English can be heard in the street and at the local shop (Coe, 2018, 73). The vision of an ideal community that characters like Helena projects is imbricated with a mythical image corresponding to the concept of 'Deep England', which implies a mythical version of national identity emphasizing rural lifestyle. Angus Calder connects this to the British propaganda during World War II, which was meant to build cohesion around the idea of preserving traditional British values and social norms (Calder, 1992). Coe treats with scepticism this manner of defining identity, in which geography and history intersect to produce a mythology that intends to exclude migration and any other form of cultural influence, as he contours such characters as Helena as dehumanised by xenophobia and nativism.

In contrast to the topography of 'Deep England', Coe depicts cosmopolitan cities as spaces marked by inclusion, tolerance, and pluralism. In such socio-geographical spaces, he negotiates the idea of Britishness through the voices of progressive characters like Sophie, Benjamin, or Doug, whose interaction with migrants and approach to multiculturalism denote a high degree of openness towards cosmopolitan values. The stark contradiction between the spaces that *Middle England* negotiates is comprehensively expressed through Sophie's experience throughout the novel. When she travels to the metropole to teach art history at university, she resonates with "the heady mixture of cultures that gave London its modern character" (Coe, 2018, 129). Yet, she also feels disturbed by the conservative vibe of "the green and pleasant land" (214) that Kernel Magna represents, a place evocatively associated to a mythical past through the intertextual allusion to

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William Blake's *Jerusalem* from the preface of the epic poem *Milton*[31]. With such contradictions associated to various topographies, the novel signifies the tensions dominating British society, which, as the Brexit referendum campaign proved, split the nation into two opposing camps with irreconcilable visions about community and identity.

Nevertheless, despite the stark criticism of Brexit Britain's condition that permeates the novel, the narrative of *Middle England* intends to convey a message of hope, one suggesting that extremities can meet in the middle, as the title indicates, and to negotiate a form of conviviality that is acceptable for everybody beyond geographical, political, or social positions. A significant allegorical representation of the novel's antithetical setup is represented by the depiction at the end of the first part, 'Merrie England', of the opening ceremony of the 2012 Olympic Games in London. This section of the novel is constructed in a polyphonic way, describing meticulously the events of the ceremony, paralleling the images unfolding on television with the reactions and comments of each of the protagonists. In his review of the novel in *Financial Times*, Jonathan Derbyshire construes this scene as "one of the pivotal movements" of the narrative in relation to the theme of nationhood and identity, representing "a sort of simulacrum of the televisual communion" (Derbyshire, 2018, n. pag.) that resonates Benedict Anderson's comment on the function played in the construction of an imagined national community by the "mass ceremony" (Anderson, 2006, 35) of simultaneously reading the printed media. Director Danny Boyle designed the ceremony to integrate modern images of the country with allegorical depictions of significant moments in Britain's history and evocative symbols of Britishness, such as the idyllic rural landscape, the Industrial Revolution, the performances of *Jerusalem*[32] and the other three national anthems by children's choirs, and even a spectacular descent from helicopter of the Queen and Daniel Craig in a typical James Bond-like action scene (Coe, 2018, 130).

All these references to Britain's past seem to concentrate in one event a series of myths about the emergence of a collective national identity, unleashing at the same time melancholia and nostalgia for an epoch of great achievements, seemingly better than a decaying present and an uncertain future. By depicting the different affective responses of characters to the myths incorporated in the ceremony, the novel succeeds in representing comprehensively the antagonistic viewpoints shared by them about defining Britishness and imagining the national

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[31] The poem *And did those feet in ancient time* by William Blake, from the preface to his epic poem *Milton*, best known today as the hymn *Jerusalem.* Not to be mistaken for Blake's poem *Jerusalem. The Emanation of the Giant Albion.*

[32] The hymn *Jerusalem* featuring music composed by Sir Hubert Parry and the lyrics of Blake's poem is widely considered as one of the unofficial anthems of England (cf. Classic FM, "What are the lyrics to the hymn 'Jerusalem', and is it England's national anthem?," 2022)

community. Characters that display progressive attitudes throughout the novel, such as Sophie and her friend, Sohan, a scholar with Sri Lankan origins, approach the ceremony critically, raising question regarding the relevance of representations of Britishness in terms of 'Deep England'. Like Sophie, "[D]oug had approached the opening ceremony in a mood of scepticism" (Coe, 2018, 131). In contrast, Colin, a retired worker of the now defunct automobile factories in Longbridge, Birmingham, resonates with the mythological depictions of British history and identity. So does Helena, who appreciates particularly the references to idyllic rural life and the performance of the British national anthems. Both, however, are disturbed by the reference to the Windrush moment, a significant symbol of Britain's present cosmopolitanism, which they find confusing and excessive (Coe, 2018, 132).

The depiction of a multiplicity of perspectives in the opening ceremony scene represents a narrative device by which the novel signifies the fragmentation of British society in a context that, paradoxically, was meant to reflect and equally produce social cohesion. The negotiation of this event in the text may thus be considered a comment on the increasing divisions in society, as well as a foreshadowing of the events to come, since the same characters will collide four years later in the debate on Brexit. A significant narrative strategy in this sense is represented by the construction of the main characters in terms of binary oppositions in the second part of the book, 'Middle England', which comprises a series of conflicting approaches related to the significance of myths about endangered culture and community.

As already mentioned, Helena epitomises the attachment to traditional, ethnically homogeneous community values, which she believes to be jeopardised by immigration. Her sense of interpreting the ideal community is heavily influenced by the myth of 'Deep England', a nostalgic space implying the idealised topography of rural England, as well as a well-established social fabric. This feeling of nostalgia is encapsulated in the confession she makes to her son's fiancé, Sophie, where she bemoans the disintegration of the community in Kernel Magna:

> We moved here the year Lucy [her daughter and Ian's sister] was born. I don't suppose I shall ever move now, even though the village is not what it was, not by any means. My son can probably tell you. There used to be a butcher's, an antiques shop, an ironmonger's. It was very different back then. (…) And of course, there was Thomas's. The village shop. A proper village shop. (Coe, 2018, 73)

Such references to the way things used to be accompany Helena's appearances throughout the novel. In addition, she connects the debasement of the local community, and by extension of the entire nation, with the interference of migrants in the traditional lifestyle. If in her mythicized vision of the past, the village shop represented a symbol of community cohesion, where people

went not just to buy but also to socialise. But in the new shop, Helena comments, "[o]ne can hardly go in there and expect to have a conversation with the person behind the till. You never know what language they're going to be speaking, for one thing" (Coe, 2018, 73). In this new, cosmopolitan reality, in which the shopkeeper is not British, and the agency has replaced her retired "lovely cleaner (…) who had been coming here since goodness knows when" with "a girl, Grete is her name" who "comes from Vilnius, Lithuania, of all places" (73), Helena feels marginalized and threatened. Her vision of the impact migration has in altering the composition of the population ultimately represents a manifestation of the myth promoted by Enoch Powell four decades before, who prophesised the dangers that immigration represents for Britain's "national character" (Powell, 1968, n. pag.). Coe consciously alludes to "Powell's legacy"   (Earle, 2018) as a source of Helena's nativism when, as Giles Newington argues in his review of the novel, "the grim spectre of Enoch Powell is invoked" (Newington, 2019, n. pag.). While driving off Kernel Magna together with Sophie, Helena's nostalgia is evidenced once more as she complains about Grete coming by to bring her some mushroom soup which was "full of garlic, or sauerkraut, or some such" (Coe, 2018, 89), a gesture which she meets with suspicion and scepticism. "Where will this all end, Sophie? Where will all this dreadful business end?" (89), she asks rhetorically, before bemoaning the present as a fulfilment of Powell's prophesy: "he was quite right (…) 'Rivers of blood'. He was the only one brave enough to say it" (90).

The melancholia encompassed in this reference to Powell's speech foregrounds Helena's interpretation of the present, but for Sophie this only reveals the fearsome spectre of a country in a "in a state of undeclared war" (Coe, 2018, 385), in which the ideological fault lines between nativist and cosmopolitan Britons have grown so deep that reconciliation seems to become unattainable. Coe quotes in the novel Powell's bellicose rhetoric for the clear purpose to criticise the tension determined by such different dominant positions in understanding Britishness. By insisting on depicting the contradictions that inform the relation between Helena and Sophie, the novel touches on the opposing group positions that led to the fragmentation of British society stressing,

> "(…) that Sophie (and everyone like her) and Helena (and everyone like her) might
> be living cheek-by-jowl in the same country, but they also lived in different
> universes, and these universes were separated by a wall, infinitely high,
> impermeable, a wall built out of fear and suspicion and even – perhaps – a little bit
> of those most English of all qualities, shame and embarrassment" (Coe, 2018, 385).

The antithetic depiction of these characters represents a narrative technique through which the author decries the fragmentation of reality; if Helena stands for the category of native British who are captive in a mythical past marked by colonial values, Sophie is a representative of the

progressive generation who feels comfortable in the cosmopolitan environment symbolically represented by the European city of Marseille, a model of multiculturalism, where she attends a conference, rather than "in the country she was obliged to call home" (122).

This deep divide between traditional and progressive visions of Britishness foregrounded by the cultural and ideological distance between Helena and Sophie is further negotiated in the novel through the relationship between Sophie and Ian. Their marriage, felicitous in the beginning, implacably deteriorates as a consequence of their opposite political views and attitudes towards migration. A crisis occurs in the couple when Ian fails to get a job promotion in favour of a workmate with immigrant origins; in a conversation during a social gathering, a common friend, Mr. Wilcox, condemns immigrants for causing undesirable societal fractures, signified in this case through the tension that arises between Sophie and Ian:

> 'We all know what it's like these days', said Mr. Wilcox.
> 'What it's like?'
> 'This country. We all know the score. How it works. People like Ian don't get a fair crack of the whip anymore.'
> Sophie turned to look at Ian. Now, surely, he would intervene, protest, say something. But he didn't. And so, once again, she was the one who had to pursue the point.
> 'When you say "people like Ian", I suppose you mean white people?' (…)
> 'We don't look after our own anymore, do we?' he said. (…) 'This country'… Words which he invested with a potent mixture of sadness and content. (Coe, 2018, 166)

This contentious dialogue between Sophie and Mr Wilcox, who speaks on Ian's behalf and, beyond that, for the wider category of Britons who blame immigrants for the disruption of social cohesion, gives voice to the already accumulated tension between Sophie and Ian. Mr. Wilcox's conclusion – "'I think you'd better decide', he said, 'which is more important to you: supporting your husband, or being politically correct'" (166) – comprises the ideological contradictions that trigger the crisis between the two, signifying at the same time the crisis of cultural homogeneity that immigration allegedly generates.

Although this scene seemingly positions Sophie and Ian in straightforward contradiction, it is actually pervaded by irony, since Sophie had just rejected a position by which she was tenured as a university lecturer in London, which would have led to her separation from Ian. She therefore chose family over career even though she never abandoned her principles. Later on, during the Brexit campaign, the tension between them arises again, with Ian reacting to the referendum result "with such a gleeful, infantile, triumphalism that she genuinely realised that she no longer understood why her husband felt the way he did" (Coe, 2018, 326). The reader can however realise that the source of Ian's nativist proclivity is related to his close relation with Helena, whose attitudes towards migration and ideas of national community he mirrors.

Despite what seems an irreconcilable situation, the novel depicts the development of Sophie and Ian's relationship as a successful negotiation of the contradictions that separate the groups they represent. They decide to try relationship counselling, a trope by which the novel emphasises the importance of dialogue between Britain's antagonistic camps. Re-establishing a communication channel through therapy eventually contributes to them understanding that having different opinions on political matters should not represent a ground for discordance or separation.

Ian's transformation into a character who crosses the ideological borders that had conditioned his individuality is, ironically, also triggered by his mother's xenophobic attitudes. As Ian was on one of his regular visits to his mother, Grete, Helena's pregnant maid, recounts for him a racist attack to which she fell victim in the local shop's car park while helping Helena do the groceries. A man aggressed her as she was speaking on the phone in Lithuanian: "'What effing language were you speaking?' (…) 'We speak English in this country', he said and then called me a Polish bitch. (…) 'We don't have to put up with you … people anymore' (people was not the word he used, either), and then he spat at me" (Coe, 2018, 381). Since Helena had witnessed the scene, Grete was now asking her to testify in the prosecution process, but, shockingly for both Sophie and Ian, she refuses, telling Grete: "I think, on the whole, it would be better if you and your husband went home" (383), by home meaning, as they realise immediately, their country of origin. Even Ian's persistent plead – "Mum, all she's asking is that you tell people what happened" (384) – leaves Helena undisturbed, thus Grete, heavily affected by the entire experience, leaves the house and eventually she moves to France together with her family.

This scene, beyond its significance in denouncing Helena's nativism, has an important meaning for the narrative's unfolding, as Ian, after having a "bad argument with her" (384), experiences an epiphany, which turns him into a reconciliatory character. He later confesses to Sophie that the episode involving Grete prompted him to realise that upholding the dichotomy of 'us' versus 'them', which has been governing his mother's vision of the world all along, represents a form of dehumanisation: "She kept saying to me, 'Whose side are you on? Whose side? That was how she saw it. I couldn't believe I hadn't noticed before – that this was basically how she'd been living her whole life. In a state of undeclared war" (Coe, 2018, 385). Ian's repositioning signifies not just a detachment from his mother's cynical attitude towards immigrants, but equally represents a symbolic expression of the possibility of gradually accepting the advantages of cosmopolitan conviviality.

If throughout the novel Coe explores critically the impact of differences, either cultural or personal, he ultimately seems more interested in negotiating these differences in order to discover

possible points of congruence and bridges for dialogue. This interest is foregrounded by the reference to Jo Cox's story, the Labour MP who was killed one week before the referendum, as Coe incorporates in the novel a fragment of her maiden speech to the House of Commons, which reads: "[w]hat surprises me time and time again as I travel around the constituency is that we are far more united and have far more in common with each other than things that divide us" (Coe, 2018, 313). The unity Cox refers to is represented in the novel by a symbolic gesture directed to the future of the nation: "Sophie and Ian's tentative gesture of faith in their equivocal, unknowable future: their beautiful Brexit baby" (Coe, 2018, 421). By revisiting the same trope employed by Andrea Levy, which, in *Small Island,* represents a symbolic resolution of racial tensions directed towards future, Coe's novel also seems to invest Britain's future with hope in its attempts to resolve the cultural tensions, to which Paul Gilroy refers (Gilroy, 2005, 142), that inform the present day interaction between native British and the newest immigrants.

The optimistic, future oriented resolution of the conflict between Sophie and Ian also imbues the plot line which has Benjamin Trotter in focus. His development as a character encapsulates the novel's overall intention to negotiate the rifts produced in British society by contradicting attitudes towards migration, suggesting that the typical ways in which such divides are framed can be surpassed through symbolic gestures of convivial cohabitation. In the first part of the novel, Benjamin's life is marked by a distant observation of events unfolding in the country, as he actually is the only protagonist refusing to watch the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games. His main interest is in completing a novel entitled *Unrest*, which recounts events of his personal experience set against the backdrop of "a vast narrative of European history since Britain's accession to the Common Market in 1973" (Coe, 2018, 106). By exploiting the motif of a novel within the novel, Coe introduces a metafictional element that allows him to distil through the voice of his protagonist the very same elements that he intends to address in *Middle England.* This is signified by Benjamin's literary interests, as expressed in his book, which represent a parallel to his evolution as a character in *Middle England,* and equally reflect Coe's literary agenda. Even the novel's title, *Unrest*, lends itself to capturing the tumultuous relationship between Britain and the European Union, as well as the sense of unrest informing British reality in the period around Brexit.

An incident that foreshadows Benjamin's transformation from a character dominated by apathy, rather obsessed with completing his book, into an agent fully engaged in the political debate of his time occurs when he meets an old school friend and writer, Peter, whose latest book is titled 'The Kalergi Plan'. Peter's book gives expression to the conspiracy theory grounded in

the racist myth that "[t]he white races of Europe were being subjected to gradual genocide" by "being slowly bred out of existence" (Coe, 2018, 67) through uncontrolled immigration and racial mixing. At this point in the novel, Benjamin disregards his friend's engagement in promoting racist myths, considering it a mere fictional expression of nationalistic rhetoric. He therefore continues to live peacefully in a restored mill house in Shropshire, on the banks of the river Severn, an "absurdly remote and secluded spot (…) in the middle of nowhere" (7), which allows him to fantasise about his unfulfilled youth love for Cicely Boyd, a theme that is reiterated from the trilogy's first novel, *The Rotters' Club* (2001).

Benjamin's apparent stagnation in a suspended present is signified by his continuing work on his book, which both negotiates his attempt to recapture the past and fulfil a fantasy. This state of ambivalence hints however at the impossibility to separate from the reality of Brexit times, which opposes the nostalgia for a mythological past to the prospects of a future in a cosmopolitan, united Europe. The close relation he has with his father, Colin, after his mother passed away, functions in this context as a reminder of the obsession of the older generations for myths about Britain's imperial past. Colin's vision of the present is profoundly marked by disappointment, as he repeatedly expresses his discontent for the recent transformations generated by immigration. This he articulates in his derogatory comments on the inclusion in the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games of the Windrush moment (Coe, 2018, 131), of which he thinks to represent the source of Britain's debasement from its, "first and foremost, unspoiled, mono-cultural state" (224), which made the nation stand strong, mostly during the war: "Can you imagine what it was like, hundreds of people, working together like that, for the war effort? What a spirit, eh? What a country we were back then!" (262). Migration, he claims, has made the nation to "go soft" and as a consequence, the country has turned into "a joke" (262), a pale copy of the superpower it used to be. It then comes as no surprise that Colin, like Helena, perceived with scepticism the depiction in the ceremony of the first migrant arrivals and later he unhesitatingly votes 'Leave' in the referendum.

Even though one of *Middle England's* main characteristics is its engagement with major historical events, their novelistic exploration is centred in the individual human experience. In this sense, the depiction of Benjamin's evolution as a character represents a stylistic device that allows the novel to perform a pungent critique of the frequent social slippages that occurred during the Brexit campaign. A significant scene that accommodates fictional aspects and references to real events depicts Benjamin and his father debating Boris Jonson's infamous remark in *The Daily Telegraph,* by which the future Prime Minister compared the European Union to Nazi

Germany and claimed that both were intended to affect Britain's independence in similar ways (Coe, 2018, 292). Colin, resonating Helena's reference to Enoch Powell in another context, sustains that "[h]e talks sense. He's about the only one who does. It took us six years to stop the Germans in their tracks (…)" (292). The preposterous comparison functions as a catalyser for Benjamin "whose interest in politics had grown exponentially in the last few weeks" (292), sparking his re-connection to a reality whose evolution starts to worry him. His reflections on the evolution of British politics encompassed in the question – "Was it happening because of the referendum campaign, or had it been this way all along, and he hadn't been paying attention?" (292) – lead him to realise the continuity in British social imaginary of the mythology professing a sense of victimhood, the feeling that "something huge has been lost" (416). These are realities that Benjamin decides no longer to ignore. If Colin represents in the novel a marker for Britain's obsessive nostalgia for its past, Benjamin, in contrast, develops as a character who "was getting rather tired of this myth, which seemed to be in ever-wider circulation" (292) and decides to involve himself by taking a firm pro-*Remain* position.

Another important real-life event on which Coe touches in the novel, and which contributes to Benjamin's transformation, is the launching of the poster for the Leave.EU campaign by Nigel Farage, which Benjamin regards as a noxious attempt to deform reality. As he watches on BBC News the event, the description insists on the details of the poster depicting the "winding queue of young people, mainly men, mainly dark-skinned [who] were meant to be migrants, obviously" (Coe, 2018, 299), an image intended to reinforce the sense of urgency related to the so-called migrant invasion of the country. Abhorred by the unapologetic xenophobia of the image, Benjamin realises that in the rhetoric of the *Brexit* campaign "everything seemed to hinge upon immigration and border control" (299), a "made up" (299) nativist mythology which he decides to denounce in a public statement that he writes for an unmentioned newspaper, the same that had published a laudatory review of his already printed book.

The day when the results of the referendum were announced represents another turning point in Benjamin's life, as he decides to move out of Britain, thus challenging the fantasy of British isolation that was promoted by Brexit rhetoric. This gesture represents a significant comment that the novel provides on the post-Brexit reality and Britain's place in the world, particularly its relation to Europe. The symbolic act of selling the old mill house in Shropshire signifies Benjamin's complete break with the past and opens the perspective of continuing to live in a cosmopolitan environment in southern France, where he buys a large house together with his sister, Lois. The trope of relocation that Coe chooses to employ in the final part of the novel also

represents a way of negotiating the space in which the protagonists interact. Significant in this sense is the name that Benjamin gives to the "writing school" (Coe, 2018, 384) that he establishes in his new house in Provence, one which, just like his mill house back in Shropshire, is an old mill that allows him "to live by a river" (388). Driven by melancholia after his reluctant relocation, he initially names the guest house "*Le Vieux Moulin*" (388), a metaphor that signifies his connection to his past and his desire to transfer the emotionally charged memories of pre-Brexit Britain in his new life.

Nevertheless, the inauguration party, which joins symbolically "[s]ix English people, two Lithuanians, a Frenchman and an Italian [who] all had dinner together one beautiful evening in September" (399), also prompts a renaming of the establishment. Sophie, who is a persistent promoter of cosmopolitan values throughout the novel, comes up with the idea to rename the house owned by her mother and her uncle as "THE ROTTERS' CLUB" (415). The new name represents a pun on Benjamin's and Lois' surname, Trotter, but also an intertextual reference to Coe's first novel of the trilogy, *The Rotters' Club* (2001), to which Benjamin's novel, *Unrest,* also alludes, and which depicts the youth years of both Benjamin, Lois, and their friends through the 1970s, following the changes brought in their life by Britain's integration in the European Community. Coe, therefore, ends the novel with a metaphor that signifies, paradoxically, another form of nostalgia; a nostalgia for the values of unity and diversity, which underpin the mythology of a common European identity, and which contrasts the nostalgia for ethnic and cultural purity, which generated the pro-Brexit choice of many Britons. The fact that the protagonists of *Middle England* become themselves migrants in an EU country, as well as the metaphor of the "beautiful Brexit baby" (421), which are the closing words of the novel, convey a message that challenges the fantasies of British isolationism and ethnic homogeneity as ways for re-establishing the past glory and envisions a future based on tolerance, diversity, and conviviality to which Britain should wishfully aspire.

4.4.5 Conclusion

This chapter has analysed literary responses to migration myths professing that multiculturalism and ethnic mixture between immigrants and native British jeopardise what nativist discourses feature as an essentially homogeneous British nation, altering its ethnic composition and weakening its political and economic force. The expressions that such myths took in post-war British imaginary as response to various moments of immigration tend to

emphasise a sense of victimhood, associating the loss of international prominence, social cohesion, and economic prosperity with a dilution of cultural and ethnic homogeneity caused by migration. In this context, narratives that harken back to a glorious past permeate the social imaginary of many British citizens, serving as an argument for spurning migration and claiming a return to a mythicized past.

The review of migration myths that the novels negotiate suggests a reiteration of similar nativist attitudes in the British imaginary during the first decades of the twenty-first century, expressed in a similar language of British exceptionalism, cultural homogeneity, and ethnic purity which characterised the discourses of the 1950s and 1960s. Further, the analysis of the novels *Absolute Beginners* and *Middle England* demonstrates how literary responses to nativism can engage critically with the perpetuation of scaremongering and scapegoating narratives related to immigrants, denouncing their insubstantiality.

In *Absolute Beginners,* Colin MacInnes criticises the absurdity of myths about an endangered culture and identity by pointing at the consequences it can generate, since a significant part of the novel distils the connection between the effects of such myths and the violence manifested against Caribbean migrants during the 1958 riots of Notting Hill. References to tabloid media that actively promoted myths about the alleged dangers of miscegenation and cultural dilution caused by immigration help readers even today to realise the potential for such narratives to arouse nativist attitudes and instigate racial violence. Furthermore, through the voice of the unnamed protagonist, the novel denounces hostility towards migration as an inhibitor of ethnic pluralism and cultural exchange. Even though the story's hero fails to a certain extent to negotiate successfully anti-migrant myths in the environment he inhabits, his role as a mediator on the behalf of his generation conveys a message of optimism directed towards the country's future. This makes the novel as topical today as it was at the time of its publishing, not only because of its clarity in depicting social details of its era, but also for arousing sympathy for the vulnerable condition of migrants and for promoting cosmopolitanism as a viable alternative.

In a similar manner, Jonathan Coe's *Middle England* performs a literary retrospection of Britain's recent past in relation to the current migration from Eastern Europe in an attempt to imagine "a 'rebalancing' of Britain's distinctive bifurcated approach to multiculturalism" (Ashcroft & Bevir, 2019, 36). By doing so, the novel prompts contemporary readers to engage with questions related to national identity, culture, and Britain's role in contemporary world. By filtering myths about an endangered culture and identity through the individual experiences of characters sharing opposing views on these topics, *Middle England* is a novel that challenges its

readers to take a dim view of narratives that intend to define such terms as identity, community, and culture in essentialist terms. The depiction of complex native characters who develop into promoters of tolerance and conviviality represents a clear warning signal directed at the hazards represented by increasing nativism in Britain in recent years. At the same time, the trope of reconciliation, which marks the end of the novel, conveys a message of hope about a desirable middle ground where highly polarised camps in today's British society can meet and negotiate their controversies and thus acknowledge differences as an asset defining their community.

4.5 Lost Control and Reclamation Myths

4.5.1 Preliminaries

The migrant presence has represented one of the major factors generating a feeling of loss among a large category of native British throughout the entire contemporary history of Britain. However, this collective sentiment, which came to be represented throughout this period in terms of nostalgia for empire or lost identity, has constantly generated a compulsive urge for reclamation, of return to a safe, more controllable way of community life. A significant moment when this ethos became openly manifest was during Brexit campaign, with former UKIP leader and fervent *Leave* campaigner, Nigel Farage, promoting the notorious anti-migration poster known as *BREAKING POINT*. The poster's image depicted a large group of migrants amassed at the Croatian-Slovenian border (Stewart & Mason, 2016, n. pag.), who allegedly intended to enter Britain, and was accompanied by what was to become the *Leave* campaign's most famous slogan: *Take Back Control* (United Kingdom Independence Party, 2016). This slogan implies the ideas of loss and dispossession and builds expectations about reclaiming back a past to which British people wish to return, about regaining control of borders, repatriation of immigrants, and re-establishing law and order in social sectors that have allegedly been affected by immigration and, in doing so, giving back sovereignty to the nation.

Farage's rhetoric was, however, nothing new. Narratives professing the necessity to regain control over a 'destabilised-by-migration' society emerged already in the wake of first migrant arrivals to Britain during the 1950s. Far-right politicians like Colin Jordan, founder of the White Defence League in 1957, declared in an interview in 1959 that "we are fighting a war to clear them [black immigrants] out of Britain" (Walker, 1977, 34). He was also the originator of the

notorious 'Keep Britain White' slogan (34), which became in the late 50s and early 60s the motto of extremist parties and organisations such as the National Labour Party, British National Party, Greater Britain Movement, or the British National Front. The catchword 'breaking point' itself was recycled by Farage from a lead article in the *Spearhead*, in which Greater Britain Movement leader, John Tyndall, used it to announce a turn in British right-wing politics towards smaller nativist populist parties after the defeat of the Conservative Party in the 1966 elections (Walker, 1977, 58).

And if ideas about immigration stop and repatriation were circulating rather in the tabloid media and among obscure far-right parties until the middle of the 1960s, they became material of serious political discussion with Enoch Powell's emergence, especially after 1965. In a major speech he gave in Wolverhampton in November that year, he spoke for the first time about his 'send them home plan', which proclaimed the urgency of introducing immigration control and the "desirability of achieving a steady flow of voluntary repatriation" (Walker, 1977, 108). These ideas would gain significant impact especially after the April 1968 'Rivers of Blood' speech, in which he reasserts that the only "simple and rational" solution would be "stopping, or virtually stopping, further inflow, and by promoting the maximum outflow" (Powell, 1968, n. pag.). It can therefore be established that the origins of the narrative of taking back control, which proved so influential in the Brexit campaign, can be traced back to the nativist discourses of "those who uttered them long, long ago", as John Tyndall comments in 1968 after the 'Rivers of Blood' moment (Walker, 1977, 111); it was therefore, again, Powell's 'legacy' that contributed decisively to its entrenchment in British nativist social imaginary.

Nonetheless, the imagery to which both Farage, Powell, and other 'prophets' of the reclamation narrative appealed proved to be mere rhetorical strategies meant to arouse nativist responses among those sectors of population who disapproved of immigration. As John Lancaster comments, the arguments they used to achieve impact "weren't really arguments but a very clever appeal to emotion, to the idea that the UK could 'Take back control'" (Lancaster, 2016, n. pag.). This largely accepted narrative was encapsulated in a series of migration myths that this study analyses. Therefore, this chapter turns to investigating how the novels in focus negotiate myths included in the lost control and reclamation category.

The first section (4.5.2) of this chapter describes the main patterns of expression that migration myths in this category take, examining an arena in which two sets of issues are prominent: the issue that Britain needs to take back control over its borders and society and the issue that social, economic, or identity crises would be solved by subjecting migrants to different forms of

exclusion or expulsion, such as incarceration or repatriation. Both categories appeal to a sense of urgency by converging aspects of criminal justice with those of immigration, aiming to justify the imperative to take immediate action in order to protect society and the motherland from immigrants, who are labelled as "criminals, deviants, and security risks" (Stumpf, 2013, 61). For similar effects, immigration itself is sometimes represented in terms of illegality or "crimmigration" (59), by creating, through semantical ambiguity, the impression that all forms of migration correspond to irregular migration. This is followed by a section (4.5.3) presenting how several novels in the corpus address critically migration myths in this category. As the introduction of this chapter shows, a significant number of similar myths was influential in reifying an image of a drifting society under the impact of immigration in both analysed periods, stimulating societal and political responses that have eventually encoded restrictions and means of control in the state legislation.

Ultimately, the novels selected for close reading in this chapter are Laura Wilson's *The Riot* (Wilson, 2013) and Tracey Mathias' *Night of the Party* (Mathias, 2018). These novels represent literary responses that two contemporary British authors provide to two impactful events in Britain's contemporary history and their negative consequences on the experiences of immigrants: the 1958 race riots of Notting Hill (Wilson) and Brexit, respectively (Mathias). Both novels include representations of lost control and reclamation myths, expressed through the voices of nativist characters, but a major common characteristic is their focus on negotiating the nefarious consequences migration myths can have in society when nativist impulses unleash collective violent responses performed by groups of natives and by state institutions against immigrants. Belonging to the crime/thriller genre, these novels capture comprehensively the visceral fear of difference that myths can arouse, filtering a series of socio-psychological processes leading to hostility towards migrants and exposing to critique acts of collective violence that are allegedly justified by the narrative that those not born here, do not belong here, therefore must be banished.

4.5.2 Unpacking the Lost Control and Reclamation Myths

The analysis of novels in this study reveals a series of migration myths that provoke an exacerbation of the anxieties and insecurities felt by many British natives in relation to management of migration and institutional control of the state apparatus. At the core of these myths lies a discourse that depicts migration in terms of security problems, either referring to societal aspects or to matters of community and state politics. The narratives promoted by these

myths revolve around people's apprehensions raised by the increasing number of migrants, on the one hand, and around the imperative need to enforce measures for protection of the country, of the local communities, and of the 'good citizens' from the dangers immigration allegedly poses, on the other hand. The need for protection has constantly been fuelled by the feeling of loss, which has obsessively characterised the British sense of existence after the war, especially in connection with the demise of British empire.

Narratives of migration control negotiated in the novels incorporate several tropes. First, a core notion they are concerned with refers to the existence of strong borders as a key factor in preventing migrants to enter the physical space of the nation state (Bridget Anderson, 2017, 1531). The adoption of the *British Nationality Act* in 1948, which opened the way for settlement of immigrants from the colonies, led to the assumption that Britain lost control over its borders, since any citizen of the empire could travel freely and settle in the metropole with virtually no restrictions (Hansen, 2000; Walvin, 1984). In the years that followed, this narrative was so successfully constructed by nativist actors, such as right-wing politicians and the tabloid media, that it came to obtain the status of common sense in the social imaginary of many Britons. Moreover, its power was reinforced through its correlation with the mythology that professed an invasion of the country by migrants, whose presence endanger an allegedly coherent national identity, as shown in the previous chapters of this thesis.

One of the major features of borders in mythical discourse, which became highly salient in the context of migration to Britain, is their inward orientation. The novels often negotiate the trope of keeping migrants outside the national territory as a symbolic exclusion of migrants from the nation understood in terms of a community of racial, ethnic, and cultural unity. Consequently, borders are understood in this context not just in terms of physical and institutional boundaries delineating the state, but also as immaterial lines of demarcation separating migrants from insiders through exclusionary immigration control. This way of conceiving borders intends to preserve the homogeneous identity of the in-group by keeping migrants and natives in separate social and cultural frames imagined on an 'us' versus 'them' logic[33].

By placing such heavy focus on bordering, certain myths in the lost control and reclamation category also become part of the narrative of national identity construction in the sense of

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[33] The role of borders in the construction of socio-spatial identities as a driver for the creation of 'Us' and 'Other' is debated by numerous scholars within Critical Border Studies today. For details see, for example, *A Companion to Border Studies,* edited by Thomas M. Wilson and Hastings Donnan (T. M. Wilson & Donnan, ed., 2012).

Benedict Anderson's 'imagined communities' (Benedict Anderson, 2006 [1983]). Borders are conceived in this context as a device that reinforces a continuous construction and re-construction of identities and alterities, becoming an exclusionary tool of securing and governing of the 'self'. As the examples analysed thus far suggest, mythicized representations of borders, either physical or symbolic, turn them into fetishized markers of security that allegedly guarantee the continuity and homogeneity of the domestic community, assuming that social agreement, group identity, and economic stability are conditioned by the construction of mental, and sometimes even material fences (Newman & Paasi, 1998).

Curbing immigration through border control is arguably one of the most widespread narratives that the novels in focus negotiate. Nevertheless, the historical reality with which the novels engage is one in which immigration was a constant phenomenon, with significant variations in terms of intensity being generated by the political context, both domestic and international. It is then not surprising that another favourite narrative for taking back control of society professed by nativist discourses refers to repatriation of migrants. This idea is often articulated in political discourse in terms of internal management of migration, which implies, on the one hand, encouraging re-emigration through restricting the rights for immigrants and foreigners (Afonso, 2013, 23) and thus increase the incentives for voluntary return, and repatriating immigrants forcefully, on the other hand.

This myth was highly politicised, as repatriation represented both during the 1950s and 1960s and, again, after 2010 one of the major topics of political debate. As shown in Chapter 3 of this thesis, British public opinion consistently wielded pressure on the establishment to reduce the number of immigrants in the country by encouraging or forcing their return. Populist politicians have successfully exploited this trend, capitalising on the reluctance of mainstream parties to implement stricter regulations and thus gaining significant support. As previously mentioned, Enoch Powell was among the first public figures to introduce the narrative of migrant repatriation in mainstream political debate, and the course he set in British politics related to migration in the 1960s was reiterated with similar success by politicians such as Nigel Farage, David Cameron, or Theresa May in recent years.

With similar effects, the association of strangers, and migrants in particular, with danger and criminality engendered one of the most enduring social myths, as Melanie Griffiths argues (Griffiths, 2017, 534), repeatedly re-emerging in British nativist discourses as a means to explain and resolve social tensions. Narratives of illegality and threat, which often appeal to exaggerations and generalisations of specific cases of law infringement done by immigrants, represent the

foundation on which the argument that the expulsion of (all) migrants contributes to re-establishing law and order in society. Once migrants are designated as deviant, therefore unfit for the British social fabric, their expulsion becomes justified in similar way to the "ancient-world practice of banishment with its spectacle of punishment and claimed role in maintaining social order" (Griffiths, 2017, 542). This myth, after entering the public imaginary and, moreover, being endorsed by nativist populist actors, became remarkably powerful in British context due to its emotional, vindictive component. The expulsion of migrants, enhanced by the 'border spectacle' set as a "scene of 'exclusion', where allegedly 'unwanted' or 'undesirable' (…) migrants must be stopped, kept out, and turned around" (de Genova, 2019, 108), may serve as an act of revenge and redemption for that category of British natives whose imaginary is haunted by the phantom crisis of a migrant invasion (109).

The trope of the criminal migrant represents in the period this study analyses one of the favoured topics of sensationalist media, which showed a clear tendency to over-report crimes committed by migrants (Mawby & Gisby, 2009, 39) in order to create a sensation of generality and ubiquity of crime related to migration, and thus produce a sense of 'moral panic' (Cohen, 2011 [1973]). Several novels which this study analyses negotiate media representations of this type of rhetoric, which, by reducing the migrant's image to that of an utmost contemporary "folk devil" (ibid.), increases public anxiety and stands as a justification for banishment.

In addition, narratives which claim a convergence of migration and criminality identified by this study sometimes extend the range of illegality ascribed to migrants from the field of penal justice to that of national security by depicting migration itself as an illegal act and thus constructing the myth of the illegal migrant. Such narratives exploit a specific form of security discourse in which the challenges posed by irregular migration are assumed to inform (almost) all forms of migration. The construction of this myth relies on the presumption that "there is something self-evident and straightforward about migrant 'illegality'" (de Genova, 2019, 107) in the sense that migrants are categorised as 'illegal' not because they have committed crimes within British jurisdiction, but because they have presumably violated the 'Law'. The ambiguity of the language engrained in this myth, in which political aspects interweave with concrete practices, has the effect of constructing discursively and image of migration as "crimmigration", a term designating a domain where criminal law and immigration law meet (Stumpf, 2006, 376) to justify the intervention of the state apparatus to expel from society those deemed criminally alien.

From this standpoint, a further consequence of this myth is the fabrication of a particular vision of the 'illegal migrant' that extends from the institutional to the ontological domain by

discursively turning the migrant, and in general the foreigner, into an illegal human being. This, however, becomes even more problematic when, under the pressure exerted by public opinion on authorities and lawmakers, this myth produces concrete effects in the field of state legislation. A consistent criticism in this sense refers to the term 'illegal' ascribed to migrants (Koser, 2007; Menjívar & Kanstroom, 2014; Sharpless, 2016), which intends to deny their humanity; nevertheless, as Khalid Koser argues, "human beings cannot be illegal" (Koser, 2007, 54) and this also applies for migrants who, whatever their legal status, are people too and thus their basic rights ought to be respected. The analysis of the novels reveals a particular interest in negotiating such effects of lost control and reclamation myths, by hinting at the recurrent changes of legislation related to migration in Britain between 1962 and 2015, which have produced one of the most restrictive regimes of immigration in Europe (Bosworth, 2008; Griffiths, 2017; Huysmans, 2006; Karamanidou, 2019).

4.5.3   Protecting the Motherland. An Overview of Lost Control and Reclamation Myths in the Novels

As argued in the previous chapters, migration myths have nurtured deeply negative, exclusionary attitudes against those people who in the British nativist imaginary do not fit within the majority population in terms of ethnicity, culture, and civilisation level. The perception that too many immigrants infiltrate British society, on which the myth of a migrant invasion was built, has continuously been associated with fears concerning the dangers of losing concrete social and economic privileges. At the same time, migrants present on the national territory have been portrayed in nativist discourses in terms of significant alterity, threatening British traditional values and the reassuring ethnic and cultural homogeneity of the community. The proliferation of such myths during the 1950s and the yearly 1960s, and again during the first decades of the twenty-first century, generated increased anxiety among many native British who felt threatened by the changes immigration entailed.

In these circumstances, the response that Britain must control immigration came, not unexpectedly, from extremist organisations and political parties, which emerged as challengers of the establishment. The discourses they promoted contributed to the construction of a powerful mythology in post-war Britain around the idea of the historical mission to reclaim control of all sectors of society, economy, and politics, as a way out from the ordeals Britain was repeatedly going through. Many of the novels analysed in this study take a dim look at such narratives,

denouncing their intention to support nativist, exclusionary attitudes towards immigrants. In what follows, this section presents an overview of the most illustrative examples of migration myths subsumed under the category of lost control and reclamation myths, which are negotiated in the novels, featuring briefly how these texts deal critically with characters and situations affected by these myths.

Two of the novels analysed in this study touch on events and actors that have marked profoundly race relations in Britain during the late 1950s, decrying the societal rifts engendered by the proliferation of the myth promoting an imperative of immigration control: Colin MacInnes' *Absolute Beginners* (MacInnes, 2011 [1959]) and Laura Wilson's *The Riot* (Wilson, 2013). In *Absolute Beginners*, the protagonist reads in the fictitious newspaper *Mrs Dale Daily* that "that immigration by coloured persons, whether having an identical citizenship status as ourselves or not, should be halted instantly [and] the whole process should be reversed, and compulsory repatriation should be given urgent and serious consideration by the government" (MacInnes, 2011 [1959], 171). MacInnes alludes here to the vehement campaign carried in the media by such extremist politicians as *White Defence League* leader Colin Jordan, one of the main promoters of migration control discourse in the late 1950s, and which contributed to inflaming the already existing anti-migrant atmosphere that led to the 1958 race riots.

Laura Wilson's *The Riot*, which approaches retrospectively the historical events of the race riots of 1958, refers specifically to the *White Defence League* and its newspaper the *Black and White News*. Through the voice of the novel's protagonist, Inspector Stratton, the novel takes a critical stance on the myths promoted by this organisation, whose role in the riots is also debated in several episodes of the novel. While investigating the murder of a black immigrant, which was apparently connected to the right-wing milieu of Notting Hill, the protagonist comes to interrogate the League's leader, who in the novel is named John Gleeson[34]. Stratton's itinerary in the area is marked by the conspicuous display of slogans urging the rejection of immigration and the necessity to expulse immigrants: KEEP BRITAIN WHITE; STOP COLOURED IMMIGRATION; JOIN THE WHITE DEFENCE LEAGUE (Wilson, 2013, 76). The promotion of such slogans through posters and in newspapers represented a major strategy in the creation of an anti-migrant mythology during the 1950s, and this can be considered a major point in the spread of nativist ideas in British post-war context.

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[34] The name conceived by Wilson resonates the names of two of the most notorious leaders of extremist organizations, John Tyndall and Arnold Leese.

The similarity of nativist propaganda during the 1950s and that of Brexit campaign is rather conspicuous, with UKIP being the most prominent actor promoting the narrative of migration control. In the novel *Middle England* (Coe, 2018), Jonathan Coe debates extensively the effects of the *BREAKING POINT* poster, whose caption 'take back control of our borders' encapsulates indicatively the anti-migrant mythology through which the *Leave.EU* campaign gained significant support in the referendum. Through the voices of characters like Benjamin and Sophie, the novel provides a sharp critique of how "the debate shifted" after the poster was launched, as "[t]here was less discussion of economic forecasts and sovereignty and the political benefits of EU; now everything seemed to hinge upon immigration and border control" (Coe, 2018, 299).

The myth that a positive dynamic in terms of society, economy, and national identity could be guaranteed only if borders and immigration were tightly controlled became a prominent ingredient of nativist discourses during the whole post-war British history. In *Escape to an Autumn Pavement* (Salkey, 2009 [1960]), Andrew Salkey engages in criticising the myth professing that immigration control is allegedly the warrant for maintaining Britain's desirable ethnic and cultural homogeneity. By figuring on the activity of the same organisation as MacInnes and Wilson, Salkey employs the trope of propaganda leaflets in which the protagonist, Jonnie Solberg, and his friends can read:

> Our greatest concern must, therefore, be the preservation of her [nation's] native blood. Accordingly, the White Defence League has been formed to awaken the British people to Britain's foremost problem, the Coloured invasion, and to the necessity, if Britain is to survive, of an effective and immediate policy to keep Britain White by stopping all Coloured immigration into Britain and by expelling all Coloured immigrants already here. (Salkey, 1960, 122)

Salkey negotiates this episode with detachment and irony. The discussion between Jonnie, Larry, a Jamaican, and Dick, a white British, eventually boils down to satirising the character of democracy in Britain. Larry has a rather lenient attitude, considering that freedom of speech ought to prevail, even though he finds the text "funny and sad, at the same time" (Salkey, 1960, 123). Dick also considers the pamphlet to be both hilarious and embarrassing, which makes Jonnie to conclude ironically: "And that's the funny thing about that kind of pamphlet: it embarrasses both sides. Maybe that's the hidden strength of Democracy; who knows?" (123)

Even though Britain's entire contemporary history was marked in a way or another by migration control mythology, a significant intensification was registered around Brexit, with British Home Secretary Theresa May saying: "we must […] have an immigration system that allows us to control who comes to our country' and control the country's borders, (…) because when immigration is too high, when the pace of change is too fast, it's impossible to build a

cohesive society" (Brinded, 2015, n. pag.). A novel that negotiates extensively the way nativist populist actors capitalised on this mythology in the Brexit campaign is Sam Byers' *Perfidious Albion* (Byers, 2018). When asked during an interview on public television what are the most pressing needs of the country and of the people, Hugo Bennington replies unhesitatingly: "'One', he said, shaking his thumb. 'Self-protection. We need to get control of immigration. We need to get control of our culture. We need to make sure that we're all, literally and hypothetically, speaking the same language" (Byers, 2018, 253). Bennington's rhetoric, which intends to establish a causal relation between immigration and threats to national identity, conspicuously calls attention to the type of discourse real life politicians like Theresa May used to convince people of the urgency to control immigration.

In response to such political positions, Byers appeals to sarcasm to express his contempt for this way of running politics when he reveals the source of Hugo's 'arguments'; his adviser and campaign manager, Teddy Handler, whose vision for the *England Always* party's success is comprised in the following rant:

> What's the best argument for curbing immigration? Efficiency. The less immigration we have to manage, the more time and money we'll have to manage the things that really matter. What's the best argument for making sure everyone in England speaks the same language? Efficiency. Because if everyone speaks the same language, we won't have to waste time dealing with people who don't understand what's going on. What's the best argument for controlling the spread of radical ideologies that run counter to basic English values? Efficiency. Because if we allow militant ideologies to spread, then the country will collapse into anarchy. No-one wants anarchy, Hugo. No-one wants chaos. They want consistency. They want a safe, predictable, efficient country that runs like a well-oiled machine. That's what they want, Hugo, and that's what we can give them, and now we can give it to them without taking away all the stuff they love about the past.' (Byers, 2018, 276)

The repeated use of the term 'argument' in relation to such ridiculous reasoning represents an efficient way of using irony by which Byers intends to expose such discourses for exactly what they are; flippant political rhetoric meant to foster inflammation and feed the expectations of party's followers.

A similar example pertaining migration control myths in the context of Brexit is negotiated in the novel *Time of Lies. A Political Satire* (Board, 2017) by Douglas Board. Bob Grant, ex-football hooligan and political party's *Britain's Great* leader, engages in the 2020[35] electoral campaign, which he and his party would eventually win. His nativist populist platform synthesises all major Brexit myths and stereotypes and adds to them a flavour of Donald Trump, which is suggested by

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[35] Since the novel was published in 2017, the setting of events three years later informs the novel's visionary-dystopic perspective.

his party's name, an innuendo to the 'Make America Great Again' slogan. Bob Grant's campaign leverages on fundamental populist slogans, among which *Getting Britain Back*, also the title of a ghost book he allegedly wrote, plays a key role in coagulating people's anger against undesirable immigrants. In a political rally, his diatribe against the establishment mesmerises an enraged audience, just before adding "The finale – strong borders, controlled immigration, safe streets, BG's heartland staples familiarly disturbing or reassuring according to the taste" (Board, 2017, 99).

By assigning the nativist populist message to an aspiring political contender, *Time of Lies. A Political Satire* not only figures on *UKIP* and Nigel Farage's political venture but also revisits the discourse of far-right populist parties of the 1950s and 1960s. The newly established in 1960 *British National Party,* which resulted from merging the *National Labour Party* with the *White Defence League,* proclaimed as fundamental policies the following principles: "1) Send those coloured immigrants already here back to their homelands. 2) Impeach the Tory Cabinet and the 1945-50 Labour Cabinet for their complicity in the black invasion" (Walker, 1977, 34). Andrew Salkey had already commented on this rhetoric, by including in *White Defence League's* pamphlet that Jonnie Solberg reads the slogan "[T]hrow out the old Labour and Tory politicians who have betrayed you" (Salkey, 1960, 122). The same trope is extensively employed by Board, whose protagonist, Bob Grant uses every opportunity to profess the myth that traditional parties, "the shit-bags who've been running our governments" (Board, 2017, 27), (…) Tories, Labour, they both sold Britain to the foreigners" (48).

As discussed so far, novels like Andrew Salkey's *Escape to an Autumn Pavement*, Laura Wilson's *The Riot*, and Ian MacInnes' *Absolute Beginners* touch on the promotion of the myth of expulsion-as-redemption by extremist nativist organisations in the 1950s. In the period following the adoption by the Conservative government of the *Immigration Act* of 1962, its narrative slowly lost its force. It was, however, replaced by the myth professing voluntary repatriation as a viable solution to preserve social order and national identity, a trope on which many of the novels engaging with the period following the adoption of the *Immigration Act* figure broadly. Perhaps not coincidentally, E.R. Braithwaite negotiates this myth in the novel *Paid Servant* (Braithwaite, 2014 [1962]), which was published the same year the new law was adopted. Through the voice of a welfare officer, Jim Baxter, who is the protagonist's co-worker in the City Council's Welfare Department, the novel gives expression to what appears to represent a wide spread conviction among many native British: "Jim said that the British Government should undertake a lot of major work projects in the West Indies, and other overseas territories; then the immigrants would all

return home and there would be no colour problem in Britain" (Braithwaite, 2014 [1962], 85). Braithwaite, however, treats with irony this myth, since Jim is depicted throughout the novel as a character with rather limited aptitudes, and, in conclusion to Jim's reflections, he adds sarcastically: "Jim was very knowledgeable" (85).

It can be argued that the articulation of the repatriation narrative gained prominence especially with Enoch Powell's emergence as "defender of the native English people and culture" (Walker, 1977, 109) after 1965, when he started promoting it fervently as part of his 'send them home' plan. This myth is challenged by Andrea Levy in her novel *Small Island* (Levy, 2004). Bernard Blight, a character who epitomises the British nativist prototype in the novel, persistently tries to convince Queenie, his wife, who had been letting rooms to Caribbean immigrants in his absence, that the proper way of living is "[q]uite simple. Everyone has a place. England for the English and the West Indies for these coloured people. (…) I've nothing against them in their place. But their place isn't here. (…) It would be a kindness to return them to the backward place they came from" (Levy, 2004, 469). The "kindness" to which Bernard refers recalls Powell's "generous assistance" for returning migrants to "their countries of origin or to (…) other countries anxious to receive the manpower and the skills they represent (Powell, 1968, n. pag.). Even though the events depicted in *Small Island* precede Powell, Levy's allusions to his ideas pervade the novel; as already mentioned in Chapter 4.2 of this thesis, this way of retrospectively commenting on dominant discourses about migration that emerged several decades before and which are still influential in the early 2000s is highly favoured by Levy.

In *Middle England*, Jonathan Coe also revisits Powell's ideas, somehow reinforcing the necessity suggested by Andrea Levy to denounce the mythology engrained in his legacy, which haunts the British social imaginary even after five decades. Helena, who lives in the small traditional community of Kernel Magna, is portrayed throughout the novel as a character zealously devoted to Enoch Powell's legacy. She ominously interprets the settlement of immigrants from Eastern Europe in her village as a fulfilment of Powell' prophecy, claiming that "[h]e was quite right (…) "Rivers of blood". He was the only one brave enough to say it" (Coe, 2018, 90). The transformations produced by migration in Britain unsettle severely Helena, thus she firmly believes that 're-emigration', as Powell phrased it, represents a desirable resolution to the country's problems. She declares this plainly when Grete asks her to testify as witness of the racist aggression she suffered: "I think, on the whole, it would be better if you and your husband went home" (383).

As these examples point out, repatriation was a catchword that aroused strong feelings in the debate on migration as it reinforced the myth professing that a return to a safe social condition, that of an idealised past, could only be achieved by warding off immigrants who allegedly undermined the functioning of society and jeopardised its moral values. In this sense, nativist discourses have speculated the strong emotional component of the myth that immigrants represent a major source for increasing criminality, which also implies that their expulsion would function as a universal panacea for the society's acute problems. Placing migration as a prominent issue in the domain of securitisation was the result of the creation of a "[c]ontinuum of threats and general unease in which many different actors exchange their fears and beliefs" (Bigo, 2002, 63), building the illusion that specific societal threats or risks can be managed through immigration control. It can thus be said that at the core of securitisation of migration lies its discursive presentation as a threat, which, as Barry Buzan argues, "requires urgent measures and justifies actions outside the normal bound of political procedures" (Buzan, Waever, & Wilde, 1997, 24).

The myth claiming that immigrants were promoters of vice represented a major source of 'moral panic' in British society, especially in the period preceding the race riots of 1958. Colin MacInnes challenges this dim view in *Absolute Beginners* (MacInnes, 2011 [1959]) by debunking deceitful stories promoted by nativist media, which he interprets as mischievous instruments for spreading anti-migrant propaganda. MacInnes' response to the increasing presence of this myth in nativist newspapers is done through the incorporation of a fictitious piece of opinion in the novel, which the protagonist reads in dismay: "[i]t was time for plain speaking, and this had to be said. The record of the courts had shown – let alone the personal observations of any anxious and attentive observer – that living off the immoral earnings of white prostitutes, had now become all too prevalent among the immigrant community" (MacInnes, 2011 [1959], 155). The tendency to generalise immigrants' deviance from traditional moral norms was a common rhetorical procedure in the nativist discourse of the 1950s and the spread of such narratives through racist pamphlets and media articles provoked strong feelings of resentment against the newcomers (Goodrick-Clarke, 2002, 34). In addition, the narrative of expulsion-as-resolution was ineluctably connected to that of deviance, and in *Absolute Beginners* this is reflected in the 'diagnosis' established by the article:

> Several conclusions (…) flowed inevitably – and urgently – from these grave matters and, more particularly, from the recent disturbances at Nottingham (…). The first was, that immigration by coloured persons (…) should be halted instantly (…) and compulsory repatriation should be given urgent and serious consideration by the government (…). Meanwhile, it went without saying, law and order should be enforced most rigorously. (MacInnes, 2011 [1959], 156)

MacInnes takes a clear critical stance towards such narratives, as the reaction of the protagonist suggests, who signals the insidious intention of the article to construct a myth through omission and generalisation of facts - "And there's quite a lot of things that he's left out!" (156). Besides, the fragment is permeated by irony, since the article promotes enforcement of "law and order" against allegedly wicked immigrants in a moment when black immigrants were being attacked by gangs of wrathful British youngsters in the streets of Nottingham.

The nefarious influence of this mythology was evident during the race riots that shook Britain in the summer and autumn of 1958, and its repercussions are widely negotiated in the novel *The Riot.* The myth about immigrants "promoting vice" (Wilson, 2013, 76), which the *White Defence League* pamphlet spreads, is reflected in the way many of the native residents of the mixed-race neighbourhood, in which Inspector Stratton investigates the murder of the rent collector, Mr. Hampton, perceive black immigrants. "My dad says it's the coloureds that do these things" (1), conjectures Shirley Maples about the murder, a teenager whose parents, panicked by the rumours about black immigrants, do not allow her to exit the home on her own.

Similar effects of the myth about the criminal migrant are negotiated in *We Come Apart* (Crossan & Conaghan, 2017), as the protagonist, Nicu, becomes the victim of pre-established patterns of perceiving migrants in terms of moral deviance and predilection for crime. The reflexes conditioned by this mythology become manifest when some of his schoolmates accuse him of petty theft – "I bet he nicked it (…) my old man's right about them lot". Later, somebody writes on Nicu's textbook the message "filthy fucking thief [sic]" (193), an image easily recognisable in the tabloid press of the time, which has consistently described East European Roma immigrants as thieves and scroungers who ought to be deported (McGarry & Drake, 2013). It then comes as no surprise that another message written on Nicu's textbook by a classmate – "Voted out of Britin. Fuck off [sic]" (133) resonates the question asked in the streets of Britain only days after the referendum: "We voted; why are you still here?" (Outhwaite, 2019, 99).

The novel that most explicitly negotiates this myth is Tracey Mathias' *Night of the Party* (Mathias, 2018), which provides a sharp critique of the abusive migration legislation that Brexit generated. The reader is introduced in the dystopic climate informing the entire novel from the very first page. This depicts a mock Wikipedia article describing the "Immigration and Residency Act" (Mathias, 2018, 1), which represents the legal base of the 'British Born policy', a legal system that literally deprives all immigrants in Britain of residence and property rights. The myth on which the authorities underpin the exceedingly strict migration legislation is expressed in the novel through the electoral speech of the Prime Minister, in which he "hails the BB policy as

necessary defence of national resources, security and culture, promising to enforce it with even greater energy if the government is re-elected on February 13th, denying the Coalition's accusation that the confiscation of illegals' property and their forced deportation amounts to human rights abuses" (Mathias, 2018, 133). The justification for illegalising migration extracts its substance from the mere belief that immigrants are the reason for societal, moral, and economic decline, a vision equally shared in the novel by state authorities and a large majority of the population. A major theme in the novels is the nearly symbiotic collaboration between the *Party* and nativist Britons, which fuels the dynamics of the expulsion practices with devastating consequences for the protagonists. This way, the novel comments on the dangers that manipulative exploitation of powerful narratives may imply, thus calling into question some of the myths and assumptions on which the *Leave* campaign built its discourse in the Brexit debate and whose consequences still affect many migrants today.

4.5.4 Violence as Strategy of Migration Control in *The Riot* and *Night of the Party*

Immigration into Britain in different historical moments triggered a widely accepted belief that many societal and political privileges of natives were lost and thus a series of powerful myths professing the urgency that the country must regain control over borders, society, economy, and ultimately its destiny emerged. Thus, starting already from the 1950s, a mythology that places immigration within the security sphere triggered an increased moral panic among many native British. The negative connotations brought by associations of immigration with illegality and crime, concocted with a false perception that the Establishment lost control over migration, generated in certain historical moments the feeling that societal control can and should be justifiably regained through violent actions.

The novels that are scrutinised in this chapter, *The Riot* (L. Wilson, 2013) by Laura Wilson and *Night of the Party* (Mathias, 2018) by Tracey Mathias, follow a pattern of negotiating migrations myths in the lost control and reclamation category that mostly focuses on the effects these myths have in producing violent responses as forms of reclamation. Through a detailed exploration of events connected to the historical incidents of Notting Hill (Wilson) or of dystopic fictitious situations set against the backdrop of post-Brexit Britain (Mathias), these novels negotiate comprehensively the effects migration myths may have in the production of what Johan Galtung describes as direct and structural forms of violence (Galtung, 1990) targeting immigrants.

4.5.4.1 Reclaiming the Streets of London in *The Riot*

The five nights of turmoil at the end of August 1958, known as the race riots of Notting Hill, are considered a turning point in British 'race relations' (Hilliard, 2022, 47), as they represented the most signficant manifestation of the racial tensions that had been growing for a decade after the arrival of Caribbean migrants. These events, which saw groups of violent white youths attacking the houses of black immigrants or assaulting them in the streets, made the object of much historical and sociological investigation (Blackman, 2019; Hilliard, 2022; Høgsbjerg, 2009; Mulhall, 2020), which attempts to make light in the unfolding of events, as well as scrutinise the structural conditions that triggered these violent confruntations. At the same time, the Notting Hill riots made the topic of numerous fictional representations; as shown in the previous chapter, Colin MacInnes' *Absolute Beginner* (MacInnes, 2011 [1959]) dedicates an entire section to the events, providing a minute description of the protagonist's perception of the clashes, as well as a scrutiny of the social conditions leading to them.

If MacInnes' novel undoubtly represents the most immedite literary response to the riots, as he was writing while the events were unfolding, one of the most recent novels treating this topic is Laura Wilson's *The Riot* (2013). Being an acclaimed and award-winning contemporary author of crime fiction, Wilson drew the attention of critics with the detective stories in the "Inspector Stratton" series, in which she displays a particular interest in setting the novels' plots against significant historical events, such as the Battle of England in *Stratton's War* (2009) or the Hungarian Uprising and the Suez Crisis of 1956 in *A Willing Victim* (2012) (Mann, 2013, n. pag.). *The Riot,* which is the third novel in the series, depicts a densly-paced investigation of two murders that were committed in the Notting Hill area during the hectic days of August 1958, a period marked by arising racial conflicts to which Caribbean immigrants fell victim.

By placing Inspector Stratton's investigation at the core of the narrative, the novel provides both an exciting murder mistery story and a detailed scrutiny of a social-historical context informed by crucial developments in race relations in post-war Britain. The novel's opening puts Stratton at the centre of a case which implies the death of a rent collector, interviewing residents in the building where the incident took place. This investigation unveils a full spectrum of telling attitudes and outlooks related to the multi-racial community of Notting Hill of that time. Black immigrants are predominantly frustated, disillusioned, or angry about the lack of opportunities which they had expected to find in the 'motherland', whereas most of the native white population regards the cosmopolitanisation of their neighbourhood with suspicion or even open hostility. The

investigation is complicated by another killing, which appears to be racially motivated, and soon after, a community party turns into havoc as groups of Teddy Boys start attacking black residents and rioting breaks out in the surrounding streets. In the attempt to make sense of events, Inspector Stratton turns his attention towards the activity of a far-right political organisation, the *White Defense League*, whose propaganda he suspetcs to be connected to the murder of the Caribbean immigrant, as well as to the violent incidents.

The considerable importance the novel shows to real places, organisations, personages, fashions, or events of the epoch not only enhances the realistic feel of the detective plot but also provides an increased sense of place and time. This anchors the story in a convincing atmosphere of the late 1950s London marked by the development of socially and racially mixed neighbourhoods, which saw the emergence of burgeoning cosmopolitan relations but also the tensions around these changes. In her review of the novel, Jessica Mann considers that Laura Wilson has recreated this era with "an academic historian's accuracy and a born writer's imagination", producing a murder mistery novel that "could also be a historical document" (Mann, 2013, n. pag.). References to historically accurate contextual details continues into the characters, as the leader of the *White Defence League* in the novel, John Gleeson, alludes to John Tyndall and Arnold Leese, two leaders of far-right organizations in Britain during that time. Another prominent character in the novel, Danny Perlman, is also an innuendo to real-life notorious landlord of that area, Peter Rachman, whose alleged intimidation and exploitation of his tenants gave rise to the term "Rachmanism" (Hilliard, 2022, 50).

Although *The Riot* is a novel deliberately based on real events and characters, which, along with the attention it shows to details, creates the appearance of a documentary text, it succeeds in shedding a new and revealing light on the reality it addresses. The trope of detective investigation of a racial crime represents not just a plot device facilitating a detailed depiction of the social reality of the most ethnically and culturally diverse area in London, but it can also be interpreted as an allegory of a social system under the scrutiny of an attentive, yet ideologically detached social commentator. Through the insertion of Stratton's reflections on events and on the nature of relations that develop across culturally heterogenious groups, the novel negotiates crucial aspects related to the emergence of nativist attitudes in Britain during the first post-war decade. In this context, Notting Hill represents the frontline for the manifestation of insecurities and apprehensions in relation to the settlement of Caribbean immigrants in Britain and the violent attacks that marked the end of the summer of 1958 constitute the climax of an accummulation of

social tensions among a generation of young Britons who felt dispossessed by a series of privileges, which, as natives of the country, they considered to be only theirs.

Inspector Stratton's investigation reveals the pervasive feeling of lost control over community space, which many of the interlocutors convincingly decry. The refrain that "[i]t's the couloureds" (Wilson, 2013, 8; 11; 30; 31) who are responsible for taking over natives' living space bewilders Stratton and at the same time sets him on a track to investigate what is the source of this narrative. His inquiery facilitates the recreation in the novel of social and historical details that underpin the emergence and dissemination of the myth that the housing crisis of the 1950s was caused by uncontrolled immigration from the Caribbean colonies. Stratton's investigation leads him to the headquarters of the *White Defense League*, which is suggestively described by Wilson to capture the atmosphere of the moment: "The headquarters of the White Defence League turned out to be a shopfront (…) [where] two solid panels at the bottom of the window advertised something called The Black and White News (…) and the glass was covered with a grille, behind which he could see six posters, all with the same legend:

<div align="center">

KEEP BRITAIN WHITE

STOP COLOURED IMMIGRATION

JOIN THE WHITE DEFENCE LEAGUE (Wilson, 2013, 76)

</div>

The nativist vibe is however not restricted to the League's headquarters. Inspector Stratton also comes across 'House Britons Not Blacks' (36) and "KBW" (67) slogans painted on walls and posters titled "End Coloured Immigration Now", which advertise a meeting to be addressed by Sir Oswald Mosley[36] (29). All these symbols of far-right political activity, Stratton reflects, remind him of the "stuff he'd seen on the newsreels about Germany in the 1930s, the slogans and smashed windows" (29).

Much of the tension is depicted in the novel in connection with the precarious housing situation in West London, which represented a catalyst for the violent incidents of Notting Hill. The plot development comments on what contemporary social research confirms, namely that the housing crisis could not trigger the violent attacks against black immigrants without the propagation of a migrant invasion narrative for which far-right actors were responsible. As Christopher Hilliard argues, most of the rioters who were arrested during the riots did not live alongside black people nor competed with them for housing (Hilliard, 2022, 51). This historical aspect is debated in *The*

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[36] Oswald Mosley was a member of the parliament in the 1920s and the founder and leader of the British Union of Fascists in 1932. After the war, he ran again for a sit in the Parliament on a far-right agenda without success (Walker, 1977).

Riot, as Inspector Stratton, while reading through the arrest reports, realises that most of the Teddy Boys involved in the racial attacks in Notting Hill had their residence in his "old patch in the West End" (Wilson, 2013, 10) and hardly had any direct connection with the areas around Notting Hill. The attackers rather walked or drove in the areas with a high density of immigrant inhabitants and challenged them there. Despite such evidence that Inspector Stratton comes upon, the interrogation of attackers reveals their conviction that "[t]he new immigrants [were] increasing the housing shortage of Notting Hill" (Wilson, 2013, 75), as stated in many arrest reposts. This fear of dispossession, the novel suggests, is rather the result of a mythology that was meticulously promoted by nativist actors. Stratton's investigation reveals a clear connection between the motivation of the attacks and the activity of the White Defence League, as many of the testimonies simply reproduce the narratives promoted by the League.

Besides, the disclosures related to Danny Perlman's manipulation of the real estate market, whose practice of encouraging the clustering of Caribbean immigrants in the areas where he monopolised the market and thus claim high rents from them, provide a real explanation for the high density of Caribbean population in certain areas of London. Such situations were nevertheless exploited to disseminate the myth of a migrant takeover. By reproducing in the novel the practices connected to Peter Rachman, to whom the character Danny Perlman alludes, Wilson draws attention to the deceitfulness of nativist discourses by which neo-fascist political organisations instigated "the white people of Notting Hill" to "keep Britain white" (Wilson, 2013, 76) in the period of the incipient migration from the Caribbean. The mapping of the Notting Hill area that Inspector Stratton performs reveals a rather ethnically mixed community, with agglomerations of black residents mostly connected to Perlman's properties.

However, the sense of urgency infused in the narrative of invasion worked efficiently in motivating disoriented native youths to initiate a crusade meant to reclaim control over areas that were allegedly lost to foreign immigrants. In this sense, a significant comment on the nature of the violent acts of rejection of migrants is provided through the voice an old resident, Mr Russell. In a conversation with Inspector Stratton, he gives voice to a category of transgressive British natives, articulating a realistic vision of the situation:

> You mark my words: for all our talk of liberty and tolerance, we're going to see something very ugly here, very soon. We've spent years spreading ourselves all over the world without so much as a by-your leave, but when a few thousand harmless Negroes (sic) come to our shores, we throw up our hands in horror. That's why they're here, Inspector, and don't you forget it. They're here because we are – or in some cases, were – there; because of the history of this island. (Wilson, 2013, 28)

Mr Russell's stark criticism of the violent nature of British imperialism, characterised through the expression "without so much as a by-your leave" (28), reminds that the attacks in Notting Hill, by which native youths showed their intention to banish immigrants from the local community, represented a mere continuation of a history of violence that significantly marked Britain's colonial past.

At the same time, Mr Russell's reminder, which echoes Paul Gilroy's thesis that "the immigrant is now here because Britain, Europe, was once out there" (Gilroy, 2005,100), adds to the critique of the natives' hypocrisy in relation to their rejection and condemnation of immigration. In this context, such slogans as "End Coloured Immigration Now" (Wilson, 2013, 36) and "demanding that they be shipped back home at once" (76) that imbue the discourse of the White Defence League, intend to attack the establishment's official policy on immigration at that moment, as well as to infuse in the British public a sentiment of anxiety and rebellious discontent. It then may come as no surprise that, as Mr Russell foreshadows in his statement, angry young Britons heed the far-right politicians' call to become involved in the symbolic gesture of taking back control of the public spaces through acts of direct violence targeted at black immigrants. In his study *Cultural Responses of the Teds*, Tony Jefferson argues that the Teds' territorial impulses, manifested through their desire to expulse immigrants through violence, were "an attempt to retain, only imaginatively, a hold on the territory which was being expropriated from them" (Jefferson, 1993 [1975], 81). In *The Riot,* this topic is debated beyond the mere depiction of the violent clashes by which the Teddy Boys attempted to regain control over the streets of Notting Hill, literally and "imaginatively" (81), as Jefferson claims. The novel's focus on the detective investigation of a racially motivated murder, which allegorises the wider picture of the historical events, unravels the intricacy of race relations in Britain in that period and exposes the role played by anti-migrant myths in the development of these relations.

The "depressing litany of prejudice and irrationality" (Wilson, 2013, 75), which Stratton comes across during the investigation, reveals that, besides the Notting Hill rioters' concerns to return the streets to their white past, the fear of losing control over an allegedly morally superior form of organisation represented another significant reason behind the collective acts of violence against immigrants in Notting Hill. Among "the various reasons for their [immigrants] dislike" figured "the way they behave with women [and] they're dirty (…)" (Wilson, 2013, 75), which aligns with the White Defence League's programme that professed, among others, that immigrants were "Spreading Disease [and] Promoting Vice (…)" (76). In his research on the Notting Hill riots, Christopher Hilliard also concludes that the violent attacks represented "an attempt to reassert a

conception of the proper order of things" (Hilliard, 2022, 48) in the sense of a return to a mythicized past characterised by probity and social order.

The analysis of several novels in this thesis reveals an obsessive propagation of the myth that immigrants are promoters of vice and criminality. *The Riot* comments extensively on the effects of this myth by scrutinising the nature of race relations that led to the Notting Hill riots, as well as the sources of the narratives that constructed an image of immigrants as socially deviant and dangerous. Intrigued by the rumours that produced anxiety among the white residents of Notting Hill, Inspector Stratton scrutinises the local police records just to find out that immigrants were not responsible for a disproportionate number of criminal offences. Except for a few "black men convicted for possession of hemp and some living on immoral earnings of white women" (Wilson, 2013, 43), he finds no other evidence of deviant behaviour or criminal deeds at a large scale, as most of the white residents he interviews claim.

However, despite this lack of factual support, the myth that immigrants represent the main source of criminality permeates the narrative universe of the novel, leading to a generalised sentiment of hostility, which eventually degenerates into racial violence. Stratton's further investigation reveals, however, an intricate network of nativist agents who contribute significantly to framing immigrants in negative terms through a discourse that conflates immigration and crime in a way that leads to the development of a justificatory myth regarding immigration control. The *White Defence League*'s propaganda, as well as references to Oswald Mosley's anti-migrant campaign are comprehensively debated in *The Riot* in relation to the violent events of Notting Hill. Mosley's persistent promotion of narratives lamenting that Notting Hill was becoming a 'little Harlem' and his references to 'black brothels' and vice clubs (Hilliard, 2022, 61) depict the area as a community that was disintegrating and failing because of immigration.

In addition, *The Riot* comments on depictions in the media and in political discourses of inter-racial couples as highly charged violations of British social conventions. Such claims inflamed even more the already tense relations between young white men and black immigrants, triggering several attacks on mixed couples that occurred in the streets of Notting Hill during the riots. In these circumstances, the appeal to protect the community, which resonated with the groups of dissatisfied Teddy Boys, was interpreted by Tony Jefferson not just in terms of defence of the physical space but also as a "defence of status" (Jefferson, 1993 [1975], 82). The novel figures on such events in several narrative moments, as shouts of "nigger-lover" (Wilson, 2013, 22) or "black man's whore" (66) addressed to British girls precede Teddy Boys' assaults over several inoffensive mixed-raced couples.

It can thus be said that the negotiation in *The Riot* of the migrant criminal myths' connection to racial violence reveals the significant impact of the discursive constructions of immigrants in terms of social and moral danger, as a real folk devil, to use Stanley Cohen's words (Cohen, 2011 [1976]), which the Teddy Boys and other categories of native British perceived as real. By expressing stark disapproval of violence as a form of immigration control, the novel draws attention to the risks that transferring the debate on immigration in the field of public security may represent. The fact that the protagonist is a representative of law enforcement and, at the same time, a character who challenges many questionable social conventions and attitudes related to migration in the epoch, represents a narrative strategy by which the novel deconstructs the very ideas of migrant criminality and social deviance. Through thorough detective investigation combined with critical reflections over the social milieu he explores, Inspector Stratton's performance succeeds in exposing the violence directed at immigrants in Notting Hill as transgressive acts not only in the penal, but also in the moral sense.

The intentions to reinstate control through organised direct violence over areas allegedly 'lost to immigrants', as depicted in *The Riot,* may sound less plausible today. Yet, the rise of political extremism during the past years, as well as events such as the ethnic riots of 2001 in Oldham, Bradford, Leeds, and Burnley or the murder of Arkadiusz Jóźwik in the wake of Brexit referendum may be considered as ominous signs of the lurking spectre of race violence. Laura Wilson's novel, by reiterating the topic of the Notting Hill race riots, performs a dissection of these historical events not only to evince their ignominy but also to prevent their repetition.

The riots remain, however, a turning point in the development of race relations in Britain in the post-war period in several ways. In terms of political debate, the toxic discourse of far-right parties and organisations became less and less prominent, as the years following the riots saw the demise of these parties and their leaders while established politicians started showing more interest in issues concerning immigration (Walker, 1977, 108). At the societal level, even though nativism has persisted in many forms and in many contexts, its manifestation has never reached the level of paroxysm as in the summer and autumn of 1958. Many native British came to realise that the practice of community development and the idea of community itself was, as Camilla Schofield and Ben Jones argue, in need of decolonisation (Schofield & Jones, 2019, 56), and the Notting Hill riots functioned as a catalyser of this development.

At the same time, community activism within the Caribbean circles took a new impetus after the Notting Hill moment leading to extensive and articulate expressions of community consciousness during the following decades (19). It is perhaps a paradox of history that the

outburst of racial violence led to such transformations; as Christopher Hilliard contends, if the Teddy Boys attempted in the summer and autumn of 1958 to claim back control of the public space for white people through acts of fighting and vandalism, by the same token, the annual Notting Hill carnival, which has its origins in a response to the riots, represents an act of laying claim to public space in London (Hilliard, 2022, 60) for Caribbean immigrants and their descendants, functioning as a reminder that cosmopolitan conviviality can actually be achieved in the same streets of London which witnessed the reprehensible events of 1958.

4.5.4.2 Defying Anti-Migrant Totalitarianism in *Night of the Party*

As migration represented one of the major issues for the *Leave* campaign during the Brexit debate, the effects of the lost control and reclamation myths became even stronger in a context where many Conservative politicians, as well as a large group of the native population, believed that giving the same rights to foreigners was unacceptable (Outhwaite, 2019, 3). The much-proclaimed narrative about regaining control over state and society was in these conditions often conflated in nativist populist discourse with a desire to control immigration. Therefore, the vision about Brexit that many Britons shared at the moment of the referendum implied, first and foremost, an opportunity to expel the migrants from Eastern Europe who were already there and to prevent further new arrivals. As Julien Barnes comments, "it was as if the Brexit vote gave them permission to purify the country" (Barnes, 2017, n. pag.). The delusion about this 'regained freedom' was triumphantly proclaimed by Nigel Farage in the 'victory speech' celebrating the 23rd of June 2016, a day to which he referred as "Independence Day" (Farage, 2016).

Even though Brexit was implemented in the meantime and Britain officially left the European Union on the 31st of December 2020, its causes and consequences still make the topic of debate in academic, political, and cultural circles. Countless studies and journalistic investigations have been trying to shed light over many controversial issues that are still difficult to grasp. In addition, such endeavours are complemented by many cultural representations that intend to provide critical insight into the events that unfolded and about the agents involved in them. The study edited by Robert Eaglestone in 2018 titled *Brexit and Literature: Critical and Cultural Responses* (Eaglestone [ed.], 2018) provides valuable critical responses to some of the *Brexlit* novels that were published in the wake of the referendum; however, this study may be considered just a

starting point as the complexity of issues treated by fiction texts dealing with Brexit requires a continuous and comprehensive investigation.

As previously mentioned in this study, several novels in the category of *BrexLit* negotiate the mythology claiming that strict migration control represents a prerequisite for regaining control over the country (Board, 2017; Byers, 2018; Coe, 2018; Crossan & Conaghan, 2017; Mathias, 2018). Among these, Tracey Mathias' *Night of the Party* (2018) is the text that treats most comprehensively the notoriously strict migration control policies that nativist populist politicians and their supporters fetishized extensively in the debate over Brexit. A British author of Welsh origin, Mathias is mostly known for her fantasy and young adult fiction. *Night of the Party,* her most successful novel so far, has received positive reviews in prestigious newspapers, such as The Guardian (Williams, 2018), The Irish Times (Hennessy, 2018), and The Sunday Times (Jones, 2018), which consider it a thought-provoking political thriller about post-Brexit Britain. The novel's plot is built around the story of a teenage romance between Ash, a student majoring in mathematics and philosophy, who struggles to get over the grief of losing his sister in a drug related accident, and Zara, an apparently ordinary seventeen years old girl aspiring to turn her passion for English literature into a career. Despite an exciting start, the relationship between the two teenagers is significantly impacted by post-Brexit reality, as Britain has transformed into a dystopian, xenophobic society under the rule of a nativist populist political party depicted simply as 'The Party'. The exciting romance turns problematic when a dramatic truth is revealed; Zara is Romanian-born immigrant who has lived most of her life in Britain after she and her mother moved in legally before Brexit.

The novel depicts a captivating and intricate love story that can stimulate empathy and a sensitive outlook over relations between humans facing exceptionally distressing situations. At the same time, by exploring the psychological impact of the social trauma that the protagonists undergo, the novel provides a stark criticism of the harsh immigration policies that Britain adopted gradually under several Conservative cabinets after 2010. As the title suggests, the novel sets out to comment on the nefarious dynamics of British politics in the aftermath of the Brexit referendum. The association of the signifiers 'party' and 'night' already sets the premises for a dystopian setting, foreshadowing the gloomy atmosphere of an inhospitable community in which Britain was turned under the rule of the 'Party'. At the same time, the metaphor of night, whose effect is enhanced throughout the novel by the trope of recurrent blackouts that affect London, signifies the state of bewilderment and obscurity that produced social polarisation around the topic of immigration, an issue that significantly impacted the society during the Brexit debate.

A major plot device that introduces the main topic on which the novel comments is depicted in the preamble of the novel in the form a mock Wikipedia article titled the "Immigration and Residency Act" (Mathias, 2018, 1). This article sums up the provisions of a newly adopted immigration bill, which literally deprives all immigrants in Britain of residence and property rights, claiming the state's privilege to deport everyone not British born, and declaring any failure to report an illegal immigrant as a criminal offence (1). The depiction of the bill's provisions has the effect to anchor the story in a dystopic, yet recognisable context for the contemporary reader, one informed by a nearly ubiquitous state of emergency that state authorities discursively construct. The novel employs irony when mentioning that the new law is intended to protect freedom, whereas in the novel's diegetic frame it appears rather as a temporary suspension of law which reverberates Giorgio Agamben's "state of exception" (Agamben, 2005), wherein states can remain lawful while transgressing individual rights.

Through a thorough depiction of events and description of societal organisation, the novel distils at the diegetic level both the effects and the genesis of the processes that led to the transformation of post-Brexit Britain into a totalitarian society. The development of characters, as well as the relations they establish with each other and with the authorities, provide a thorough insight into the processes by which the 'Party' imposes its ideological tenets regarding migration as a dominant perspective. In a context dominated by vindictive reactions of many British natives, the master narrative that seems to orchestrate all social interaction is anchored in the myth that the 'Party' has assumed a historical responsibility when claiming to take back control of the country by imposing a fanatical anti-migrant policy.

The official position of state authorities, as it emerges from the Prime Minister's electoral speech, revolves around the tenets of the 'British Born policy', a slogan turned into state policy, which the Government delineates as "necessary defence of national resources, security and culture" Mathias, 2018, 133). Once the explanation that immigrants represent the source of economic, societal, and moral declension is turned into a commonly accepted belief, the justification of "forced deportation" (133) seems sensible for a large majority of the native population. Consequently, most people rally around the 'Party's' project to "purify the country" (Barnes, 2017, n. pag.) in a way that resonates Julien Barnes' comment when referring to post-Brexit Britain.

By following Zara's experience as an illegal(ised) immigrant, *Night of the Party* scrutinises the mechanisms through which a powerful mythology that constructs immigrants as "folk devils", in the sense Cohen (Cohen, 1972 [2011]), triggers stark, emotionally charged responses to migration.

The fabrication of an increasing sense of insecurity follows in this context a specific strategy which, as Stanley Cohen notes in his most recent discussion of the moral panic concept in relation to immigration, turns stories about migration into a narrative that generates a "single, virtually uninterrupted message of hostility and rejection" (Cohen, 2011 [1973], xxiii) targeting immigrants. This message is reinforced by the imbrication of the idea of an ever-beleaguered community with mythicized images of deviance, criminality, and illegality attached to the signifier of immigrant, thus perpetuating the sense of a phantom crisis that allegedly jeopardises the native society's survival. In *Night of the Party,* such messages overflow the public space and, as a result, the abusive treatment of immigrants is eventually perceived by most citizens as a sensible and legitimate act. The Prime Minister's statement functions as a validation in this sense: "What rights do these people have? They are here illegally" (Mathias, 2018, 133).

The myth of the criminal/illegal migrant becomes thus one of the major tropes that the novel negotiates, since it represents one of the key instruments that the 'Party' employs in creating and maintaining a sense of utmost moral panic. This phenomenon is particularly interesting to analyse in conditions where the authorities appear to have total control over immigration, yet the state of alert in society is maximal. Therefore, the novel pays special attention to the propaganda techniques by which the association of migration with illegality is turned into a commonly accepted factualness. Throughout the novel, the characters' attention is often caught by quotations from newspapers or billboards displaying slogans that underpin the government's nativist policies. Zara is repeatedly depicted in situations where such slogans are ubiquitous: "posters on the bus shelters shouting the same message she read later, on the scrolling screens on the tube, in spaces above the windows, where once, sometimes, there used to be poetry. DO YOU KNOW AN ILLEGAL? IT IS YOUR DUTY TO REPORT THEM" (Mathias, 2018, 14).

The mythic character of the criminal migrant narrative is debated in the novel from legal perspective, as the attribute of illegality attached to immigrants results from the adoption of an arbitrary and oppressive legislation that, as expressed by the opposition coalition, "amounts to human rights abuses" (133). This is an artifice by which the signifier immigrant is conflated with the idea of crime and its meaning is blurred so that the concept 'crimmigration' (Stumpf, 2013) becomes a reference term that in the natives' collective subconscious delineates migration itself. Although Zara and her mother have never infringed any law, they are criminalised retroactively and stripped of their residence rights as a means of justification for migrants' expulsion. As expressed by Lewis, one of Ash's friends and 'Party' activist, criminalisation of immigration is a necessary decision in the processes of regaining control of society, since immigrants allegedly

represent a burden for the state: "We're a small island. We've got limited resources and limited space. […] We are getting overcrowded. Overrun" (Mathias, 2018, 161). Their expulsion is thus considered as an equitable solution to resolve Britain's overlapping crises and, as Lewis claims, "it's only the Party that's *realistic* and *tough* enough to make this hard decision that the country needs" (168).

The wide acceptance of such narratives by native Britons not only arouses a generalised state of alert but also suggests that the perception of migrants as illegalised human beings permeates the social imaginary of the native population. A particularly interesting consequence of this fact, which the novel addresses extensively, refers to the function of myths in the legitimation of aggregate structural violence directed at immigrants, which results from the synergistic collaboration between authorities and common people. If the media outlets controlled by authorities prove their efficiency in disseminating the myth claiming that the government is regaining the nation's sovereignty through strict immigration control, the people, in return, respond by endorsing the 'Party's project both through banal gestures and at the polls. In an interview, the newly re-elected Prime Minister declares that "the government has a democratic mandate for its policies [therefore] it will certainly be looking at increasing surveillance" (Mathias, 2018, 197), as well as "begin house to house searches in London" (2019).

Besides the political endorsement of the far-right party, which reverberates the resounding electoral success of UKIP in the 2014 elections for the European Parliament and in the general election in 2015, many natives are depicted in the novel as directly involved in the process of 'purifying the country'. An example in this sense is represented by the complicit involvement in the immigrant hunt of Neighbourhood Watch, a sinister organisation of volunteers reminding of Migration Watch UK, which signifies the willingness of people to collude with the regime in implementing the British Born policy. *Night of the Party* comments extensively on the eagerness of common people, often harmless elderly, to sustain the oppressive frames of surveillance and detection of immigrants as a natural continuation of institutionalised nativism. The novel's protagonists are frequently subjected to random ID checks either by the police or by Neighbourhood Watch patrols, as in the opening scene, when Zara and Ash must walk home after a blackout paralyses all public transport. Ash's neighbours, who are on patrol, approach them: "You need to go home. Stay in till the power's back on!" (Mathias, 2018, 8). The scene seems banal, and the apparently kind neighbours appear to act helpfully. Yet, the scene foreshadows ominous events that would lead to Zara's exposure and subsequent arrest by the police.

Once the myth that criminal immigrants represent a threat to community infiltrates people's social imaginary, the premises for concrete manifestations of structural violence are set, since, as Johann Galtung argues (Galtung, 1990, 291), it provides justification for the violent intervention of state authorities. Zara falls victim to these circumstances after the re-election of the 'Party', which entails an escalation of the paranoid immigrant hunt. She and her mother conceive a plan to flee to Ireland, but before that, Zara decides to do justice to her friend and Ash's sister, Sophie. Zara is the only witness who can identify the person responsible for Sophie's death, thus she goes to the police station to denounce him. However, as the officer displays an obsessive urge to scrutinise her identity, he discovers that she is not British born and arrests her: "You're illegal, Miss Ionescu. You're under arrest" (Mathias, 2018, 216). The words used by the police officer are symptomatic for expressing the effects of the illegal migrant myth; the automatic use of the term 'illegal' by the officer indicates that the reflex of seeing migrants not as human beings but as mere targets of criminal law has developed into standard practice.

Arguably, the negotiation of the illegal migrant myth represents one of the main themes in *Night of the Party,* and the dystopia built around an all too believable repressive political regime in the novel represents a bitter criticism of Britain's restrictive immigration and asylum policies of the last two decades. The mere fact of being non-British born places Zara, according to the provisions of the Immigration and Residency Act, in a state of illegality and makes her subject to forced deportation. This abusive form of incrimination hints plainly at the Borders Act 2007, which grants British authorities considerable discretion to detain and remove migrants on charges that Juliet Stumpf describes through the term "crimmigration" (Stumpf, 2013, 61).

By following Zara's experience in the detention centre for migrants where she is arbitrarily detained for an unjustifiably long period, the readers are urged to reflect on events, characters, and situations that are strikingly similar to the reality some migrants in Britain have to face today (Karamanidou, 2019). Ultimately, Zara's indefinite detention and the prospects of forced deportation represent a form of profound state intervention that undermines the agency and freedom of individuals who are abusively criminalised through the label of 'illegal immigrant'. Through the emotionally charged depiction of Zara's imprisonment experience, *Night of the Party* raises several important moral questions in this sense. First, it brings out the topic of migrants' human rights as a problematic issue in relation to contemporary migrants and asylum seekers in Britain, as well as in other Western democratic states. This matter, which made the subject of intensive debate within migration scholarship in the past years (Griffiths, 2017; Karamanidou, 2019; Korkut, Bucken-Knapp, McGarry, Hinnfors, & Drake, 2013 [ed]; Koser, 2007), revolves

around the fundamental question of how can a human being be illegal. In this context, Khalid Koser considers that the "most powerful criticism of the term 'illegal' is that defining people as 'illegal' denies their humanity" (Koser, 2007, 54). The employment of such terms may have severe effects on the way immigrants are perceived, as the fact that immigrants are human and have fundamental rights, whatever their legal status may be, may be ignored.

Placed in Oake Leigh deportation centre for women, sarcastically referred as her "new temporary home" (Mathias, 2018, 226), Zara undergoes a suspension of basic human rights, as privations, abuses, and mistreatment represent a common experience for incarcerated migrants. She is denied appropriate access to legal aid, being instead often woken in the middle of the night for interrogation, or is denied basic hygiene rights, such as access to tampons or going to the toilet. Her hope is to be on the deportation list and be sent "out of England, in a place where she doesn't belong" (Mathias, 2018, 225), but instead she is retained without explanation for a much longer period than legally allowed.

A second important moral question raised in the novel refers to the state's practice to use detention and expulsion as a symbolic and practical tool of migration management. The redemptive rhetoric of the 'Party', which professes the solution for regaining control of the country through complete removal of all dangers inherent in foreignness, turns the practice of deportation into a primordial aim of state politics. Therefore, the provisions encoded in the Migration and Residency Act, which place any non-British born resident in the position of a law offender, grant state authorities discretionary powers to incarcerate and deport all immigrants. The novel treats the topic of legally criminalising migrants with sharp irony, as Zara, who had embodied the image of an exemplary, law-abiding citizen until the moment of her retention, becomes a 'criminal' in the very moment when she decides to denounce a real crime, namely the murder of her friend. The police, however, ignores the crucial information she can provide for solving Sophie's murder, yet celebrates triumphantly the discovery of an illegal immigrant.

It can be said that, through the depiction of events from Zara's perspective, *Night of the Party* gives a powerful voice to a migrant character who denounces the inconsistencies of the myth professing the country's redemption through migrants' banishment. In addition, the novel also provides a perspective on events expressed through a native character's narrative voice, namely Ash. Mathias chooses to structure the novel in chapters that render successively the perspectives of the two protagonists, a technique which facilitates a coherent deconstruction of the narrative that the 'Party' acts on the behalf of the entire nation to redeem the country. The 'Party's claim that the government represents the expression of popular will, in similar fashion to Nigel Farage,

Boris Johnson, Michael Gove and many other Brexiteers who have described the Brexit vote as "proof of a popular will cast by the unfairly excluded and forgotten" (Shilliam, 2018, 174), is challenged by Ash's development as a character. Even though he starts as an ordinary British teenager preoccupied with trivial aspects of existence, after Zara confesses her non-British born identity, he gradually becomes aware of how he had been programmed into unconsciously acquiescing to the dominant discourse of the Party and transforms into a responsible activist who questions the state's authority to treat immigrants as disfranchised non-citizens. The turning point in his evolution as a character is depicted through an epiphany. While reading the newspaper, his attention is drawn by the headline stating "KNOW AN ILLEGAL? IT IS A CRIMINAL OFFENCE TO FAIL TO REPORT THEM" (Mathias, 2018, 133), which prompts his consciousness to split between the citizen's duty to report Zara and protecting her despite infringing the law. The moral dilemma triggered by this episode urges him to reflect over the ethical inconsistencies of the British Born policy and thus decides that his moral duty is to help Zara escape to newly independent Scotland and eventually be re-united there with her.

Ash's transformation into a transgressive character represents an important literary device in the novel's strategy to denounce the arbitrariness and cynicism of an inhumane migrant legislation. At the same time, anti-migrant totalitarianism is questioned by the creation of a constellation of characters who oppose injustice and choose to stand up for the cause of persecuted immigrants. An illustrative example in this sense is the Archbishop of Lincoln, who organises a clandestine organisation that helps immigrants escape to neighbouring countries and avoid detention, a daring act that eventually leads to his arrest. A similar attitude is displayed by Ash's friends and university colleagues, Chris and Prya, who defiantly confront Lewis after he denounces a Lithuanian waitress, who is also arrested by the police.

The acts of solidarity performed by such to non-compliant British natives, as well as the novel's optimistic ending, which depicts Zara and Ash on a train platform in Edinburg, convey a message of hope that alleviates the overall dystopian tone of the novel. Nevertheless, *Night of the Party* is a novel that challenges in many ways the arbitrariness of stark anti-migration policies in contemporary Britain, as well as the narratives that underpin their legitimacy. In her review in The Guardian, Imogen Russell Williams describes the novel as "a hundred-decibel alarm call, skewering both the inhuman bureaucracy of the detention centre and the casual acceptance of horrors" (Williams, 2018, n. pag.). Her comment raises considerable questions about the novel's topicality in the context of post-Brexit Britain, as the persistence of anti-migrant attitudes demands an urgent need for tolerance and for the promotion of cosmopolitan values.

4.5.5 Conclusion

Migration myths in all categories have had a significant impact on the way British natives relate to migration, but the category analysed in this chapter stands out in a specific way; the narrative that Britain must take back control of its conditions of existence in terms of self, society, and politics represents one of the most powerful drivers in the construction of the sovereigntist ethos that influenced decisively the result of the Brexit referendum.

The review of migration myths performed in the third section of this chapter reveals both a continuation and a diversification of sovereigntist narratives in the periods in focus. If the myths related to Windrush Generation migration approach specifically aspect of identity, community, and economy, insisting on racial and cultural differences as arguments for a strict immigration control, the discourse connected to East European migration implies a more nuanced politicisation of these topics. The master narrative in this new context focuses on the concept of political community and the trope of borders control, referring to both political and symbolic borders, which become the most prominent feature of the lost control and reclamation mythology. This nuancing in British sovereigntist discourse is explainable given the different historical conditions characterising the two migrations. The legislation regulating immigration at the time of the first arrivals referred to internal resettlement within the borders of the British Empire, therefore the Caribbean immigrants could not be perceived as alien intruders from a legal perspective. This situation is significantly different in the context of East European migration, since the control over Britain's borders was often conflated with the rhetoric claiming the country's 'independence' from the European Union.

Despite such distinctions, several elements of continuity can be established in relation to the mythologies informing the two historical moments. The narrative that state authorities lost control over immigration permeates the British nativist discourses of both periods and a similar propensity for nativist actors, such as sensationalist media and far-right politicians, to propagate this myth can be observed. Consequently, the imagination of many Britons was enthralled by the myth that expulsion of migrants represents a form of regaining control over society, politics, and economy and a viable solution to end all internal crises, either real or contrived.

The novels selected for close analysis, *The Riot* and *Night of the Party,* display a particular interest in negotiating myths in the lost control and reclamation category, as both treat comprehensively experiences of immigrants facing a 'hostile environment' characterised by a

climate of institutional racism and wide-spread nativism. Laura Wilson's *The Riot* discusses extensively the connection between myths promoting the urgency of re-establishing social order and the violent events of Notting Hill in the summer and autumn of 1958. And if acts of organised violence against immigrants have never re-occurred after that, manifestations of hostility towards immigrants continued throughout the following decades, often in the form of what Camilla Schofield and Ben Jones describe as the "covert racial violence of everyday life" (Schofield & Jones, 2019, 56). Extreme forms of this type of violence are negotiated in *Night of the Party,* where the sovereigntist obsession that haunted the Brexit debate provides the background for the implementation of disproportionately strict anti-immigration policies, by which authorities claim to regain control over all aspects of community life.

Another significant aspect that both *The Riot* and *Night of the Party* negotiate refers to the mythological dimension of violence against migrants, which emerges from the interplay between authorities and population. In the contexts described by both novels, violence is justified through a commonly shared belief that a hostile environment incentivises migrants to re-emigrate. At the same time, the narrative of expulsion-as-redemption has a palliative effect on the groups of dissatisfied Britons, and, nativist populist actors, such as the White Defence League in *The Riot* and the 'Party' in *Night of the Party,* are eager to capitalise on this. A parallel can thus be drawn between the events these novels negotiate, in the sense that violent manifestations of nativism were underpinned in a reclamation mythology that significantly marked the British ethos of the past seven decades.

Despite the gloomy tone that imbues both novels, it can be said that a message of hope transpires from each of the stories. The return to a peaceful communitarian cohabitation in Noting Hill, which Inspector Stratton witnesses in the denouement of *The Riot,* as well as Zara and Ash's escape from the repressive post-Brexit environment envisioned by Tracey Mathias, represent powerful fictional expressions of the idea that exclusionary attitudes and policies can be countered by various cosmopolitan understandings of community and by the promotion of rights associated with free movement.

5 Concluding Remarks and Perspectives

This study has investigated how seventeen novels dealing with two important phases of migration into Britain after World War II negotiate migration myths that (re)produce and reinforce stereotypes and prejudices about migrants and migration as justification for nativist attitudes. Its focus on literary representations of migration from the Caribbean between 1948 through the 1960s and from Eastern Europe since 2004 until today reveals a pattern of recurrence of migration myths over this period, which contributed to creating a sense of moral, identitarian, and social crisis that many native Britons perceived as real. Furthermore, besides critically addressing ways through which the selected novels approach, negotiate, and challenge the ideas promoted and structures upheld by migration myths, this study highlighted the novels' potential to create imaginative frames of cosmopolitan conviviality in ethnically and culturally pluralistic societies, as Britain can be described in the two historical periods in focus, by deconstructing such concepts as race, alterity, nation, community, and identity.

The immediate historical and political context, in which migration has received (again) increased attention, signifies the relevance for society of the present study. Brexit, as well as everything it involved in the pre- and post-referendum periods, represent significant forms of manifestation of long engrained nativism in British social imaginary, which has its origins in the racial hierarchies of the British empire. The decision for investigating literature engaging with these two migrations emerged from their contextual, thematical, and structural similarities. Migration instances addressed in both categories of novels seem to catalyse in similar ways the detrimental energies of a nation in crisis and produce nativist group positions that project migration realities at a mythological level. At the same time, this comparative approach considers specific textual and contextual particularities that distinguish the ways in which these novels respond to the social-historical realities they address.

The extant research within social sciences on the impact of migration myths in shaping the relations between natives and migrants seems to have deficiencies in at least two ways, which this study sought to address. A first aspect refers to the lack of historical-comparative perspective, since most existing research is focused on contemporary contexts of migration. Therefore, the comparative analysis this study performed in relation to two major migrations, the Windrush Generation, which can be considered the first mass migration to Britain after the war, and the one from Eastern Europe, which is one of the most recent, brought into discussion the continuity of

nativist mythology in Britain. In this sense, the study establishes a typological classification of the main forms of expression of migration myths that are repeatedly evoked in novels that engage with both analysed contexts.

A second deficiency refers to failing to suggest and promote alternative narratives to the prevailing nativist discourses. Social scientific studies provide valuable critical analyses on the sources and the impact of migration myths in various contexts of migration, deconstructing the discursive structures upon which they are constituted and developing empirically sustained arguments which prove their falsity. Their findings contribute to raising awareness about migration myths' role in the emergence of nativist attitudes and state policies that affect the interaction between natives and immigrants. This present study also contributes to the critique of the effects that migration myths have in society, but, in addition, it explores how the selected novels build an alternative cosmopolitan social imaginary, by foregrounding the advantages of living in tolerant, pluralistic societies.

Countless works within critical literary studies have addressed anti-migrant discourses that incorporate myths about migrants and migration. The present study expands this topic by including in the analytical discourse an explicit and unequivocal terminology, as well as a theorisation of migration myths, and by addressing specific questions about the role of migration myths in the construction of a nativist social imaginary. Through innovative methodology and comprehensive examination of important concepts for investigating migration, this study provides viable tools for critical scrutiny of the discursive mythical frames that predispose and sometime reinforce the demonization and de-humanisation of migrants in various cultural, political, and geographical contexts. The hermeneutic approach of this study contributes to raising important questions about situations and structures that proclaim to be natural rather than contingent. The literary techniques and narrative strategies highlighted in the analysis demonstrate the novels' potential to negotiate migration myths and to promote alternatives to nativist models of thinking and interaction.

In the analysed texts, the plurality of characters and narrative voices secures a diversity of perspectives related to important plot events and interactional situations, which allows an interpretation of the novels as *heteroglossic* (Bakhtin, 1998) texts that accommodate different and even opposing viewpoints on migration. Migration myths that intend to reify detrimental images of migrants and migration are by and large represented in connection to characters who act in accordance with nativist ideological tenets. In most cases, such characters represent fictional archetypes of native British who feel threatened by the settlement of immigrants in their communities, as it is the case of Mr. Todd and Bernard Bligh in *Small Island,* Miss Wren and Jim

Baxter in *Paid Servant,* Alfred Darkin in *Perfidious Albion,* Helena in *Middle England,* or Lewis in *Night of the Party.* There are also cases when political leaders or prominent figures in society, either real historical persons or innuendoes to them, are the promotors of anti-migrant mythologies at the diegetic level, as in *The Riot,* a novel which refers to far-right politicians of the 1950s, John Tyndall, Arnold Leese, and Oswald Mosley or in *Middle England,* which mentions specifically Boris Johnson and Nigel Farage.

Nevertheless, the promotion of anti-migrant myths by nativist characters is subverted in all novels by transgressive characters who are willing to engage in dialogic interaction. By doing so, they contribute to denouncing the instrumental function of migration myths and to supplementing the production of alternative imaginaries informed by pluralistic conviviality. Such characters are not only committed to dialogue across cultural boundaries but also, through their attitudes and discourse, influence the reconfiguration of spaces inhabited by natives and migrants alike. For instance, Queenie in *Small Island*, Rick in *To Sir, With Love* and *Paid Servant,* the 'Beginner' in *Absolute Beginners,* Christy Slane and Midge Midgham in *The Road Home,* or Benjamin Trotter in *Middle England,* contribute to transforming such spaces into dialogic contact zones in which signifiers that intend to reify mythicized images about migrants and migration become unstable. By giving expression to such cosmopolitan voices, the analysed novels raise questions about the perception of migration for many native British as a threat to the nation's homogeneity and society's cohesion, and equally sustain the idea of positive transformations that migration engenders.

Cosmopolitan commitment is therefore staged in all novels as a strategy for transgressing the epistemological barriers discursively created by mythicized designations of migrants and migration. However, it is not the ultimate feature of these novels to signify the capacity of migrant characters to debunk the mendacity of migration myths as a strategy to integrate in the British social fabric, as neither it is to depict the propensity of a category of liberal thinking, cosmopolitan native characters to either ignore or actively engage in denouncing migration myths. The novels can inspire contemporary readership to social engagement in an 'age of migration' (Castles, De Haas, & Miller, 2014), to stop avoiding the public sphere and start reaching out and participate in daily political events, to challenge the mind frames in which they were educated and/or formed by dominant discourses and to turn into active cosmopolitan agents.

An entire constellation of characters throughout the texts draw attention to the state of emergency characterising many contemporary societies in which nativist populist ideas gained significant support among large groups of natives. Such characters, both migrants and natives,

represent available examples of active involvement in practicing and promoting cosmopolitan values. The figures of the Beginner or Benjamin Trotter, for instance, represent an embodiment of active political involvement, as they realise the urgency to act in contexts informed by the unfolding of nefarious events driven by nativism. Their example, as well as that of many other protagonists in the novels, represents a call for all community members, not just migrants or those natives directly affected by migration, to reflect on the importance of being engaged in the construction of a cosmopolitan society based on pluralism, tolerance, and inter-cultural dialogue.

Myths, which represent the main focus of this study, can be said to carry a powerful message and their negotiation in works of fiction may significantly contribute to the degree they can influence the readers' way of conceiving reality. The approach of various social, political, and identitarian questions in the texts analysed in this study reflects the debates of the times the novels address. Therefore, significant space is granted in each of these novels to the negotiation of myths about migration in connection to factual events that marked Britain's recent history. The close relationship between the texts and the social environment which they depict and on which they comment finds expression in either explicit or implied allusions to the extra-diegetic aspects informing the narrative development. The perspectives expressed through characters' voices can thus be construed as significant comments intended to convey manifold views about real events, phenomena, or persons.

The analysed novels often allude to such specific elements of historical reality, as, for instance, the references to the nativist populist politician Enoch Powell, which supplement the plot events of some of the analysed novels (*Black Teacher, Middle England,* which include direct references to Powell, or *Small Island,* which refers to his 'legacy'). The comments on Powell's role in promoting a stark anti-migrant mythology provide a significant reference point in the critical analysis of such myths performed by this study. Several novels that engage with both historical periods pay special attention to Powell, as the rhetoric of the 'Rivers of Blood' speech seems to coagulate suggestively not only the migration related ethos of the decades following the war, but, through the 'legacy' (Earle, 2018; Sweney, 2018) it produced, represents an important source in the expansion of nativist attitudes in relation to the newer migrations of the twenty-first century.

References in several novels (*Middle England, Perfidious Albion, Night of the Party, We Come Apart*) to migration myths articulated by Powell and their reiteration in the context of Brexit by such political actors as Nigel Farage, Theresa May, or Boris Johnson may be construed as an interrogation of the repressed fear and self-image that have characterised British society throughout the entire period since the end of World War II until today. The critical examination of

such issues in the novels shows that, ultimately, the instrumentalisation of migration myths by nativist rhetoric has served populist actors in both historical contexts, obstructing a more realistic perception of Britain's position in a changing social and political world order. The "unexpected and unexplainable" (Walvin, 1984, 134) demise of the British Empire, as well as Britain's place in the European Union as 'just' an important member, have fuelled a sense of melancholia (P. Gilroy, 2005), which still affects many Britons in a high degree. Immigration has served in these contexts as a convenient explanation for the country's decline from world prominence, and nativist discourses have often promoted the mythology that the presence of migrants has allegedly weakened the nation and triggered its decline.

Besides, references to major historical events, such as the race riots of 1958, which represent the backdrop of *The Riot* and *Absolute Beginners*, or Brexit, which informs the plot of many novels dealing with the East European migration, such as *Perfidious Albion, Middle England, Night of the Party, Time of Lies. A Political Satire,* and *We Come Apart*, represent important fictional responses to a social reality confronted with acute problems of perception related to migration. The way the novels approach major topics that raise controversies in society, as is the case with migration myths, demonstrates that literature can play an important role in the social debate, since fiction texts stretch beyond reporting or/and dissecting such topics. The consistent negotiation of issues connected to migration that these novels perform can stimulate critical reflection, as well as provide a ground for imagining a cosmopolitan social imaginary, which can stimulate alternative societal developments.

Through a complex exploration of various events and phenomena related to migration, the analysed novels provide a diagnosis of the present, but, at the same time, connect it to a more optimistic vision of the future. In all texts, a depiction of an incremental societal progress towards cosmopolitanisation can be noticed throughout the historical period in focus, despite the constant persistence of nativist traces, such as anti-migrant myths. Therefore, besides depicting characters with a high potential to challenge the effects of such myths, many of these novels tell stories about the emergence of a cosmopolitan society in Britain that take the form of counter-myths, which intend to challenge and replace the nativist anti-migrant mythology. The incorporation of counter-myths in the texts has the effect to galvanise the discussion about the interaction between natives and migrants, providing opportunities for reflection on and subversion of those nativist discourses which intend to deploy anti-migrant myths as means of closure in the representation of migration and migrants.

One of the most common counter-myths encountered in these novels refers to a foundational myth that promotes an image of Britain as a society in transformation, which implies an integration of immigrants that goes beyond their mere acceptance as a driver for economic development or as isolated peripheral groups. Such myths promote a vision of Britain as an emerging diverse, cosmopolitan community, whose members' identity is re-configured through cultural exchange and, moreover, by a mutual acceptance of differences and a wish to live together in conviviality. A conclusion that can be drawn is that many of the novels incorporate suggestive tropes that contribute to the construction of a cosmopolitan community myth, which challenges nativist views about the nation as a perennial cultural, ethnical, and political community. In *Small Island,* the birth of Queenie's mixed-race baby represents a powerful metaphor that signifies Britain's future transformation, acting as a foundational myth of a community that, in the time when the story is set, was inevitably becoming multicultural through the incorporation of Commonwealth immigrants. Levy's choice to represent the 'birth' of a new nation through the symbol a mixed-race baby is not isolated in the literature of that period; Zadie Smith in *White Teeth* (2000) and Maggie Gee in *The White Family* (2002) choose to end the stories of their novels in similar manner, as in both cases a new-born baby symbolises hope for a harmonious cohabitation of native British and immigrants from different parts of the world in a racial environment that is coloured less in blacks and whites and more in myriad shades of grey.

The three above-mentioned novels provide examples of alternative counter-myths that challenge a series of anti-migrant myths related to community (trans)formation. The stories these novels tell imply retrospective re-evaluations of processes that unfolded in different historical moments[37], thus providing for readers a reminder rather than a prefiguration about Britain's cosmopolitan character. Nevertheless, the examination of novels published almost simultaneously with the events they address suggests that Britain's cosmopolitanisation could already be predicted in the early 1960s. Ian MacInnes' *Absolute Beginners* represents an eloquent example in this sense, as the novel's final scene can be read as a foreshadowing of the direction in which British society will develop in the following decades. The fact that the protagonist, an emblematic representative of the post-war generation who decides to remain in his native country and become involved in facilitating immigrants' integration, reinforces the power of the myth about the establishment of a new, cosmopolitan community. A laughter and a collective embrace between the protagonist and newly arrived immigrants, which is the image on which the novel ends, signifies unity and solidarity

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[37] The story of *White Teeth* is set in the mid-1970s and that of *The White Family* in the late 1990s.

within an emerging heterotopic community that bears the positive marks of diversity and acceptance.

The comparative analysis of novels dealing with the Windrush migration and the migration from Eastern Europe, respectively, reveals a common concern for promoting a mythology that intends to represent Britain within a cosmopolitan frame. However, if the first category of novels insists on constructing an image of a multicultural Britain placed at the centre of the former empire, the second category of novels re-assesses Britain's place in the contemporary international arena, insisting on the importance of its position within the European Union. The positive contribution of East European immigrants in Britain, as depicted in *The Road Home, Night of the Party,* or *We Come Apart,* but also the presence of British emigrants in EU countries, as in the case of the Trotters in *Middle England*, offer an image of the importance of cosmopolitan conviviality and co-operation between nations in the context of contemporary politics, in which nativist and sovereigntist movements tend not just to destabilise international collaboration but also generate internal polarisation.

If Brexit shattered many hopes and expectations about a further positive development of cosmopolitanism in Britain, the analysed novels are a reminder that the struggle for building a future marked by solidarity represents a constant duty for all Britons, irrespective of their views about the topics that triggered such an unfortunate division of the country. The "unknowable future" (Coe, 2018, 421), Johnathan Coe seems to suggest, ought to be marked by reconciliation in similar ways as Ian and Sophie managed to work out their differences and who, through the birth of "their beautiful Brexit baby" (421), provide a symbolic example of optimism and hope about Britain's future. It is through the employment of such tropes that many of the novels intend to convey a message of reconciliation between Britons with nativist views and those sharing a cosmopolitan vision about society, but also to foreground the advantage of openness towards the world in opposition to nationalistic parochialism.

The exploration of a wide corpus identified a panoply of migrations myths that are reiterated in different social contexts and historical moments marked by the common denominator of increased migration. Starting from this observation, one of the findings of this study refers to developing a typological model for the classification of migration myths that recurrently (re)emerged in Britain in contemporary history. This model may serve as a tool to provide structure and clarity for similar studies. I therefore expect that the premises established by this study to represent the groundwork for further and more exhaustive explorations of this topic, since the subject of migration myths in literature has yet to be explored.

The findings of this thesis can inspire studies on novels dealing with migrations to Britain from other periods or cultural contexts, in which similar mythical patterns of relating to migration and immigrants may be identified. Many such novels treat literary images related to migration in their own individual way, but the model of analysis developed by this study can help in distilling prominent issues informing representations of any encounter between natives and immigrants. A very brief list novels that may serve as potential sources for such research includes works dealing with migration from China (for instance Xiaolu Gou's *A Concise Chinese-English Dictionary for Lovers* [Guo, 2008])*,* from African countries (Maggie Gee's *The White Family* [Gee, 2002] or Simi Bedford's *Yoruba Girl Dancing* [Bedford, 1994]), or from the Indian subcontinent (Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* [Kureishi, 1991]*,* Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* [Ali, 2003]*,* Nadeem Aslam's *Maps for Lost Lovers* [Aslam, 2004], Gautam Malkani's *Londonstani* [Malkani, 2007], or Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* [2017]), to mention only a few from a wide collection.

The model of investigation in this dissertation could also be extended along similar lines in the analysis of migration texts that involve a more prominent religious component. Such aspects can be comprehensively foregrounded in studies that feature stories about migrants who have different religions than Christianity, for instance Muslim immigrants. Novels such as *Exit West* and *Brick Lane* may provide substantial material for analysing myths that allege a connection between Islam and radical political ideologies and terrorist activities. It would be equally interesting to use this present study as an outset for more empirical, reader-focused research that explores such questions as how novels that challenge migration mythologies contribute to the transformation of attitudes, behaviour, and outlook of native groups who interact with immigrants in societies informed by immigration.

It can be anticipated that after Brexit and its not so successful implementation, migration myths will persist in the British social imaginary and migrants will continue to be reified as scaremongers and scapegoats. Some of the consequences can clearly be noticed at the time when the conclusion of this study is written, as in the attempt to deter further migrants to cross the English Channel, the British Government is working on implementing a project to deport asylum seekers to Rwanda, where they are to submit their asylum applications (BBC, 2022, n. pag.). Consequently, literary responses to such phenomena should also be expected to emerge. The model of analysis used in this thesis can therefore be used in the examination of forthcoming literary productions that challenge such revisionist attempts, which claim a return to a condition of ethnic purity characteristic to a mythicized past.

Overall, this thesis, through the analysis it performs and through the paths it opens for further research, intends to suggest that literature, and cultural practices in general, can represent valuable resources in the study of migration, since they provide viable referential frameworks that can facilitate a critical approach to factual events and personal experiences in the extra-textual reality. The integration of concepts and methods from social sciences and literary studies can represent a productive way to approach both the aesthetic and thematic elements of migration novels and thus facilitate a more comprehensive understanding of certain aspects of such a complex phenomenon as migration.

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