Bodies in Spaces: In/visible Boundaries in Zadie Smith's *NW*

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Tämän pro gradu -tutkielman tarkoituksena on analysoida kuinka Zadie Smith paljastaa ja haastaa yhteiskunnan näkymättömiä rajoja nykypäivän Lontoossa jälkikolonialistisessa romaanissaan *NW* (suom. *Risteymiä*). Tutkielmassani analysoin Smithin romaania käyttäen hyväksi kehollisuuden, sosiaalisen tilan ja identiteetin käsitteitä. Tavoitteenani on näyttää, että Smithin hahmot kohtaavat elämässään yhteiskunnallisissa rakenteissa ja sosiaalisessa ympäristössä piileviä näkymättömiä esteitä, jotka pohjautuvat muun muassa rasismiin, seksismiin ja luokka-eroihin. Lisäksi argumentoin, että näitä esteitä ja epätasa-arvoisia rakenteita voidaan myös vastustaa kehollisuuteen, sosiaaliseen tilaan ja identiteettiin liittyvillä keinoilla.

Romaani on julkaistu alun perin vuonna 2012, ja se sijoittuu fiktiiviselle Caldwellin alueelle Kilburnissa luoteis-Lontoossa. Romaanin keskeiset hahmot ovat syntyneet ja kasvaneet Caldwellissa, mutta heidän vanhempansa ovat tulleet Lontooseen entisistä siirtomaista kuten Jamaikalta ja Irlannista. Romaani on jaettu osiin, ja kerronnan näkökulma vaihtelee eri hahmojen kesken. Romaanin fokus on kuitenkin koko ajan vahvasti luoteis-Lontoossa, ja se onkin merkittävässä osassa tarinassa.

Käytän tutkimukseni teoreettisena kehyksenä tutkimuksessani sekä jälkikolonialistista teoriaa että tilallisuuden teoriaa. Olen käsitellyt kehoa yhtenä tilan ilmenemismuotona, ja siihen liittyen olen käyttänyt analysoinnin työkaluina esimerkiksi Nirmal Puwarin (2004) kehoihin liittyviä käsitteitä. Lontoon kaupunkitilan kuvausta olen analysoinut esimerkiksi Masseyn (2007) sekä McLeodin (2004) teosten pohjalta. Identiteettiä käsittelevässä osiossa olen hyödyntänyt muun muassa Hallin (1996) ja Barkerin (2003) tutkimuksia.

Tutkielmassani totean että Smithin hahmot kohtaavat elämässään esteitä, jotka johtuvat siitä, että heidän kehonsa ovat ”merkittyjä” joko heidän ihonvärinsä tai sukupuolensa tai molempien perusteella. Kutsun näitä esteitä ja rajoituksia näkymättömiksi, koska ne eivät välttämättä ole avoimesti tiedostettuja, eivätkä kosketa ihmisiä jotka eivät ole samalla tavalla merkittyjä. Kehollisuuden lisäksi myös Lontoon eri alueet ovat epätasa-arvoisissa asemissa toisiinsa nähden, ja myös hahmojen synnyinalueilla ja taustalla on vaikutuksensa niihin mahdollisuuksiin ja haasteisiin, joita he kohtaavat. Lisäksi totean että nämä tekijät ovat myös mukana vaikuttamassa hahmojen identiteettien rakentumiseen. Kehoja, kaupunkitilaa ja identiteettejä voidaan kuitenkin käyttää myös epätasa-arvojen vastustamiseen. Epätasa-arvoiset yhteiskunnalliset rakenteet ovat jäykähköjä eivätkä pysty kokonaan rajoittamaan hahmojen kokemuksia kehoistaan, asuinalueistaan ja omasta itsestään.

Avainsanat: Zadie Smith, kehollisuus, tila, identiteetti, jälkikolonialismi, Lontoo, kaupunki

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1. Introduction

NW is the fifth novel of the British author Zadie Smith, and it was first published in 2012. The novel takes place in Kilburn, North-West London, in a fictional inner city area of Caldwell, and tells the story of four people who were born there. The four main characters are Keisha (who later changes her name to Natalie), her friend Leah, and Nathan, who attended the same school as them, and Felix, who lives in the same area but is older than the other three characters and does not actually know them. The school, Brayton, is described in the novel by Leah as "a thousand-kid mad house". (*NW* 2013, 64) Keisha's/Natalie's parents have come to Britain from Jamaica, and Leah's from Ireland. They are all from working-class backgrounds, and this, together with Keisha/Natalie, Nathan and Felix being black, affects their lives and how they experience the social spaces of London. The story follows their lives through school and childhood to their mid-thirties, focusing mainly on Keisha/Natalie and Leah, and their friendship and choices at different stages of their lives. The novel is divided into different parts where focalisation changes from one character to another. All the different storylines culminate in the same weekend of the annual Notting Hill Carnival, when Felix is murdered in a random act of street violence.

Smith draws our attention to how questions of space and identity are intertwined: London is represented as a city having both visible and invisible boundaries, and this relates to it still being very much a white and male space where both women and non-white bodies of mixed ethnic and racial origin are not welcome, or if they are, there are restrictions. This is well exemplified by the following passage in the novel, where Keisha/Natalie is discussing her career in law with a senior colleague, who, like Keisha/Natalie, is also a black woman. She gives the following advice to Keisha/Natalie:

> 'Then I realized the following: when some floppy haired chap from Surrey stands before these judges, all his passionate arguments read as "pure advocacy". He and the judge recognize each other. They are understood by each other. Very like went to the same school. But Whaley's passion, or mine, or yours, reads as "aggression". To the judge. This is his house and you are an interloper within it. And let me tell you, with a woman it's worse: "aggressive hysteria". The first lesson is: turn yourself down. One notch.

> Two. Because this is not neutral.' She passed a hand over her neat frame from her head to her lap, like a scanner. 'This is never neutral'. (*NW* 2013, 242-243)

I will examine how Zadie Smith reveals and challenges the invisible boundaries present in contemporary London as a social space in *NW*. I will focus on the (in)visible social inequalities and racism in today's London that Smith is depicting, in particular the invisible boundaries that the characters face as non-white and/or non-male members of society, and what are the consequences of crossing those boundaries. As my theoretical framework I will be using spatial theory, or more precisely, postcolonial spatial theory. I will focus on the concepts of bodies, social spaces of London, and identities. These are all present in the quotation above: because Keisha/Natalie inhabits a black, female body, she is seen as "an interloper" in the white male space of the courthouse. This, then, leads to her having to "turn herself down", modify her behaviour in ways that would not be expected from her white male colleagues. These expectations and prejudices are not officially acknowledged, but as Smith shows, they are nevertheless present. This is why I am analysing invisible boundaries in this thesis.

I will thus explore issues concerning the inclusion and exclusion of bodies in spaces, for example, who is "allowed" to belong to the public spaces of London, and what is expected from people in order to be accepted and included. These are, amongst other things, issues of power: those who have unlimited access to spaces can have power not only over themselves but over other people as well. The less freedom a person has, and the more excluded they are, the less power they have in their own lives. This issue of power is why revealing the invisible boundaries is important. As Young states, "so the politics of invisibility involves not actual invisibility, but a refusal of those in power to see who or what is there. The task of the postcolonial is to make the invisible, in this sense, visible" (2012, 23). I also argue that these concepts of bodies, social spaces and identities can also be utilised in resisting these boundaries.

The significance of space and place as subjects of cultural and literary research has increased over the last few decades, partly resulting from the emergence of postmodernism, as well as postcolonial critical theories (Tally 2013, 3). Postcolonial studies are spatial by definition; as Teverson and Upstone (2011, 1) state, "space in all its forms" has been identified "as integral to the postcolonial experience". The body has risen to theoretical focus during the recent decades, in addition to having also become a more prominent centre of attention in other areas than academic study (McDowell 1999, 36). I will analyse the characters of the novel as occupying/inhabiting spaces at the intersection of race, class and gender, as those three aspects are intertwined and cannot really be considered separate from each other. As Spain (1992, 235) notes, "…people do not live three lives, one as a man or woman, one as black or nonblack, and one as upper or lower class."

I analyse *NW* as a postcolonial novel, and London as a postcolonial city in this thesis. I have several reasons for doing this. I discuss the London of *NW* as a postcolonial city because its history as the imperial centre still affects the present day society. Furthermore, when the characters attempt to resist the invisible oppressive structures in *NW*, they do so by means of fluidity (for example, fluid identities, fluidity of spaces, et cetera). Upstone (2009) has discussed this phenomenon in her work on postcolonial spaces. I will elaborate on this later in my analysis, but to clarify, by fluidity I refer to the fluidity of real life experiences, actions and identities that cannot be wholly controlled by strict colonial ordering. John McLeod, who has written on the subject of postcolonial London, notes that London "occupies a particularly significant place in the evolution of postcolonial and oppositional thought and action, and has long been an important site of creativity and conflict for those from countries with history of colonialism" (2004, 6). *NW* is a novel about London, a specific experience of London, and that experience stems partly from the imperial past, in that it still affects how the city is constructed socially, and the power relations that are present there (McLeod 2004, 7). McLeod posits Smith in the continuum of writers of postcolonial London along with Ferdinand Dennis and Monica Ali (2004, 194). While Keisha/Natalie and Leah are born in London, their parents

are immigrants from the Caribbean and from Ireland respectively. McLeod notes that even though he discusses London as a postcolonial city, this does not mean that is comparable to the experience of the colonised areas. He (2004, 14) notes that there is a risk of "recentralizing the Western metropolis", if describing London as postcolonial shifts attention away from the areas that have been colonised. However, according to McLeod, it is not prudent to see the effects of colonialism solely as a unilateral influence and London as "solely the undifferentiated colonial 'centre' or immune from the consequences of Empire, its resistance and its decline" (2004, 14-15). As is mentioned several times in the novel, Leah, Keisha/Natalie and Felix are "born and bred" Londoners, but the effects of the colonial history are still to some extent present in their lives and in the city. One example of this can be seen in the division of different areas of the city. The characters of *NW,* who were born into immigrant families, all live in the same area of London, which is at one point described in the novel as follows: "their old estate, full of people from the colonies and the Russiany lot" (*NW* 2013, 79). Somehow, the "people from the colonies" tend to live centred around the same areas, and more often than not those areas are not peaceful, well-to-do areas, but rather like the tower houses of the council estate in Caldwell.

Another reason why I discuss *NW* as a postcolonial novel are the invisible boundaries that appear in it. Aldama has discussed Smith's first published novel, *White Teeth* (2000). Aldama treats *White Teeth* as a postcolonial novel, because it is concerned with experiences of "boundaries, crossings, transfers, dispersions, marginalizations, decks and holds, fields and jungles created by or related to colonialism." (Prince in Aldama 2009, 105) As a result, the characters inhabit "multitopical spaces", or fractured, overlapping spaces that their experiences and actions are affected by. The description above also fits *NW,* as well as my discussion on it, in that the invisible boundaries the characters face are usually remnants of the colonial past and London's history as the centre of the empire.

One of the central claims of this thesis is that social spaces are not neutral, but are instead affected by power dynamics that take place in them. Upstone (2009, 92) suggests that postcolonial authors aim to highlight the fact that urban spaces are experienced in a highly subjective manner. Spaces are not neutral or equal, but their constructions are based on different interests and power relations. The same can be applied to non-white, non-male bodies: Upstone also describes the colonised body as "increasingly narrowed, its meanings and possibilities reduced" (2009, 150). This phenomenon of narrowed meanings and possibilities is one of the key issues I will discuss in my analysis of *NW*. While the colonial era has been over for a long time, the attitudes and prejudices still affect people today, albeit in a less visible manner. According to Upstone (2009, 161) this is why "postcolonial novels … place the definition and control of bodies at the centre of their texts". These are relevant themes in *NW* as well, as the treatment of different bodies reveals issues of stereotyping and inequality.

I will now briefly outline the structure of this thesis. In section 2, I will discuss the theories I have applied in my analysis of the novel. This part will include three subsections, which will focus on the concepts of bodies, social spaces and identities, respectively. The analysis that constitutes section 3 of the thesis, will follow a similar structure. In section 4 I will conclude my findings. Along with other critics used in this thesis, I will also refer to Pérez Zapata (2014) and Slavin (2015) who have both analysed *NW*. Their texts concentrate on some of the same themes that I analyse in this thesis, namely identities and city spaces.

2. Bodies and identities in social spaces

In the following subsections, I will first discuss the concepts of racialised and gendered bodies and social space, and secondly, I will concentrate on the specific case of social space in postcolonial London. Thirdly, I will focus the concept of identity, in order to enable an analysis on the consequences of the characters of *NW* encountering and crossing invisible boundaries. My aim is to analyse how Smith depicts the power relations in the social spaces of contemporary London, and their effect on the people inhabiting those spaces. In order to do this, I will discuss concepts such as race, class and gender, since they are among the things that are used as a basis of the divisions of social spaces in Britain.

2.1. Bodies out of place

In this section I will discuss the concept of "body" as a theoretical tool in spatial and postcolonial studies. My aim is to examine bodies and boundaries in *NW,* and therefore I will in this subsection discuss the construction of black and white bodies and the idea of bodies 'out of place', i.e. bodies that have crossed invisible boundaries that exist in today's western society, and have in the process rendered those boundaries visible. Once the implicit or latent social boundaries are exposed, it is easier to challenge them.

The reason I have chosen body as a focus of my discussion is that it is, as McDowell states, "the most immediate place" (1999, 34). A body is the physical entity with which we exist and interact in social spaces; therefore it is also involved in social processes and the formations of power dynamics. McDowell further notes that "[l]ike ideas about gender, ideas about place, boundaries and membership are social constructs." (ibid., 31) These "social constructs" shape the way different people live their lives, and the things that they are or are not able to do in their lives. By definition of being "social", these ideas are not constructed in a neutral context, but are shaped by the surrounding systems of power relations and common values. This is why studying bodies and social spaces is

useful within the postcolonial framework. In *NW*, we are able to see that the characters are not treated (nor do they necessarily treat others) in a neutral and unprejudiced way. Their physical appearances as non-white and/or non-male individuals affect the way they are perceived. So too does the fact that they come from a poor part of London, where a significant portion of the population come from former colonies (such as the West Indies, African countries, and Ireland). This is one of the reasons why I am analysing *NW* as a postcolonial novel, and I will elaborate on this in the following subsection of my theory chapter.

Sara Upstone discusses spatial politics in postcolonial literature and argues that "postcolonial texts aim to magically reconfigure the body's significance in a way that marks the ultimate reduction of spatial scales, as the site of greatest colonisation becomes a resource facilitating the most powerful statements of resistance" (2009, 156). It is this idea of the body as both the place of oppression and resistance that interests me in the context of this thesis. In addition to discussing the invisible boundaries that the characters face in society, I also argue that they can resist those boundaries and the oppression they encounter with methods involving the body (as well as the social spaces of the city, and the concept of identity). The reason why I have chosen to discuss social spaces in *NW* can be exemplified with the following quote from McDowell (1999, 4): "it is social-spatial practises that define places and these practises result in overlapping and intersecting places with multiple and changing boundaries, constituted and maintained by social relations of power and exclusion." Thus, through examining the body and the processes of exclusion and inclusion it is possible to reveal and question the legacy and remains of British colonial thought.

In her study *Space Invaders: Race, Gender and Bodies Out of Place* (2004), Nirmal Puwar analyses the concept of cultural diversity at length, from the point of view of non-white/non-male bodies in spaces that have traditionally been perceived as belonging to white men (either consciously or, perhaps more recently, in a more latent manner). The spaces I am referring to are those in the professional and/or public world, as opposed to domestic spaces. On one hand, Puwar

draws attention to the fact how achieving diversity and equality is more complicated than simply having more people from different ethnicities in positions of power: "[t]he presence of women or 'black' bodies in the upper layers of institutions should not be taken as a straightforward sign that organisational cultures and structures are drastically changing." (ibid., 32) On the other hand, she (ibid.,1) discusses the moment that those bodies which do not adhere to the "somatic norm" enter the abovementioned spaces, because she sees that moment as revealing a "paradox", in the sense that it serves to deconstruct boundaries and also signifies "a change in the status quo". Puwar especially concentrates on contemporary Britain, which makes her work particularly useful for my thesis.

Puwar discusses the invisible boundaries and strategies through which non-white/non-male bodies are excluded from positions of power, or included with restrictions and specific expectations. I will discuss these strategies further later in this section. Some of these restrictions relate to the visibility of bodies. She states that the "universal body" is invisible, because it "lacks" the markers of gender and race (as it is white and male), thus rendering those bodies that represent the other in either one or both of those markers, highly visible: "It [the universal body] is a 'privileged position' that is 'reserved' for those who are not bedraggled by the humble shackles of nature, emotion and, in effect, the bodily, allowing them to escape into the higher realms of rationality and mind" (ibid., 57). The universal white male body is seen to represent culture and thought, and other bodies are connected to nature and emotion. In other words, they are viewed as less rational than the universal body. "Male" is, of course, a gender just like "female", but when Puwar talks about the universal body, she means that "male" is seen as default, hence it is universal and invisible, whereas "female" is seen as an exception to the norm. The same applies to whiteness: the universal body is assumed to be white, and to be marked as something other than white is also seen as an exception.

In relation to bodies being visible or invisible, Puwar (ibid., 57) writes about processes, or "social dynamics", that those bodies which do not comply with the somatic norm are subjected to. Puwar especially concentrates on the professional world. I will discuss three of these processes here

since they can be seen taking place in the social sphere in *NW* as well, as I will further demonstrate in the analysis section of this thesis. The processes are as follows: the burden of doubt, super-surveillance and the burden of representation. Firstly, the burden of doubt occurs when a woman or a non-white person has to prove themselves capable of performing a task, in a way that would not be necessary for someone inhabiting "the universal body": "Although they endure all the trials and tribulations involved in becoming a professional, they are still not automatically assumed to have the required competencies." (ibid., 59) They are not entirely trusted to be able to perform a task, since they are not included in the concept of the rational universal body. Secondly, super-surveillance refers to increased attention to the actions and opinions of "space invaders". They are under "super-surveillance", because they are seen as a potential liability or even a threat. Thus, as Puwar claims: "Not only do these bodies that are out of place have to work harder to convince people that they are capable, but they also almost have to be crystal-clear perfect in their job performances, as any imperfections are easily picked up and amplified" (ibid., 61). Thirdly, the burden of representation means that a person belonging to a minority has additional pressure to perform well, as they are seen to represent that particular minority as a whole (ibid., 62).

Puwar further states that a "denial of the body" is part of the masculine ideal, whereas women have been determined by their physical existence (ibid., 16). She states that "the whole basis of an identity which had relied on a border is placed at stake when the boundaries do not obey the slicing of mind/body, man/woman. With the body coded as female per se, women's bodies represent foreign matter that threatens to contaminate the realm of serene, clean thought." (ibid., 17) According to Puwar, those boundaries have been the justification of the male ideal, and crossing them, and thus making them visible, renders the ideal less powerful. McDowell describes the importance of bodily differences (such as race and gender) for those who are included in positions of power:

> Bodily distinctions are crucially important in the production of inferiority as dominated groups are defined as nothing but their bodies, and seen as imprisoned in an undesirable body, whereas the dominant groups occupy an unmarked neutral, universal and disembodied position, which is white and masculine by default. (1999, 48)

I will now briefly discuss the concept of whiteness, in order to elaborate on the idea of the universal body that Puwar analyses. Critics such as Dyer and Lopez have studied whiteness. The universal nature of white bodies makes their whiteness invisible and non-racial, as Dyer (1997, 1) notes: "Other people are raced, we are just people." White people in the West are seen as representing people in general, non-white people are seen to represent their race. (ibid., 14) This is connected to power dynamics of a given society, as it is an extremely powerful position to be able to define not just oneself but other people, too. (ibid., 2)

Lopez (2005, 1) argues that even though the colonial era is over, "the cultural residues of whiteness linger in the postcolonial world as an ideal, often latently, sometimes not." Being white is still associated with status or power or other desirable qualities, as opposed to non-white which sometimes has negative connotations (ibid., 2). Lopez further states: "[t]he idea of whiteness as a cultural aesthetic norm combines with the idea of whiteness as a desirable and even necessary trait for colonized subjects who wish to achieve class mobility and financial success in a colonized (or formerly colonized) society" (ibid., 17). Lopez talks about colonised or formerly colonised societies here, but in my opinion, this can be extended to involve all societies that have been affected by colonialism and postcolonialism, such as Great Britain (I will concentrate on the postcolonial aspects of London further in the following subsection). When power is linked to being white and male, if a non-white/non-male person is to achieve equal power or position, they are required to "suppress his or her own cultural practices and beliefs and learn to live 'like a white man.'" (ibid., 18) An abstract and vague idea of "living like a white man" is then seen as something better and preferable to other methods of existing, something to strive for at the expense of one's own identity. However, when a body possesses markings of race or gender, it is difficult to be seen as a fully individual person separate from representing said race/gender:

> More strikingly, by establishing a putative absence of racial marking, whiteness establishes itself as a pure absence, a lack against which any positive mark of identity appears as a contingency. Absolute absence equals a vision of self whose performance

> and agency is unmarked – and unimpaired – by any trace that would mark that identity as situated – and hence limited – by gender, sexuality, class, etc. (Trimm 2005, 247)

Paul Gilroy calls for rejecting the binary oppositions that come with the concept of "race" (2000, 51). Gilroy and Dyer both argue on the same problematics of race, but their approaches differ: Dyer wants "white" to be seen as a visible race, as opposed to the universal human, whereas Gilroy is calling for the removal of such divisions alltogether. (Lopez 2005, 2)

2.2. Social Spaces of London

In this section I will examine contemporary London as a postcolonial, urban space. I will first discuss why I have chosen to treat London as a postcolonial space in my thesis, before moving on to briefly consider the aspect of class divisions in London, as the invisible boundaries I am analysing in *NW* work in the intersection of race, gender and class. Chris Barker (2003, 373) discusses urban spaces and argues that "space and place are cultural constructions … matters of the social relations of class, gender, ethnicity, etc". He notes that the city cannot be seen as one coherent entity, but as several different representations of a city, "cities rather than the city" (ibid.). This type of complexity is present in *NW* as well, since the novel is divided into separate sections, where the view of London changes as the focalisation does.

Contemporary London can be described as a postcolonial space, or said to contain postcolonial spaces, in that there are various diasporic and non-white communities creating those spaces. Further, different areas of London (and Britain) are not all equal with each other, and it is the minimum wage labour force of the poorer areas that enables the accumulation of financial power in areas like the City of London. This inequality between the spaces of London, and their different perceptions, are key themes in *NW* as well. McLeod discusses London as a postcolonial space, in that London is the centre of the former empire, and is not separate from it, as the colonial period affected both the centre and the peripheries. (2004, 5-6) There is a two-way influence between the coloniser

and the colonised, and McLeod aims to shed light on this: "[i]n speaking of postcolonial London, then, I am in part attempting to make visible a number of contexts resulting from colonialism and its legacy, which have contributed to the social and cultural fortunes of London since the end of the Second World War". (ibid., 7) My reasons for viewing London in this context as a postcolonial city are similar to those of McLeod; for example, the financial status and power of London is partly due to the colonial legacy. In addition to this, London where the characters of *NW* live, is the result of Thatcher's time, when the colonial history was overlooked and Victorian values emphasised, as indicated by critics like Sebastian Groes, thus ignoring the difficulties faced by the people living in the poorer areas of London (Groes 2011, 235). Further, spatially speaking, London is the centre of the former empire, but there are also peripheries within that centre, like the fictional council estate Caldwell in Smith's novel. These peripheries can be argued to be subaltern areas when contrasted to, for example, the financial centre of London, the City. These areas have been formed into peripheries through divisions based on class, intertwined with race. Smith has created the fictional council estate of Caldwell, where most of the population is poor and/or come from the former colonies.

I will now briefly review the historical context of Smith's novel. The Nationality Act of 1948 confirmed that people living in the Commonwealth countries were British subjects, and as such had a right to enter and live in Britain. An extensive migration from the West Indies to Britain began at that time. According to Murdoch (2007, 577), the following interaction between migrant and host cultures caused a "restructuring of identity and community" for both parties. Dawson discusses the history of racism in the 20th century Britain, and describes the current situation in Britain as follows: "Despite the gradual implementation of antiracist, multicultural state policy, Britain has retained structures of racial inequality and the popular authoritarian ideologies that legitimated them throughout the last half-century." This has been enabled through offering an essentialist idea of a British identity that is exclusive and racialised (Dawson 2007, 25-26). Such inequalities and prejudices cause tension and conflict in *NW*, and since the novel stresses conflicts

related to class, profession, ethnic identity and power, I will especially focus on these issues here. According to Dawson (ibid., 8), 6 % of the British population are members of "ethnic minorities". Dawson further states that the term "ethnic minority" is not accurate, as many of these people are born in Britain, and they often live in urban areas, in specific boroughs, hence forming an area-specific majority, rather than minority (ibid.) Dawson (ibid., 25) also argues that "British authorities and opinion-makers have a long tradition of downplaying racial conflict and inequalities while simultaneously pursuing policies that foster such divisive forces." One example of such politics is the administration of Margaret Thatcher, which I will discuss further later on in this subsection.

Upstone (2009, 92) suggests that postcolonial authors aim to highlight the fact that urban spaces are experienced in a highly subjective manner. Further, spaces are not neutral or equal, but their constructions are based on different interests and power relations. As Upstone notes, postcolonial authors seek to question and challenge "the colonial ordering" of city spaces, much like Smith is doing by revealing the invisible boundaries in London in *NW*. Like McLeod, Upstone (2009, 104) also discusses the two-way influence between the coloniser and the colonised, and states that while a city like London can be oppressive, there are possibilities for subversion and resistance. Upstone mentions "displacement" as one strategy, "where the city gradually shifts out of focus in deference to its microstructures." In this way, emphasis is refocused on the smaller individual spaces instead of focusing on the city as a unified whole. For Upstone, the postcolonial literary city represents both the ideal utopian city and the reality. (2009, 92-93) There exists a possibility of a utopia where everybody is treated equally, but at the same time the postcolonial authors make visible the underlying power structures that prevent this.

One of the key issues in this thesis is the idea of representation, and here it means that by making the invisible visible, and challenging the latent structural inequalities, the authors highlight the postcolonial experience of the city space. McLeod (2004, 21) argues that "diasporic Londoners have taken control not only of the spaces in which they have found themselves but also of the agency

to make their representations about the city and their experiences". Again, Smith's main characters are born in London, and their parents have moved to Britain from former colonies in West Indies and Ireland. However, I argue that these ideas of agency and representation in the city space also apply to them.

McLeod discusses the social conflicts of contemporary London. He argues that "it would be wrong to conclude that London's postcolonial history generally proceeds happily from postwar exclusion and struggle to multicultural inclusion and millennial chic". (2004, 21) He goes on to list several acts of racial violence and unrest, including the murder of a young black man called Stephen Lawrence in 1993, which Smith has also included in *NW,* and which I will also address later in this thesis. McLeod also states that "postcolonial London has emerged in those locations often forgotten or neglected by most Londoners - derelict streets, neglected neighbourhoods, bomb-sites and ruins" (ibid., 190). According to him, London as a postcolonial space is not an idealised, multicultural haven free of conflicts. Neither is it a fixed, unchanging space, but rather a "perpetually restless, inevitably pluralized and endlessly transforming, the mix changes with each layer of history, each arrival, departure and settlement, modulating between pain and possibility, the cut and the curve" (ibid., 194). McLeod points out that spaces do not merely "contain" social problems, they are involved in their conception. Social tensions and inequalities are not created in a vacuum, but result from historical facts and geographical politics. (ibid., 127)

Sebastian Groes states that postmodern writers' (such as Salman Rushdie) handling of London as "city-as-text" and "text-as-city", where the urban space is something that can be interpreted, allowing to "linguistically unstitch the metropolis" and to rewrite it from a postcolonial perspective. Groes points that in order for this ambition to succeed, these texts must be tightly connected to "a very real sociocultural context". (2011, 15). However, when discussing Zadie Smith's first novel, *White Teeth*, Groes (221) argues that Smith is moving away from writing about London in this way,

and focusing more on the social realities and the materiality of the city. *NW* also focuses on these aspects of London.

City spaces are not unified coherent wholes, but instead changing and divided, as they are depicted in *NW* as well. Barker too discusses the divisions of city space in the following way:

> Representations of the spatial divisions of cities are symbolic fault lines of social relations by which people come to think about the world through the built environment. That is, the cultural representations and classification of city zones as, say, black or white, working class or middle class, safe or dangerous, business or residential, glamorous or squalid are concrete cultural abstractions through which the world is lived. (Barker 2003, 372)

This, according to Barker, leads to the notions of representation and power, in the sense that some representations of the city are seen as more important or valid than others. This is caused by the power dynamics and social relations in play, and is something that should be addressed when discussing the representations of cities (ibid.).

I will now move on to discuss the concept of "class" in connection to the social spaces of London. London is a place where class distinctions and differences in income and living standards vary greatly. Doreen Massey describes London as "the most unequal region on the nation", and states that the financial inequality is increasing. (2007, 8) London is an area where the poor and the rich live more or less side by side, as do the characters in *NW*. Further, according to Massey (2007, 66-67), housing costs are spiralling out of reach for everyone except the super-rich, and the privatisation of the housing market has rendered the remaining council estates to poor condition. The consequences of these phenomena have been drastic: "Moreover this pressure of housing costs feed through to housing conditions, to levels of homelessness and overcrowding, and to the stresses and strains that accompany these things" (ibid., 68). Massey further states that the costs of transport and childcare are increasing the difficulties for lower-class women in London to have a job outside the home. This generates a spatial trap, as London's distribution of wages and cost of living make a special kind of benefit trap. (ibid. 69)

McLeod (2004, 127-128) writes about demonstrations, rioting and "violent clashes" that took place in London in the 1970s and 1980's, in areas of the city that where associated with migration and diasporic peoples. These conflicts would often include the police fighting the young black residents of the areas. McLeod mentions situations like the Notting Hill Carnival celebrations of 1975 and 1976, and further rioting in the 1980's, in the same Carnival, and in places like Brixton, that witnessed riots in April 1981: "specific streets such as Railton Road in Brixton and All Saints Road in Notting Hill became contested spaces in the cognitive mapping of London as, from one perspective, centres of black criminality and lawlessness; or, from the other, political resistance and insurrection" (2004, 127-128). The social divisions deepened when certain places came to be associated with those types of conflict and disorder, overlooking the fact that those areas were the homes and communities of people that were often not able to enjoy the same privileges that others took for granted. As McLeod notes: "many texts take issue with the pejorative representations of the riots as the crazed and spontaneous actions of an unruly mob running out of control, and of the rioter as a delinquent, destructive and mindless criminal" (2004, 128). McLeod also states that politicians like Enoch Powell and Margaret Thatcher were key figures in the forming of "racialized definitions of British national identity" (2004, 129). Groes also discusses this, and describes the political atmosphere of Thatcher's regime in London as emphasising Victorian values and ignoring the imperial history, at the cost of those Londoners who were living less privileged lives. (2001, 235)

Class is also an important factor in the inequalities present in contemporary London. According to Gary Day (2001, 2) 'class' can be broadly defined as referring to "divisions in society", and I will use this definition here in the concept of social spaces in London. Day states that there was a belief in the 1960's that the class distinctions were vanishing. Due to the rise of mass culture people dressed, acted and consumed in a more similar manner than before. This made social commentators assume that that the old divisions were vanishing. However, studies were made which showed that the number of poor people had doubled in the 1950's. (Day 2001, 186) In the 1980's and 1990's, a

new term emerged in Britain and the US, that of the "under class". According to Day (2001, 187), this was due to "economic recession, de-industrialization, and cuts in welfare", which led to increase in poverty. The term is politically charged and was used by the political Right and Left, both to their own, different, purposes.

Day criticises the financial decisions of Margaret Thatcher's administration, as well the consequences of those decisions on the British public. Severe cut-backs were made, including the removal of benefits from those under 18, cuts to benefits for pensioners and pregnant women, etc. Jobseekers Allowance replaced former support systems for the unemployed, and could be withheld if the recipient turned down a job that was offered to them. Other support systems were replaced with loans, whose repaying rendered it more difficult to make ends meet. Day states that "[t]he combined effect of unemployment and welfare cuts was to impoverish a third of the British people" (2001, 190).

Groes also emphasises the importance of understanding the role of the financial world when discussing London: "London is a city whose very being is intertwined with the nation's and the world's economy, and this relationship can be felt in many different ways" (2001, 12). The historical relationship between the financial centre, and the peripheries that enable its existence, is complex. It is this Britain in which Smith's *NW* takes place, and the above mentioned facts serve to highlight the characters' situation in the novel. Most of the story takes place in the present day London, but the effects of the past are still visible.

Chris Barker (2003, 365) states that the urban change seen in the UK (as well as Australia and the US) was "driven by the agenda of the professional and managerial middle class and large corporate business". This has led to increased class distinctions, and "abandonment of an underclass to mass unemployment, drug trafficking, poverty and homelessness", also further deepening the area divisions within London as well as within the whole of Britain. Further, according to Gilroy (2000, 254), "the emergence of postmodern consumer culture" has caused the class

divisions within black communities to widen. Gilroy argues that this change has gone unnoticed by many.

> However, rather than accept the economic and social logic of this change, ethnic absolutism has joined with nostalgic nationalisms and argued "race" remains the primary mode of division in all contemporary circumstances, that a unitary black culture is still essentially intact, and that an identifiable pattern of bodily experiences and attributes can serve to connect blacks regardless of their wealth or their health, their gender, religion, location, or political and ideological habits. (2000, 254)

Day claims that the immediate interaction between classes has diminished in Britain: "the unemployed encounter the police, the social workers and the probation officers, a whole army of officials who act as a buffer between the top and the bottom of British Society" (2001, 191). McLeod (2004, 159) discusses the same phenomenon with regards to certain places being reserved for certain ethnicities. He states that non-white (more specifically, West Indian) people have restricted access to public spaces, such as administrative or financial spaces. In other words, there are invisible boundaries in place that affect only those who are marked by their bodies as non-white.

2.3. Identities and representation

In this subsection, I will focus on the concept of identity in connection to the postcolonial bodies and spaces which I talked about above. My argument is that there is a connection between the three concepts: the experiences the characters of the novel have in regards to their bodies or the social spaces of London are also involved in the process of identity formation and self-definition. Since my thesis mostly deals with issues of power relations and representation, I will mainly concentrate on social identities here. The issue of representation arises when the characters' definitions of themselves clash with how they are seen by other people or treated by institutions such as schools, work places, the police, et cetera. The prejudiced notions and racist stereotypes people encounter can affect their identities and self-identification.

Identity is now seen as something fluid and evolving. Hall states that identities are never fixed, and have of late become more and more fractured: "never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic , discourses, practises and positions … and are constantly in the process of change and transformation" (1996, 4). An identity is something fluid, something that is constantly changing and affected by the external things like the society, i.e. social space where one lives. Hall goes on to state that since identities are constructed within discourse, they are products of "specific historical and institutional sites within specific discursive formations and practises, by specific enunciative strategies. Moreover, they emerge within the play of specific modalities of power, and thus are more the product of the marking of difference and exclusion" (ibid.). This is why bodies and identities are part of the same dynamic. A body is "the most immediate place" as well as the site of the identity. When one operates as a member of the society, when they are included or excluded, to a certain extent that is a process that happens to, and because of, the body, and has an effect on the identity. Dawson (2007, 96) states that Hall's vision of identity as fluid and changing helped to undermine the exclusive, nationalistic ideas of citizenship and common identity of Margaret Thatcher's era. Barker, too, states: "the argument, known as *anti-essentialism*, is that identities are not things that exist; they have no essential or universal qualities. Rather, they are discursive constructions, the product of discourses or regulated ways of speaking about the world. In other words, identities are constituted, made rather than found, by representations, notably language" (2012, 11). Following this definition, it is evident that the social dynamics concerning bodies and social spaces of cities are also involved in this process. McDowell sees the body as the "most immediate place", a site with which identity can be associated with, and which affects and is affected by identity. (2012, 34) Barker makes a distinction between self-identity, meaning the "the conceptions we hold about ourselves and our emotional identification with those self-descriptions", and social identity, meaning how other people see us, and what they expect from us. (2012, 220) For the purposes of this thesis my focus will mainly be on the social aspect of identities, but I will briefly

discuss cultural and/or national identities in this subsection as well, in order to provide a more comprehensive view of the setting of *NW*.

The importance of an inclusive national identity is explained by Gilroy (98) as follows:

> We are constantly informed that to share an identity is to be bonded on the most fundamental levels: national, 'racial', ethnic, regional and local. Identity is always bounded and particular. It marks out the divisions and the subsets in our social lives and helps to define the boundaries between our uneven, local attempts to make sense of the world.

Like Hall and Dawson, Gilroy sees identity as fluid and changing: "The tensions around origin and essence that the diaspora brings into view allow us to perceive that identity should not be fossilized in keeping with the holy spirit of ethnic absolutism." Seeing identity as fluid allows a subverting of a notion of citizenship and nation built on conservative, exclusivist, even racist ideals of belonging. (Gilroy 2000, 252)

Above I also mentioned the idea of representation in connection to identities. Representation raises questions of inclusion and exclusion. As such, it is always implicated in questions of power (Barker 2012, 271). For example, Barker explains the case of racial discourse in post-war Britain. Immigration was seen as "a threat to the national culture", and thus immigrants as well as black culture were presented as something negative and unlawful: "hedonism, evasion of work, and the criminality of black culture became closely entwined motifs of British media racism". (ibid. 273) Hall (1996, 4) describes the relationship between identities and representation as follows:

> Though they seem to invoke an origin in a historical past with which they continue to correspond, actually identities are about questions of using the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being: not 'who we are' or 'where we came from' so much as what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves. Identities are therefore constituted within, not outside representation. (1996, 4)

Massey compares identities of people to those of places, and states that both can have multiple identities. She further states that such "such multiple identities can either be a source of richness or a source of conflict, or both". (1994, 153) This is also evident in *NW*, since the novel deals with multiple viewpoints and fluid and changing identities, and both the tensions and benefits that

result from them. Barker talks about the connection between the social spaces of cities and representation, arguing that people form their opinions and ideas spaces of the city based on how they are represented: “the cultural representation and classification of city zones as, say, black or white, working class or middle class, safe or dangerous, business or residential, glamorous or squalid, are concrete cultural abstractions through which the world is lived”. (2012, 422) He further states that it is necessary to acknowledge the “operations of power” that produce these representations, since they have an effect on how the spaces are perceived. (ibid.)

Power dynamics and a person’s social status can affect their possibilities in life. Grossberg (1996, 99) discusses subjectivity, representation and identity, and notes that a person’s subjectivity is influenced by their social positions, which enable or limit their possibilities and experiences: “although everyone exists within the strata of subjectivity, they are also located at particular positions, each of which enables and constraints the possibilities of experience, of representing those experiences and of legitimizing those representations. Thus, the question of identity is one of social power and its articulation to, its anchorage in, the body of the population itself”.

I also mentioned the idea of national identities. The reason for this is that racism is one of the issues Smith sheds light on in *NW*, and, according to Trimm (2005, 240), “race … acts as a supplement to national identity”. When differences related to for example class cause tensions that nationalism alone cannot resolve, racism is used to strengthen common nationalist identity. On the other hand, identity can also provide the tools to resist this. Nayar states that “being ‘black British’ is to resist incorporation into a British identity alone, and keeping alive one’s Caribbean or African cultural legacies. In effect, such a consciousness resists homogenization into a unitary national identity.” (2010, 176) Here we can see how the fluid nature of identities can be used to resist oppression stemming from racism or nationalism.

According to Homi K. Bhabha (54), “the translation of cultures, whether assimilative or agonistic, is a complex act that generates borderline affects and identifications, peculiar types of culture-sympathy and culture-clash ... These borderline negotiations of cultural difference often violate liberalism’s deep commitment to representing cultural diversity as plural choice”. Bhabha, like Puwar, questions the simplistic use of diversity as an easy solution that would fix the problems of racism and sexism without deeper understanding of the issues in question. Dawson (2007, 38) also criticises the handling of concepts such as multiculturalism and hybridity. It is precisely these questions that *NW* highlights. The characters in the novel are not flawless, they have their own prejudices and other issues that result from the experiences they have had, among other things. However, Smith’s focus is not on offering simple solutions or final answers to the issues the novel presents, but rather to make visible the social dynamics and processes that are taking place underneath the everyday experience of social spaces.

3. Making the invisible visible – Deconstructing Boundaries

In this section of the thesis, I will first analyse *NW* from the point of view of postcolonial bodies crossing invisible boundaries. Secondly, I will discuss the social spaces in London that those bodies inhabit, and the specific types of boundaries that exist in those spaces. Thirdly, and finally, I will examine the concept of identity in the novel, as well as the effects of the invisible boundaries on the identities of the characters.

3.1. Non-white/Non-male bodies crossing boundaries

> For what is body and instinctual is by definition dumb and inarticulate. As it does not (itself) signify, or signify coherently, it may be freely occupied scrutinized, analysed, resignified. This representation carries complete authority; the other cannot gainsay it. The body of the other can represent only its own physicality, its own strangeness. (Boehmer 1993, 270)

In this thesis, I discuss *NW* from the point of view of postcolonial bodies and space. The reason I have chosen to apply postcolonial theory is because there is a sense on exclusion and inclusion to spaces, which is partly based on differentiation of bodies, i.e. non-white/non-male bodies. This idea in and of itself might not necessitate a postcolonial reading, but as I am studying bodies and spaces in the specific context of multicultural London, I am of the opinion that the colonial past and the history of London as the centre of the former empire should not be ignored here. The characters have all born and been raised in Caldwell, a fictional part of North-West London, which is described as a poor, rough neighbourhood. The common denominator in their families, other than living in Caldwell, is they come from formerly colonised countries. As can be seen in the novel, there are challenges the characters face, because the spaces of London are not neutral. The challenges partly stem from the characters having grown up in specific areas of the city. When we contrast this to the descriptions of more well-to-do areas of London, as well as descriptions of the more "universal" bodies that appear in the novel, there is a visible connection between the invisible, unspoken boundaries that exist in London and the British society today. Furthermore, since the colonial past was a key factor in the

formation of the wealth and political might of the British Empire, in my opinion that past should be taken into consideration in examining the lives stemming from immigrant backgrounds from the former colonies. In addition to this, there is a certain kind of fluidity present in the identities of the characters, which I will discuss in more detail in the section 3.3 of this thesis. I mention it here, however, because this fluidity is another aspect to why I consider *NW* as a postcolonial novel. There is fluidity in how the characters interact with others in different situations, and a fluidity to their identities, and this type of fluidity can, according to Upstone (2009, 147), be used as a resistance against oppressive, outside definitions of what people should be or how they should act, because of their race or gender or other bodily or physical aspects. The themes I discuss in *NW*, such as inclusion and exclusion of different types of bodies, are such that a postcolonial reading of the novel helps to highlight and contextualise them.

NW is divided into different sections where the focalisation shifts between the main characters, along with the narrative style. The first part is titled "Visitation", and it focuses on Leah Hanwell. The second part, "Guest", is narrated from the point of view of Felix, who is not known to the other characters, though they all come from the same are in London. The third part, "Host", moves on to Keisha/Natalie, and we then stay with her focalisation until the end of the novel, including the section titled "Crossing" where we are told Nathan's story, through his conversation with Keisha/Natalie. The last section, again titled "Visitation", is where the denouement of these different stories takes place and is told from Keisha/Natalie's point of view. This use of changing focalisation enables the reader to see not only how the characters' experiences of the same events differ from each other, but also, as they encounter the invisible boundaries or latent prejudices they face because their race and/or gender, those boundaries are revealed and their legitimacy is questioned.

None of the main characters in *NW* possess what Nirmal Puwar calls the universal body, in other words, none of them are white men. Leah is a white woman from an Irish immigrant background. Keisha/Natalie, Felix and Nathan are black, and all four are from working-class families.

Each of them are also "born and bred" Londoners, as is often repeated in the novel. However, their experience of London differs from that of Puwar's universal body. The fact that their gender, race and/or class is 'visible' draws attention to the invisible boundaries that they face that would not be so evident from the point of view of the universal body. They have to sometimes either negotiate their way in life, or alternatively settle for something less than they might have interest in or potential for. In addition to this, there are differences in the experiences of the main characters compared to each other, as they inhabit different spaces in terms of the intersectionality of race, class and gender. These three factors cannot really be studied as separate things, in that their impact is simultaneous and cognate. Both the gender and race of a person affect their lives at the same time. As Spain (1992, 235) states, "people do not live three lives, one as man or woman, one as black or nonblack, and on as upper or lower class. The three systems are connected in ways that affect daily activities".

Aldama has analysed Smith's debut novel *White Teeth* in terms of similar themes to my discussion on *NW*, namely postcolonial bodies. With regards to *White Teeth*, he states that there is a focus on the body in the novel: "how, in academic-speak, the gendered, sexualized, and racialized act and are acted upon in the world". (2009, 88) How bodies are seen in a social space is affected by a complex intermixture of factors like class, race, and gender. Aldama also states that there is a "heightened sense of living in outcast bodies" in *White Teeth*. To some extent, the same can be said about Smith's other novels, including *NW*. The characters experience restrictions in their lives specifically caused by their bodies being marked as something other than universal. I have chosen to call these restrictions "invisible boundaries", because they are not officially acknowledged and can be overlooked by those that do not have to concern themselves with them.

In the theory chapter of this thesis I discussed the processes, or "social dynamics", Puwar (2004, 58) described in *Space Invaders*. I will now analyse the interactions of bodies in social spaces in *NW* by using Puwar's method in order to examine how Smith makes the invisible boundaries visible. I will then move on to discuss how those boundaries are challenged, for example by using the

body as a site of resistance. My argument here is that bodies can be used as sites of resistance to oppression by revealing the invisible boundaries that affect the lives of the "othered" bodies, thus enabling one to challenge and subvert those boundaries. When the boundaries are made visible and acknowledged, their subversion is made possible.

To recapitulate, the processes Puwar discussed were as follows: the burden of doubt, the burden of representation, and super-surveillance. These dynamics affect the characters when the internalisation of the burden has caused them to worry about how they are seen or premeditate their actions beforehand, in a way they would not have to if their bodies were universal, or "invisible", and their actions were not judged in connection to their physical appearance. I will analyse these three dynamics here since they are most relevant in the case of *NW*.

One example of the burden of doubt occurs very early on in the novel, when Leah is having a discussion with her mother. The novel begins when an unexpected visitor knocks on Leah's and her husband's door asking for help. Leah recognises the woman as Shar, someone who used to go to the same school as Leah, Keisha/Natalie and Nathan. Later, when discussing the event with her mother, Pauline, Leah describes Shar as "subcontinental", to which Pauline responds: "Indian, you mean by that". (*NW* 2013, 17) Leah invites Shar in and gives her the money she says she needs for a taxi to a hospital to see her mother who has been taken in. As she leaves, Shar promises to pay Leah back. Later, when Leah is discussing the event with her mother Pauline, Pauline immediately tells Leah that Shar was lying and Leah is too naïve. Pauline states that Leah's husband Michel's "people" (i.e. people who come from Nigeria) cannot be fooled as easily as that. The narrator further describes Pauline's thought process (or Leah's idea of it) as follows:

> All of them are Nigerian, all of them, even if they are French, or Algerian, they are Nigerian, the whole of Africa being, for Pauline, essentially Nigeria, and the Nigerians wily, owning those things in Kilburn that once were Irish, and five of the nurses on her own team being Nigerian where once they were Irish, or at least Pauline judges them to be Nigerian, and they're perfectly fine as long as you keep an eye on them every minute. (*NW* 2013, 16-17)

There are several different issues present in the quote above, and in Pauline's reaction to Leah giving money to Shar. Firstly, there is an element of over-representation, or, using Puwar's terminology, a burden of representation. The nurses in Pauline's work, for Pauline, represent Nigeria, and Nigeria in turn represents the whole of Africa. Instead of Pauline regarding the nurses just as individuals, or representing the same profession as her, for example. If the nurses were to want to convince Pauline of their skills, they would have to perform exceedingly well and not make any mistakes in their work. The burden of super-surveillance is also present here. The nurses that Pauline judges to be Nigerian, are health care professionals who obviously have the required skills to be eligible for working as nurses in Britain. However, because they are marked different due to being non-white, Pauline feels that one has to "keep an eye on them every minute", meaning they quite literally are under super-surveillance, and have to prove themselves capable of doing work they have already been chosen to do. They have gone through the process of applying and receiving a job, and if Pauline did not regard them as Nigerians but as nurses, she would probably not feel the need to "keep an eye on them constantly". This is also where the burden of doubt appears, since Pauline questions the professional skills of the nurses because they are "Nigerian". That being said, Pauline herself is also an immigrant, from Ireland, and has lived in the same area as the people she is talking about, and that comparison can also be seen in the quote above, as Pauline feels that things that used to be Irish are now Nigerian. However, as Pauline, being white, lacks the physical markers of race we have discussed in this thesis so far, it is easier for her to overlook the fact that the "Nigerians" she meets also represent other things than "Nigeria". She also categorises people as "Nigerian" based on their looks, without really knowing anything about their nationality or ethnicity.

Later, when Leah and Michel are visiting Keisha/Natalie and Frank, she tells them about Shar, and what seems to have been Pauline's reaction to Shar wearing a headscarf: "'Not relevant? What do you mean? How could you tell me that whole story and not mention the headscarf?'" (*NW* 2013, 61) Although the speaker is not implicitly identified in the scene, it appears as Leah were

mimicking her mother's reaction. They all laugh about it at first, acknowledging the connotations that come with a woman wearing a certain type of headscarf, but later on in the novel when the incident is retold, Shar comes to be generally known among them as "the girl in the headscarf" (90), thus being recognised by that one culturally marked piece of clothing and the connotations that come with it, rather than by her name, which Leah has also told everyone. They connect Shar to her ethnic background, making her a representative of a much larger group of people, and associating her appearance and her wearing a headscarf with her conning Leah.

Another example of the burden of doubt occurs when Keisha/Natalie has finished her pupillage at law school and is looking for a tenancy to move forward on her career path. When she is at a tenancy meeting, she is asked whether she would be prepared to "represent someone from the BNP" (*NW* 2013, 245), meaning the British National Party, a far right political party. I argue that this is an example of the burden of doubt, because if Keisha/Natalie was not black, that question would not necessarily be made. In other words, if she wants the tenancy, she has to convince the interviewers that she is able to do her job despite being black, and perhaps opposing to BNP's political views.

Sometimes there is an excessive amount of attention towards the actions of a non-white/non-male person, compared to the attention someone possessing a "universal body" would get. This is, as discussed in the theory section and also mentioned earlier in this subsection, is what Puwar calls super-surveillance. Whereas the burden of doubt means that a person has to prove themselves capable of performing a task, super-surveillance means that the performance has to be perfect and flawless, because it is monitored closely and "the slightest mistake is likely to be noticed, even exaggerated, and then taken as evidence of authority being misplaced". (Puwar 2004, 61) As I mentioned earlier, the nurses at Pauline's work are one example of people being under super-surveillance, as Pauline states that they are perfectly fine "*as long as you keep an eye on them every minute*." (*NW* 2013, 17, emphasis mine)

Puwar connects the dynamic of super-surveillance to that of the burden of representation, when a non-white, non-male person has to concentrate on behaving in an accepted manner and fulfilling expectations because they feel the pressure of the super-surveillance they are under. For example, when Keisha/Natalie is young, she is very ambitious and concentrated on school work, in addition to being academically talented, and this is also expected from her by her family:

> and yet there was little space in the day for anything like ecstasy or abandon or even simple laziness, for whatever you did in life you would have to do it twice as well as they did it 'just to break even', a troubling belief held simultaneously by Keisha Blake's mother and her uncle Jeffrey, known to be 'gifted' but also 'beyond the pale'. (*NW* 2013, 184-185)

Keisha/Natalie is expected to do well in part to prove something to other people or justify things that other can take for granted. It is not enough that she does well, she has to do "twice as well" as white people, just to achieve the same amount of recognition that they receive for a smaller effort. There is a comparison in the above quote between Keisha/Natalie's religious and strict mother, Marcia, and her uncle, who is seen as being "beyond the pale", meaning that his actions are seen as unacceptable or frowned upon. This comparison between two very different characters highlights the fact that the burden of representation is a very real thing that is widely acknowledged by people as different as Keisha/Natalie's mother and uncle. Later, when Keisha/Natalie is older and is studying law, she goes to parties with her fellow students and adopts a more carefree attitude: "Were these really the people for whom the Blakes had always been on their best behaviour? On the tube, in a park, in a shop. Why? Marcia: 'To give them no excuse.'" (*NW* 2013, 214) Marcia feels that if they were to represent themselves in a negative light, prejudiced people would then have the excuse to judge them. As we can see here, there is a clear connection between the burden of representation and super-surveillance.

There are a few other instances of the burden of representation that I would like to mention here. For example, in Felix's part of the story, he visits his father who also lives in the area, and sees Phil, an older man who lives next door and has known Felix since he was a child. He is trying to lift something heavy and asks Felix for help. His choice of wording is revealing; "'Don't

just stand there looking like a "youth", Felix, like a ne'er-do-well YOUTH…'" (*NW* 2013, 112). It is clear from the situation that Phil is using irony. If Felix is not doing something useful and positive, his inaction could be interpreted as something inherently negative and/or suspicious. Later, Phil states that the boys of their neighbourhood are always called youth, unlike "the boys from the posh bit up by the park." (*NW* 2013, 114) Again, this is an instance where there is overlap between the issues of super-surveillance, and the burden of representation that arises from the pressure of constantly feeling watched and judged by others. Another example of the burden of representation occurs when Leah and her mother see a girl in Caldwell who appears to be Irish like them: "Whatever else is to be said of her, she is of unmistakable Irish descent. Short criminal forehead, widely set eyes. There is a special contempt Pauline reserves for the fallen members of her own tribe." (*NW* 2013, 79) Like Keisha's/Natalie's mother and uncle, Pauline also thinks that people that share her ethnic background should show particular attention to their behaviour. There can then be certain pressure from one's one ethnic group also.

I will now move on discuss how different connotations are ascribed to racialised and/or gendered bodies. Upstone (2009, 150) discusses how bodies that are marked as other by race or gender are assigned "narrowed meanings" by other people. This is somewhat similar to Puwar's views on universal bodies; if in possession of the universal body, a person is relatively free to be and act how they will, and be met with a reaction that more or less stems from that. But when there are narrowed meanings focused on someone based on their bodily appearance, there are certain expectations or connotations that come with that, and that person does not have the same kind of freedom to be defined as an individual, based on their actions. The universal body is just that, universal, all encompassing; this, as Upstone states, leaves the othered, racially marked body with a narrowed meaning. This phenomenon of narrowed meaning occurs several times in *NW*, especially with Keisha/Natalie and Felix, and also with Nathan. I will now discuss some examples.

One case of narrowed meaning occurs when Keisha/Natalie, who, when studying to become a barrister, is asked by her seniors to join them in a court room. At first she is excited and proud to be chosen, but as she enters the room, she quickly realises that there is an ulterior motive to her presence. Her team is defending a white male vicar who is being accused of murdering a woman, and when Keisha/Natalie sees the victim's family, "unmistakably Jamaican" (*NW* 2013, 238), she realises that she has been asked to be present not because of her hard work and dedication, but because she is black. In fact, as the hearing processes, and there is quite a strong case against the defendant, his attorney goes as far as to state that the trial is not "about race", and then makes a subtle hand gesture that draws the jury's attention to Keisha/Natalie sitting amongst the defence team. Her presence serves as a representation of non-white people, and her initial joy of being rewarded based on merit is quickly stamped out. There are other instances when Keisha/Natalie is seen as a representative of her race and gender in the professional world, rather than as an individual. In the section number 133, which is titled: "E pluribus unum", Keisha/Natalie finds that she has the support of many of her seniors, who wish to somehow advance her career: "Natalie Blake was in many ways an exceptional candidate, and several tenants at the set thought of her, informally, as their own protégée, despite having really only a glancing knowledge of her. Something about Natalie inspired patronage, as if by helping her you helped an unseen multitude." (*NW* 2013, 253) The irony here is visible already in the section title, which translates as "out of many, one".

At one point of the story, Felix visits his ex-girlfriend, Annie. She is a white woman who originally comes from a wealthy upper-class background, but has been in a downward spiral of substance abuse for years. Her character is a good example of the universal whiteness that Dyer writes about and which I discussed in the theory section of this thesis, in contrast to the narrowed meanings. Whereas people like Felix and Keisha/Natalie have to put in more effort to be seen as something other than the stereotypes associated with black people, Annie actually does not feel the same pressure to act as expected, because in addition to being white, her way of speech reflects her upper-class

upbringing, so that she is able to get away from difficult situations. For example, Felix remembers a police search that had been carried out in her building when there had been a big bag of heroin in plain sight in her apartment: "She could talk anybody away from her door. She could fall and fall and fall and still never hit the ground". (*NW* 2013, 146) The impression she gives helps to mask things like her drug addiction, and people are thus more willing to give her the benefit of doubt.

Another example of narrowed meanings associated with a black and/or female body occurs when Keisha/Natalie becomes increasingly interested and involved in an Internet site that helps people find partners for casual sexual encounters. At first, she only visits the page now and then, but her curiosity eventually gets the better of her and she finally starts using the site herself. She soon discovers that there is a significant amount of interest in her: "Everyone's seeking a BF 18-35. Why? What do they think we can do? What is it we have that they want?" (*NW* 2013, 288) Everyone on the site is looking for black women, ages 18 to 35. Keisha/Natalie is puzzled by this specific interest, and questions the reasons for it. Boehmer (1993, 273) describes the female body as "that most fetishized and silent of body symbols". As we can see in *NW*, the interest that Keisha/Natalie is shown on the website is a good example of this phenomenon, since her popularity there is based on her being a black woman in a certain age group. Firstly, their meaning is narrowed to something specific to be desired in terms of sex, and secondly, there is a heightened curiosity based on othering, because black females age 18-35 are apparently seen as something exotic and different. Keisha/Natalie questions this, wondering what people think that they can do that is so exciting and different from everyone else.

Throughout the novel there are prejudices and connotations based on bodies that are not "universal". Above I discussed Keisha's/Natalie's position in the intersection of race, class and gender, but there are also some limitations Leah faces due to her gender and working-class background. Leah works in a charity organisation doing general administrative work, and her colleagues are all women. "Further down the hall, the rumour of a man – Leah has never seen him.

This work requires empathy and so attracts women, for women are the empathic sex." (*NW* 2013, 31) Different things are associated with the female gender than the male gender. Things like feelings and emotionality are considered feminine, and rationality masculine. (McDowell 1999, 11) Leah is somewhat overqualified to her job, and is not paid very well. While her work might be seen by some as suitable for women, or, the "empathic sex", Leah questions this idea as she is doodling while waiting for the work day to end: "I AM SO FULL OF EMPATHY, Leah writes and doodles passionately around it, great fiery arcs, long pointed shadows." (*NW* 2013, 33, capitals in the original). Clearly, Leah does not feel as much empathy as is sometimes expected from her gender.

Earlier in this section I discussed Keisha/Natalie being asked to be present at a murder trial where her seniors were defending the suspect. Later, after the trial, when Keisha/Natalie is removing her robe and changing her clothes in the robing room, the defence attorney, Johnnie Hampton-Rowe, follows her and harasses her sexually; in other words, he shoves her clothes aside and seizes her breasts before she has time to react. When she shouts at him, he retreats immediately and acts as though she is overreacting; "With the same sleight of hand she'd just seen in court, he turned the fact of her shouting into the crime." (*NW* 2013, 239) He then returns to their colleagues and acts as if nothing has happened. Keisha/Natalie later discusses the incident with Leah, who asks her what she is going to do. Keisha/Natalie tells her she is not going to do anything, she simply answers: "Nothing" (*NW* 2013, 240). Leah does not ask for reasons for the inaction, as they both understand that Keisha/Natalie is not willing to risk her position and future career by revealing the harassment.

The harassment in the robing room is not the only time in the novel that such a thing occurs. At an unspecified time in the future, Keisha/Natalie is hosting a dinner at her and her husband's home (at this point the narrator refers to her as Mrs. Blake). The dinner guests are "a philosopher" and his wife. The philosopher, who has "a nasty breath", puts his hand on Keisha/Natalie's knee, which she does not remove, "not wanting to make a fuss in front of his wife.

Mrs Blake had become by that point quite extraordinarily well behaved." (*NW* 2013, 199) Even though Keisha/Natalie is clearly uncomfortable in the situation, and the man's advances are quite unwelcome, she again feels that if she were to draw attention to his actions or reproach him, she would be the one to face the consequences. There is a clear power dynamic at play here, as the man knows that he can subject Keisha/Natalie to this even in her own home, because her resistance would potentially be seen as "making a fuss".

After Hampton-Rowe's harassment in the robing room, Keisha/Natalie's behaviour changes, and she alienates herself form her colleagues to some extent. This does not go unnoticed, and she is called in for a discussion with one of her seniors, Dr Singh. She tells Keisha/Natalie that she has organised a meeting for her, with an esteemed female senior attorney, Theodora Lewis-Lane, who originally comes from the Caribbean region. Keisha's/Natalie's (unnamed) seniors are concerned by her behaviour and her not taking part in the social activities they have. In other words, Keisha/Natalie, who has been subjected to sexual harassment in the work place, is the one whose behaviour is intervened in and monitored. Because she does not want to draw negative attention to herself, being in a more junior position than Hampton-Rowe, she is the one who bears the consequences of his actions. She does not want to challenge the discriminative behaviour, because if she was to draw attention to it, she would also draw attention to herself as being black and female. As Puwar states: "In most professions there is a taboo attached to naming racism, let alone organising against it. Those who openly take it up as an internal issue, in one way or another, mark themselves as potentially risky bodies". (2004, 53)

Lewis-Lane tells Keisha/Natalie that in the beginning of her career, she used to have trouble with judges and seniors, and gives her the following advice:

> "Then I realized the following: when some floppy haired chap from Surrey stands before these judges, all his passionate arguments read as 'pure advocacy'. He and the judge recognize each other. They are understood by each other. Very likely went to the same school. But Whaley's passion, or mine, or yours, reads as 'aggression'. To the judge. This is his house and you're an interloper within it. And let me tell you, with a woman it's worse: 'aggressive hysteria'. The first lesson is: turn yourself down.

> One notch. Two. Because this is never neutral." She passed a hand over her neat frame from her head to her lap, like a scanner. "This is never neutral." (*NW* 2013, 242-243)

The above quote, which I cited already in the Introduction, exhibits key issues which I discuss in this thesis. Both Keisha/Natalie and Lewis-Lane are faced with additional challenges in their professional lives because they are marked as "other" by their race and gender. As Lewis-Lane tells Keisha/Natalie, when they express themselves too passionately, the narrowed meanings that are connected with their physical bodies make people think they are behaving aggressively. There is a clear difference between "passion", a positive thing, and aggression, which is negative and confrontational. Passion is something that the universal body can have, as there are no negative connotations attached to it. The marked body is further removed from the realm of reason, as Lewis-Lane notes that for a (racially marked) woman the situation is even worse, because aggression is combined with hysteria, in other words, irrationality. These are things that the universal body can exhibit, because its invisibility distances it from its physicality, whereas the body marked by its race or gender is "never neutral", forcing people like Keisha/Natalie and Lewis-Lane to monitor their behaviour in order to succeed in the professional world. Felix too experiences similar reactions when his behaviour is interpreted as more aggressive or angry than he is actually feeling or trying to convey: "He was easily flustered and it mistranslated as anger. People thought he was on the verge of hitting someone when he was only nervous, or slightly annoyed." (*NW* 2013, 150) People react too strongly to Felix showing emotion, based on preconceived notions and racist bias, assuming that he is a risk or a threat, when he is in fact only interacting in a manner that would not be considered alarming from someone possessing an "invisible body." Here Smith employs a similar dynamic that Franz Fanon wrote about in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952, 114), where people's reactions to the actions or behaviour of someone who inhabiting a racially marked body are somewhat excessive.

The reason I also discuss whiteness in this thesis is to draw attention to how it is often seen as default, and non-whiteness is seen as the "other" to it. Whereas I discuss blackness in this thesis as a physical basis for discrimination and othering, whiteness, on the other hand, is something

that is seen as universal and default, unless stated otherwise. (Dyer 1997, 14) As Sullivan argues: "In the early twenty-first century, white domination increasingly gains power precisely by operating as if non-existent". (2006, 4) The invisibility of whiteness, and of the boundaries that non-white people face, is what gives whiteness its power, and why making it visible helps to challenge the prevailing inequalities.

To mention an example of whiteness being the presumed norm: Felix has arranged a meeting with a man called Tom, from whom he plans to purchase a car, to give to his girlfriend Grace as a gift. Felix and Tom have discussed the matter on the telephone earlier, but when they actually meet face to face for the first time, it seems that Tom is taken by surprise when he realises Felix is black. "Felix did not know why his own voice so often misled on the phone." (*NW* 2013, 121) There is an underlying assumption or an unconscious idea that unless the race, whatever that might be, is explicitly mentioned, people are white. A similar thing happens to Keisha/Natalie, when she hires a Brazilian woman called Maria as a nanny for her children. When Maria first arrives, she is confused to find out that Keisha/Natalie, is actually "several shades darker" than herself. (*NW* 2013, 299) The general, unconscious assumption is that people who hire help for their homes are usually white, and people who are employed in domestic work are more often non-white.

Later, when Felix and Tom are sitting in a local pub, discussing the car but other, more general things as well, Tom asks Felix for a cigarette. Few minutes go by, and eventually Tom asks Felix whether he would have "anything stronger", in other words, assuming that Felix would either be in possession of illegal substances, or have access to them. He quickly realises his error when he sees Felix's expression, and apologises. This is apparently a situation which Felix is very familiar with, as he silently murmurs the serenity prayer and then goes on to assure Tom that he is not the first to make such an assumption: "'You're all right. My girl thinks I've got an invisible tattoo on my forehead: PLEASE ASK ME FOR WEED. Must have one of them faces.'" (*NW* 2013, 132) "One of them faces" is quite an ironic way of expressing the issue here, as it brings to mind Upstone's point

on narrowed meanings. It would not be as common a thing to ask a white person whether they have weed, especially if it was someone one has just met, and there would not be any reason to assume that they were involved with drugs. However, Felix is marked by his body as someone who quite possibly might be. Thus, actually, Felix having "one of them faces" in reality means a black male face.

As was discussed earlier in this thesis, while the body can be a site of oppression, it can also be used as a site of resistance to that oppression, as argued by critics such as Upstone (2009) and Romanow (2006). I will now move on to discuss how the oppression and exclusion based on bodily differentiation can be resisted in ways that also include the body. According to Romanow (2006, 57), it is precisely this status of the body as the object of oppression and discrimination that also enables the resistance, by the creation of "nonnormative spaces" that serve as the basis for subverting oppression. As Upstone (2009, 150) states: "colonial treatment of the body can be seen to echo the treatment of all space. Chaos and desire are overwritten with rigid, linear systems, doubt and difference are obscured by homogeneity. Colonial order is presented as natural and unquestionable". I connect the "rigid, linear systems", that Upstone mentions, with the invisible boundaries I analyse in this thesis. Thus when the oppressive system is based on strict artificial ordering and boundaries, once the oppression is made visible or acknowledged, it can be challenged by fluid representations of bodies, spaces, and identities that do not conform to the limits that are dictated by society.

There are also instances of bodily resistance that are not necessarily completely unproblematic. For example, when Keisha/Natalie meets people she has found on an online dating site, she uses the stereotypes attached to young black working-class women to her advantage. She is married at this point, and does not want to be recognised as Natalie Blake De Angelis, the attorney. To avoid this, she wears clothes that are more common in the poorer areas of Caldwell than her everyday life, such as furry boots, denim skirts, and big earrings, and introduces herself as Keisha. The people she meets do not question her identity or story; the first couple she visits live in a poor

neighbourhood, and seem to be drug addicts. The woman, called Honey, makes conversation: "Honey, bored, turned to her guest. What do you do, Keisha? You seem nice girl. I'm a hairdresser, said Natalie Blake." (*NW* 2013, 290) The comparison between Honey using the name Keisha and the narrator using the name Natalie emphasises how Keisha/Natalie uses her bodily appearance and choice of clothing as a disguise. The same thing that took place with Honey and her husband, happens again soon after when Keisha/Natalie meets the next couple, again dressed in the same clothing that she would not normally wear, having packed her work clothes in a rucksack. The woman thinks that Keisha/Natalie is younger than she actually is: "The beautiful African woman kept talking. Where are you from? Are you in college? What do you want to be? Don't ever give up. It's all about dreaming big. Having aspirations. Working hard. Not accepting no for an answer. Being whoever you want to be." (*NW* 2013, 294) At this point, Keisha/Natalie has been working as an attorney for some time, and is married with children, but her alter ego is convincing enough to hide those things. I think of this as an example of resistance through body, in that Keisha's/Natalie's upbringing was quite strict and religious, and she has always been expected by her family, her supervisors, et cetera, to follow the societal norms and to behave in a manner that leaves no room for judgement. Masquerading as "Keisha NW" online and in the homes of the people she meets certainly subverts the expectations and pressures of her normal life. I see this dynamic as similar to how Romanow (2006) has analysed another novel on postcolonial London, namely, Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990). Kureishi's novel is takes place in the 1970's. The protagonist, Karim is a teenager in London who rebels against the expectations of others by using drugs and having casual sex with both women and men. Romanow argues that "Karim's exodus to London from the suburbs serves as an anthropological exodus; he is not removing his body from the suburbs in order to integrate it with city life, but to utilize his body as a means of disrupting the metropolis and its expectations of him" (2006, 81). In my opinion, Keisha/Natalie has a similar motivation for her interest in casual sexual encounters with strangers.

Earlier in this section I deliberated Keisha/Natalie's meeting with Theodora Lewis-Lane, and her advice that the black female body is never neutral. In addition to this, there is also an element of resistance in the character of Lewis-Lane, for example in the way she has modified her work attire and appearance: "She [Keisha/Natalie] was fascinated by Theodora's chat-show weave (having recently abandoned her own, upon Frank's request), and the subtle, glamourous variants she brought to the female barrister's unofficial uniform. A gold satin shirt beneath the blazer; a diamanté trim to the black court shoes." (*NW* 2013, 241) This is what I mean when I argue that the invisible discrimination can be subverted through fluidity. Lewis-Lane is indeed wearing the "female barrister's unofficial uniform", but she has made subtle additions to it that differ from the tradition, making it her own by making the boundaries between her professional life and her background more fluid;

> Reclaiming the body, postcolonial authors suggest that regardless as to how much control is exercised by the nation-state, there is always an intimate experience that cannot be wholly influenced by outside forces. Yet by celebrating its fluidity, they refuse to succumb to any colonial discourse of bodily definition that would allow the body to become another imperialised space. (Upstone 2009, 179)

I will discuss the resistance through fluid spaces and identities in the following sections of my analysis. I will now move on to the second part of the analysis, in which I will consider the specific social spaces of London and Britain, and discuss the London of *NW* from the point of view of postcolonial criticism.

3.2. Living in London - Social spaces in *NW*

In this section of my thesis I will analyse the invisible boundaries in the social spaces of postcolonial London as depicted in *NW*. In the previous subchapter I argued that bodies are not neutral, and that there are challenges and invisible boundaries that the characters face, if the bodies mark them as something other than universal. I will now resume my discussion about non-neutral spaces, in the context of urban spaces in *NW*. The social spaces of London have a significant role in Smith's novel and that is why I have chosen them as one aspect of my analysis. They are not perceived neutral or

free of bias or prejudice, even though they might at first seem to be so on a superficial level. Similar to bodies, they are social constructs and are involved in the power relations of the society. As Sullivan (2006, 144) states, "[s]pace often is thought of as neutral and uniform, a conception that overlooks how the racially magnetized whiteness of space is precisely what allows the conception of space as lacking such magnetization." Slavin (2015), who has analysed similar themes in *NW* that I will here, goes as far as to draw a connection between the title of the novel, *NW*, referring to North-West London, and the word "Nowhere". If one agrees with this comparison, there is a similar issue present here that I discussed earlier in this thesis in connection to "invisible" bodies: the London Borough of Brent, where Caldwell is also situated, and the people who live there are more likely to be "invisible" when talking about Britishness or London, just like people living in racialised and/or gendered bodies in comparison to "universal bodies". Thus, as with bodies, the boundaries present in connection to social spaces of the city are invisible, and need to be revealed in order to be challenged, and this is what Smith does in her depiction of London in *NW*.

As I mentioned earlier, the main characters of the novel all come from a council estate in Caldwell, a poor, fictional area in Kilburn, North-West London. Their choices and options in life, and their experience of the city, are affected by this. As Gilroy (1987, 149) states, "[p]eople do not encounter racism in general or in the abstract, they feel the effects of its particular expressions: poor housing, unemployment, repatriation, violence or aggressive indifference." This is why I have chosen to examine the urban spaces of London together with non-white/non-male bodies in my analysis of the novel. The problems and inequalities that the characters face manifest on a physical level in the context of how different spaces and places in London are sometimes seen and treated and what connotations are placed upon them, and how places affect the lives of the people living in them, for example in the media or other people, as is the case in *NW*.

The tacit inequalities in *NW* often take spatial form. People from different areas have different starting points and possibilities in life, and the main characters, who are from Caldwell, face

additional challenges in their private and professional lives. I discussed similar themes in the earlier subchapter, but at this point I want to draw attention to the aspect of city spaces in the novel. The spatial inequalities of London are revealed on several occasions in the narrative. When Leah and Michel are visiting Keisha/Natalie and Frank, they start talking about people Leah and Keisha/Natalie knew from their school years. Frank, who comes from a wealthy Italian family, asks them: "'Why is it that everyone from your school is a criminal crackhead?'" Leah does not answer but asks him: "'Why's everyone from yours a Tory minister?'" (*NW* 2013, 62) She is implying that there must be some bigger, underlying reason, and that the two things (someone's background and their future) are connected. People who are born in certain areas, and go to certain schools, will then be more likely to either be "a criminal crackhead" or "a Tory minister", depending on the areas and schools in question. Indeed, when Keisha/Natalie first starts working in a small legal aid firm, she has three clients who "'went to Brayton'" (*NW* 2013, 246). The phrasing is significant here, because earlier in the novel Brayton is described as follows: "Some schools you 'attended'. Brayton you 'went to'" (*NW* 2013, 209). "Went to" is a more passive wording, perhaps describing the role of the school in the pupils' lives as less significant than in the case of those schools that are "attended". "Attended" is also a more formal expression, also highlighting the difference between the two types of schools that the narrator is referring to.

The fact that the novel is divided into smaller parts that differ greatly from each other both in the style and form of narration as well as focalisation in part emphasises how the characters face obstacles or difficulties in their experience of the city that are not necessarily always officially acknowledged or openly discussed. One example of the differences between the main characters and the people from more privileged backgrounds is the expectations they have for life and the expectations that are placed upon them. When a character from Caldwell wants to succeed professionally or in any way get ahead in life, it is usually through struggle and obstacles, and others treat that character as someone heroic, so that their story is an inspirational rags-to-riches tale. In the

case of characters from more privileged backgrounds, success and financial stability are expected. This highlights the fact that the people from poorer areas do not have the same possibilities, and just by trying to achieve those possibilities they have to put in additional effort. When they then are exulted as strong individuals by others, their strength is glorified at the expense of acknowledging the issues that necessitate such strength in the first place. What follows is that those who do not show such extraordinary potential to rise above their circumstances are blamed for not having more ambition. Leah is relatively content living in Caldwell and working for the council, hoping to improve things locally. Her husband Michel, on the other hand, has big plans for their future, and is quite judgemental of their neighbourhood: "Look, you know what's the true difference between these people and me? They don't want to move forward, they don't want to have nothing better than this" (*NW* 2013, 29). He continues to say: "You still have to work! You have to work very hard to separate yourself from this drama below!" (ibid.) I would like to draw attention here to the fact that Michel using the word "below" to describe the difficulties in Caldwell. The dream life Michel is aiming for is something that happens above the mundane, on top, and he sees himself as striving upwards. There is a spatial hierarchy in London where those who are successful are on top and the poor or less fortunate are "below". In another part of the story, Keisha/Natalie is thinking about a girl she used to know in Kilburn, called Michelle, who did very well in school and seemed to be very successful in university as well, before she apparently suffered some type of mental breakdown and stopped studying completely. Keisha/Natalie thinks of her as "exceptional": "raised in the brutal high rise towers of south Kilburn, which had nothing to recommend them, no genteel church culture, none of the pretty green areas of Caldwell or (Natalie presumed) the intimate neighbours. What could she be but exceptional?". (*NW* 2013, 214-215) When someone is born to a poor family in a poor area of London, the only way to succeed seems to entail having to be exceptional. At the same time, it is seen as everyone's personal responsibility to be successful, and the role of the surrounding society is downplayed. Those from more privileged backgrounds are usually more often *expected* to succeed;

to fail is seen as the exception in that context. The difficulties that come with having been born in Caldwell, as opposed to wealthier areas, are further demonstrated in the following quote when Keisha/Natalie thinks about her husband, Frank: "Perhaps she would always look after him, help him become a real person. After all, she was Strong! Even relative weakness in Caldwell translated to impressive strength in the world. The world asked so much less of a person and was of simpler construction" (*NW* 2013, 225).

Massey (2007, 19) describes London as "the most unequal place in the country". She further states that the "geography of inequality becomes both the consequence *and further cause* of national levels of inequality" (ibid., italics in the original). Keisha's/Natalie's husband Frank, who, as I mentioned earlier, comes from a wealthy Italian family, tells her the following: "'if the City closed tomorrow,' said Frank, without looking at his wife, 'this country would collapse. End of story'" (*NW* 2013, 277). Frank sees a one-way influence between the City and the other areas of London and Britain, in which the financial might of the City serves to help the whole of the country, instead of contributing to the problem of inequality. Neither does he acknowledge that its success is at least partly dependent on inequality inducing cheap labour. The City here means the City of London, where the finance business is concentrated.

Both Michel and Frank view poverty as a necessary evil, instead of a problem that could and should be tackled. This overlooking of societal issues is a common trait amongst the minor characters in the novel, highlighting the inequalities of London as it is seen from the point of view of Keisha/Natalie, Leah, Felix, and to some extent also Nathan. Having been born in Caldwell, to relatively low-income families, they have experienced the difficulties personally, so treating the inequality as a necessary evil that can be overlooked, seems even less valid:

> Now and then, in court or in police stations, Natalie bumped into corporate solicitors she knew from university. Sometimes she spoke with them on phone. They usually made a show of over-praising her legal ethics, strong moral character and indifference to money. Sometimes they finished with a backhanded compliment, implying that the streets where Natalie had been raised, and now returned to work, were, in their minds, a hopeless sort of place, analogous to a war zone. (*NW* 2013, 249)

Another case of endorsing individualism and personal choices over broader societal issues occurs in Leah's section of the novel, when she and Michel are having dinner in Keisha/Natalie's and Frank's home, along with Keisha/Natalie's colleagues in law and those of Frank's in finance. The conversation flows from Leah's job in welfare to general lifestyle choices of the group. One of the other guests asks: "But Leah, someone is saying, but Leah, in the end, at the end of the day, don't you just want to give your child the very best opportunities you can give them individually?", to which Leah responds: "You think the difference between you and me is that you want to give your child the best opportunities?". (*NW* 2013, 89) Again, Leah is pointing to the fact that there is more to being successful in life than just personal choice. The original speaker uses words like "individually" and "your child", which serves to dispel the broader societal issues in question by focusing on an individual.

Often, as the story progresses, the novel draws attention to the contrasts between different areas of London, and to how different spaces are inhabited by different people (in terms of class, ethnicity, et cetera). I would like to connect this phenomenon to McLeod's analysis of postcolonial London. McLeod refers to David Dabydeen's 1991 essay "On Cultural Diversity", where Dabydeen writes about people in London living in "cells". He talks about how certain areas of London are inhabited only by either white people, or by people from the West Indies, and how white people only occasionally visit the West Indian spaces, and where West Indians are not invited to the cells of the white people "called universities, banks, concert halls" (Dabydeen quoted in McLeod 2004, 159). McLeod goes on to consider whether this has changed after the early 1990's. While the situation is bound to have changed to some extent in the past two decades, that dynamic is still somewhat present in the London of *NW* as well. There are several occasions in the novel when we see how the characters experience spaces of London differently, and those differences are at least partly tied to their different backgrounds. For example, Felix, while he is running errands in different parts of the city, thinks about the tube map: "It did not express his reality. The centre was not 'Oxford Circus' but the bright

lights of Kilburn High Road. 'Wimbledon' was the country side, 'Pimlico' pure science fiction. He put his index finger over Pimlico's blue bar. It was nowhere. Who even lived there? Who even passed through it?" (*NW* 2013, 165). Oxford Circus and Kilburn High Road are contrasted here, the former being the centre of the tube map, an example of the official representation of London, and the latter being the centre of Felix's experience. Pimlico is a rich area in central London in the City of Westminster, and it is so foreign to Felix that it is compared to science fiction, and he never goes there, nor does he know anyone who does. If we follow Dabydeen's idea, then these are examples of the "cells" in the city space of London. Further, when we meet the character of Tom, a young white man from an upper-class background Felix buys a car from, there is more evidence of this sort of separation between different parts of London. Tom's vision of London is very different from that of Felix. When Felix tells Tom he lives in Kilburn, Tom associates it with Notting Hill: "That's sort of Notting Hill way, isn't it?" "Nah, not really." (*NW* 2013, 122). Tom has little experience of those areas of London, and connects them together, while Felix sees them as separate. Notting Hill has a history as a poor area that had a significant immigrant population, and it was also a site for riots that stemmed from racism and tensions that ensued from that. Tom associates it with Kilburn, where a big part of the population come from West Indian and Irish backgrounds (like Keisha/Natalie and Leah, respectively), but to Felix there is a difference between them. Tom and Felix are both Londoners, but their experiences of the city spaces are different.

Another example of different experience of space is when Tom remembers a discussion with his parents on where he should live in London: "There were limits, however. One shouldn't pretend that Brixton was any sort of place to live". (*NW* 2013, 134) There is again a strong sense of division between different parts of London; Tom's parents suggest he should live in Mayfair where they own property, whereas for those people who actually live in Brixton, it is not only "a place to live", but in many cases, the only option. Further, where Tom's parents see Brixton as dangerous and associate it with riots that took place there in 1995, the people who live there probably see it as a

home and might instead view the wealthy Mayfair as something foreign. Like Notting Hill and Kilburn, Brixton too has a multicultural population.

When Felix goes to Soho to visit Annie, who he used to date, he thinks about how different their lives are: "How did he ever come to know this place? Unknowing it would just be the restoring of things to their natural, healthy state". (*NW* 2013, 141) Felix views his relationship with Annie, an heiress and a former ballet dancer, and his knowing about her world, as an anomaly, something abnormal that would not usually happen. The "cells" they both live in do not usually mix. A similar dynamic is present in Keisha's/Natalie's story as well: when she begins a relationship with Frank De Angelis, they spend a night at Frank's apartment which is owned by his grandmother. The apartment is in Marylebone, another wealthy area in Westminster, and Keisha/Natalie is a bit hesitant to stay there because she does not know where she is. "No one lives here." (*NW* 2013, 223) Franks tells her that "London doesn't begin and end on Kilburn High Road." (Ibid.)

Generally speaking, Keisha's/Natalie's character is an efficient way of highlighting the differences between ways of life in the various areas of London. She spends her childhood in the poor Caldwell and then, when she grows up and her part of the story progresses, she visits and inhabits theretofore new spaces, as she goes to study law and graduates and begins a career as a highly educated and, finally, as a highly paid legal professional. Dabydeen stated that non-white people were only invited to the white "cells" on occasion and for short times. This brings to mind the advice Keisha/Natalie is given by a senior lawyer, which I already quoted earlier in this thesis: "'this is his house and you are an interloper within it.'" (*NW* 2013, 243) The court room is perceived as a white space, and Keisha/Natalie has to negotiate her way in it because she is not seen as belonging to that space. Of course, this is also a question of gendered space as well as racialised one. As Barker (2012, 397) notes, in classical western thinking, spaces have been divided in to private and public ones, or respectively, feminine and masculine spaces. As Keisha/Natalie operates in the intersection of gender

and race, her being in that particular white male space of the courtroom is considered by some as interloping.

I will now analyse the different city spaces of *NW* from the point of view of colonial ordering and resistance, as discussed by Upstone (10, 2009). According to her, colonialism's aim was to assert its control through ordering and organising: "Chaos is negated by colonial and neo-colonial powers in order to assume effective control. Yet as the vision and language that overwrite space are constantly exposed for their failure to totalise, the hybrid and boundless space beneath the absolute continues to find a way to be asserted." When oppression is exercised through strict control and order, resistance comes from the fluidity of real-life spaces and identities that cannot be wholly conquered by (re)ordering (by "chaos", Upstone refers to the hybridity and fluidity of real life experiences, so it is not used as a negative expression). This is relevant to my analysis on *NW* as well. When the lives of the characters living in Caldwell are not represented equally or given the same importance as those who have more power, wealth or influence, they create their own spaces within the city that do not yield to the more official representations such as political agendas or media coverage. Leah's mother tells her about Margaret Thatcher's old comments on the borough of Brent where the fictional Caldwell is situated; "Front of the *Mail*. Today this is Brent. Tomorrow it could be Britain! The cheek of some people. The rudeness of them" (*NW* 2013, 45). Pauline is referring to a *Daily Mail* headline from the 1980's that painted a picture of the borough of Brent as a threat that tomorrow "could be Britain" (Morley and Walsh 1995, 65). Brent is viewed as somehow lesser and different than the rest of the city or country, not an equal part of Britain or London. This is also where Slavin brings up the comparison between the title of *NW* and the word "nowhere". As a part of Britain, Brent is invisible, or does not matter. (Slavin 2005, 100) If we agree with this, then it is a similar dynamic to that of the invisible bodies, which I discussed in the earlier section. The areas with the biggest populations from the former colonies have less financial power and political representation than the more affluent areas, which in turn benefit from the cheap labour available from the inhabitants of the poorer ones.

An example of colonial ordering in the novel are the tower blocks in Caldwell where the characters live as children: “They stood in the centre of Caldwell’s basin. Five blocks connected by walkways and bridges and staircases, and lifts that were to be avoided almost as soon as they were built. Smith, Hobbes, Bentham, Locke, Russell. Here is the door, here is the window. And repeat, and repeat” (*NW* 2013, 305). The affordable council-provided living spaces have been named after famous British philosophers that may have little significance in the lives of the people living in the estate, such as “people from the colonies and the Russiany lot” as Pauline describes them.

At this point I will move on to analyse spatial resistance in *NW* in regard to city spaces. Upstone (2009, 104) discusses two methods of resisting oppression within the city space, displacement and carnivalisation. By displacement Upstone means drawing away the focus from the official representations of the city as a whole and instead focusing on the smaller sections within the city. For example, while *NW* is a novel about London, its primary focus is (as can be seen already in the title) the North-West London, and Caldwell. While other areas are present in the story, its epicentre is Caldwell, thus replacing the focus of the story from the geographical and administrative centre of London to the periphery. The story covers a time span from the early childhood of the characters to their mid-thirties, and while they at times work or study or visit other places, the focus of the story and their lives is always North-West London, and Kilburn. Earlier I quoted a section of the novel where Felix was observing the tube map: “It did not express his reality. The centre was not ‘Oxford Circus’ but the bright lights of Kilburn High Road.” (*NW* 2013, 165) In my opinion, this serves as a good example of displacement; Oxford Circus is a famous symbol of London, often portrayed as a representation of the city as a whole. However, for the real experiences of those living in London, the centre can be someplace very different, in this case, in the “bright lights of Kilburn High Road.”

In addition to displacement, Upstone talks about spatial resistance through “carnivalisation”, by which she means “a re-visioning that results in what I term carnivalisation of

city space, where hybrid, chaotic performance of identity undermines official discourses of power within public space ... it is precisely through the re-visioning of an oppressive force that empowerment is achieved." (2009, 106) The fluidity of real life spaces and spatial experiences cannot be wholly controlled by artificial or dictated ordering. As an example of this type of resistance in Smith's novel, I would like to mention a description of the streets of NW in the novel. To be exact, there are two parallel descriptions, which appear in Leah's section of the story. The two chapters are consecutive, and the first consists of directions for a walking route:

> From A to B:
> A. Yates Lane, London NW8, UK
> B. Bartlett Avenue, London NW6, UK (*NW* 2013, 38)

What follows is a simple route instruction, the kind that can be found on the Internet. The chapter ends with a disclaimer: "These directions are for planning purposes only. You may find that construction projects, traffic, weather, or other events may cause conditions to differ from the map results, and you should plan your route accordingly. You must obey all signs or notices regarding your route." (*NW* 2013, 39) There is a striking difference to the next chapter, subtitled "From A to B: redux". This chapter is a depiction of the same route, but in a very different manner:

> Sweet stink of the hookah, couscous, kebab, exhaust fumes of a bus deadlock. 98, 16, 32, standing room only – quicker to walk! Escapees from St. Mary's, Paddington: expectant father smoking, die-hard holding urine sack, blood sack smoking. Everybody loves fags. Everybody. Polish paper, Turkish paper, Arabic, Irish, French, Russian, Spanish, *and News of the World.*

The chapter continues in a similar, stream-of-thought-like manner, moving from the "lowdown dirty shopping arcade to mansion flats to an Englishman's home is his castle." (*NW* 2013, 40) Finally, the narrator ends the chapter with the wealthier area of NW8, where there are "security lights, security gates, security walls, security trees ... If we pay enough, if we squint, Kilburn need not exist." There are a few different themes in the quotes above, but at this point I am focusing on the juxtaposition between the two different chapters, in terms of Upstone's discussion on carnivalisation. The "redux" chapter reveals the chaotic quality of the lived experience of the city space that is hidden in the formal

and mechanical expressions of the first chapter. There is a striking difference between the two depictions, the first being quite a literal "mapping" of space, and the second representing the character's reality.

Slavin's analysis of the novel follows similar paths here: "Willesden is represented as a place with no center, but not in a catastrophic or apocalyptic way. There are simply a multiplicity of voices at work, many of which are absent from the singular, neatly ordered myths of the pretty English village or prosperous London neighborhood" (Slavin 2005, 99). Here, both displacement and carnivalisation come into play. Firstly, displacement occurs when the centre is moved away from what Slavin calls the "dominant myths" of London. Secondly, carnivalisation is also present when a positive kind of chaotic existence, or "multiplicity of voices" is raised to the forefront. Slavin also argues that Leah and Keisha/Natalie are producing their own "maps" of London:

> These maps are, in turn, a way of asserting a vision of London that does not have to match up with dominant geographies or mythological conceptions of what matters in England or London. Their geographies, both individualistic and communal, map visions of London that resist dominant narratives. (Slavin 2015, 114)

Both characters, while they face the unequal aspects of contemporary London, also produce their own image of it. This is evident from a recurring expression used in the novel. Often, when the characters are thinking or talking about themselves as Londoners, they use the words "born and bred". This takes place on several occasions, and the recurrence draws attention to the words. As the narration is focalised through the point of view of Keisha/Natalie, Leah and Felix, and we see their experience of London, it is simultaneously emphasised that they are Londoners "born and bred". In other words, while their geographies or experiences of London might differ from the "dominant myths" of the city, they are nevertheless valid versions of it. They might not represent all of London, but their representation is still part of London. As Slavin states, "With Leah and Natalie, Smith wedges into a tradition of postcolonial writers remapping the city of London in their own image" (Slavin 2015, 101). Slavin describes the area of London where Leah and Keisha/Natalie live as a place "many would

consider a periphery, meaning that their geographies may not be seen as central or necessary to the functioning of the city – certainly not like the geography of a white male banker living in Marylebone, for instance." (Slavin 2015, 99) Again, this focus on an area of the city that would usually be overlooked brings to mind Upstone's discussion on "displacement" as a means of resisting spatial injustice. Slavin (2015, 110) notes that the tower blocks are the centre of Leah's and Keisha's/Natalie's London.

An example of mainstream representation being in conflict with the lived experience of London is how the novel depicts the media coverage of Felix's murder. Leah is watching the news at the house of a friend of Keisha/Natalie's and Frank's, waiting for the Carnival to begin; "on Albert Road, Kilburn, where yesterday evening hopes of peaceful carnival weekend were marred by reports of a fatal stabbing, here, on the border of the carnival route through northwest London, as people prepared for today's festivities" (*NW* 2013, 93). The murder coverage is set up against the backstory of the carnival, even though the two things are not exactly related. The reporter goes on describe Felix as having grown up "in the notorious Garvey House project in Holloway, but had moved his family to this relatively quiet corner of Kilburn, in search of a better life. Yet it was here, in Kilburn, that he was accosted by two youths early Saturday evening, moments from his front door. It is not known if the victim knew –" (*NW* 2013, 94). At this point, the news story is interrupted by Leah's exclamation: "He was murdered! What does it matter where he grew up?" (ibid.) Felix has been murdered, he did not know the perpetrators, and had nothing to do with them except for being associated with them by other people due to both Felix and his attackers being black. Yet, when Felix's death is covered in news reports, both his childhood in a "notorious" council project and speculations about whether he knew the attackers are brought up. This could be seen as an attempt by the media to rationalise the murder by associating the victim to the attackers, connecting it to the Notting Hill Carnival, and the area of the city. The Notting Hill Carnival is a famous event in London, and it is organised by the West Indian community there. Both Notting Hill as an area and the Carnival have witnessed unrest

and riots in the past because of tensions stemming from racism. Connecting Felix's murder to these events alludes to it being part of bigger issues coming from multiculturalism. It allows others to distance themselves from the event and disregard it as unfortunate by-product of the Carnival.

I would like to draw a comparison here to the song "Welcome to Jamrock" by Damian Marley, which is quoted in the novel and credited at the end notes. The specific lyrics quoted are "Out in the street they call it murda" (*NW* 2013, 327). The song is playing at the carnival floats towards the end of the novel. I mention it here because there are some instances in the story where the main characters are faced with violence or the threat of it, and all these instances also refer to their social status and/or skin colour, etc. One of these I discussed already, namely, Felix's murder. Another incident takes place when Leah and Michel get into an argument with a man they think has been harassing Leah on the phone. Leah has suspected the man is Nathan. They see a man who Leah first thinks is Nathan; a heated altercation ensues between Michel and the man:

> From where Leah stands anyway it is still all dumb show, hand gestures and primal frowns, and of course some awful potential news story that explains everything except the misery and the particulars: one youth knifed another youth, on Kilburn High Road. They had names and ages and it's terribly sad, an indictment of something or another, and also not good for house prices. Leah cannot breathe for fear. (*NW* 2013, 83)

There is a strong difference between the dry and neutral tone of the imagined news report, and Leah's physical experience of fear in the situation. The news story would explain "everything except the misery and the particulars", and would discuss (in Leah's imagination) the incident in the context of price of housing in the area. The quote from "Welcome to Jamrock" takes place later in the novel, but I think it makes an interesting comparison here. "Out in the street they call it murda" is a much more powerful statement against violence than the somewhat indifferent tone in Leah's imaginary news story, or in the news coverage of Felix's murder.

The third mention of violence is actually a reference to a real life event that happened in London, namely the murder of Stephen Lawrence, or the Eltham Bus Stop stabbing, that took place in 1993. In *NW*, the murder is mentioned when Keisha/Natalie needs her mother's, Marcia's,

permission to go to study law outside of London, instead of going to the secretarial school on Kilburn High Road as Marcia had planned:

> Marcia had been to the 'countryside', and did not consider it a safe environment, preferring London, where at least you knew what you were up against. Then in April, that 'poor, defenceless boy' – Marcia invariably called him that – was stabbed at an Eltham bus stop, overwhelmed by 'a pack of animals'. Keisha Blake, Marcia Blake, Augustus Blake, Cheryl Blake and Jayden Blake gathered round the television to watch the white boys walk free from court, swinging punches at the photographers. The boy's body was taken to Jamaica, buried in Marcia's parish. (*NW* 2013, 197)

After the stabbing and the trial, Marcia allows Keisha/Natalie to go and study away from home, having evidently gathered from these events that the spaces of London were not as safe for people like the Blakes (meaning non-white people) as she might have previously thought. The narrator mentions all the Blakes by name, and mentions that the victim was buried in Marcia's parish. This emphasises their personal experience of the events, and how they are left feeling less safe in the spaces of their home town, having seen "the white boys walk free" without legal consequences. The mention of Lawrence being buried in Jamaica, in connection to Marcia's parish, highlights the feelings of unsafety and exclusion in the spaces of London that is experienced by the characters.

The reason I analyse these three acts of violence in this chapter on city spaces has to do with the quote from Gilroy (1987, 149) which I used at the beginning of this chapter: "People do not encounter racism in general or in the abstract, they feel the effects of its particular expressions: poor housing, unemployment, repatriation, violence or aggressive indifference." These issues affect Leah, Keisha/Natalie, Felix and Nathan in several ways, some of which I hope to have shed light on in this chapter. In the following and final section of my analysis, I will move on to discuss how the invisible boundaries in London affect the identities of the characters.

3.3. Fluid identities and self-definition

So far in this thesis I have analysed the concepts of bodies and social spaces of London in *NW*, and how there are invisible boundaries still present today that affect the lives of the characters of the novel, and how those boundaries can also be revealed and challenged by using methods that involve either the body or the social space of a city. In this last analysis chapter, I will move on to discuss the concepts of identity and representation from that same point of view. My aim is to show how Smith makes visible and challenges stereotypes in the novel, and how these stereotypes and different latent societal restrictions and boundaries affect the identities and self-definition of the characters. I mentioned in the theory section that identities are now seen as fluid and evolving, instead of fixed entities. As Hall (1996, 4) argues, identities are not "unified", unchanging constructs, but "increasingly fractured." There are multiple levels and intersections that are present, and the fragmentation is also visible in Smith's novel. According to Hall (ibid.), identities are formed in discursive contexts, and are affected by and subject to power relations, difference, and exclusion. This view of identity is now widely acknowledged and adopted among most critics, such as Barker, Hall, McDowell, et cetera, to mention those quoted in this thesis. It is also a good counterpoint to the more rigid process of stereotypes and outside definitions, which will also be discussed in this section.

The characters in the novel have outside definitions imposed upon them (by friends, strangers, colleagues, supervisors, police officers, etc.), and often these definitions are based on their bodily appearances as being black and/or female, where they live, or their social status. This idea of defining a person, either by themselves or by others, is a recurring theme in the novel, as can be seen in the very first paragraph of the novel, which is narrated from Leah's point of view:

> The fat sun stalls by the phone masts. Anti-climb paint turns sulphurous on school gates and lamp posts. In Willesden people go barefoot, the streets turn European, there is a mania for eating outside. She keeps to the shade. Redheaded. On the radio: I am the sole author of the dictionary that defines me. A good line – write it out on the back of the magazine. In a hammock, in the garden of a basement flat. Fenced in, on all sides. (*NW* 2013, 3)

This chapter presents a theme of self-definition that will recur later in the novel. Among the first things mentioned is the sulphurous anti-climb paint on the school gates and lamp posts, pre-emptively stopping people from going anywhere they are not supposed to. Secondly, while Leah is lying in the hammock in her garden, she is described as "fenced in, on all sides". Thus, already in this first chapter, there is an element of restricted space, and boundaries. In addition to this, I would like to draw attention to the quote Leah hears from the radio: "I am the sole author of the dictionary that defines me." This sentence, or the idea of "the sole author", is later repeated several times and in different situations in the novel. It is already emphasised in this first scene when Leah is having difficulties writing it down, and, characteristically to the general style of the narration in *NW*, the phrase is repeated;

"I am the sole

I am the sole author"

And a few lines later again:

"I am the

the sole". (*NW* 2013, 3)

The phrase is also repeated later in the novel, seemingly without connection to this first occurrence. For example, there is a short subchapter in Keisha's/Natalie's section of the story, titled "The sole author." It recounts a short period in her life, when she has left her first boyfriend, Rodney, who had been introduced to her by her mother. At this point Keisha/Natalie has already met Frank, who she will later marry, but for now they are only acquaintances. "More prosaically, Natalie Blake was crazy busy with self-invention. She lost God so smoothly and painlessly she had to wonder what she'd ever meant by the word." (*NW* 2013, 212). The repetition of the phrase "the sole author" is significant here, because it is also emphasised at different points in the novel that seemingly have no other connection to each other. For example, the scene I just described, chronologically takes place before the events depicted in Leah's section, so not only is it a different character and a different point of

view, but at this point Leah has not yet even heard the phrase on the radio or written it down. This disruption of the timeline of the story draws attention to the phrase and its significance to the main characters.

There is another subsection with the same title shortly afterwards, when Keisha/Natalie and Frank are already a couple and are discussing Frank's childhood as the only black child in a wealthy Italian family: 'But you're making me sound like a victim, my point is I had a very good time, these were just small things. I don't really know why we're even talking about them. All your questions are leading. Rare Negroid Italian has a happy childhood, learns Latin, the end...' (*NW* 2013, 225) The fact that it is a recurring phrase in the novel is one of the reasons why I have chosen to analyse stereotypes, self-definition and identity in this section. Most of these recurrences seem to happen when the characters' self-definitions are contested, either by others or by themselves. Since focalisation in the narrative changes from character to character, we can see the difference between how the characters see themselves and how they are seen by others. Since the narration covers a time span of several years, from the characters' childhood to their mid-thirties, we are also able to witness the development of their identities during that time, as well as how that is affected by their environment.

As we can gather from the recurring use of the phrase "the sole author", self-definition is one of the key issues in the novel. It is visible to the reader because of the contrasting views of the characters of themselves, and some of the views that are formed by others on the main characters. Patricia Hill Collins has stated the following: "why this theme of self-definition should preoccupy African-American women is not surprising. Black women's lives are a series of negotiations that aim to reconcile the contradictions separating our own internally defined images of self as African-American women with our objectification as the Other" (Collins, 1990, 106). According to Collins (ibid.), this emphasis on self-definition helps to "question not only what has been said about African-American women but the credibility and the intentions of those possessing the power to define."

Collins talks about African American women, but I have chosen to apply her argument here, since this is a similar process to Smith's revealing the invisible boundaries in contemporary London in *NW*. Making the prejudices and stereotypes visible helps us to see the contrast between them and how the characters actually see themselves, thus undermining the validity of outside definitions. This is not to say that the characters are able to access some kind of an essential, ultimate truth about themselves, but when the contrasting outside definitions are based on harmful stereotypes and prejudice, it is important to challenge them, in order to resist the oppressive, racist and/or misogynistic social dynamics that they are based on.

Further, we are able to see the types of "negotiations" Collins talks about, that take place in the minds of the characters as they encounter the notions other people have of them. For example, in a subchapter titled "9. *Thrown*" (*NW* 2013, 180-181) Keisha/Natalie is praised for her intelligence, which to her seems an accident of birth not unlike "her feet or the street she was born" stemming from a compulsive need to read and learn. "In the child's mind a breach now appeared: between what she believed she knew of herself, *essentially*, and her essence as others seemed to understand it". She begins to "exist for other people". This idea of existing for other people recurs later in Keisha's/Natalie's story, for example when she and Leah are talking about their friends having children. Leah does not want to have any, and assumes that Keisha/Natalie feels the same: "Blake was a double agent. She had no intention of being made ridiculous by failing to do something that was expected of her". (*NW* 2013, 272) Keisha/Natalie sees reproduction as something that others expect from her, and as she has "existed for other people" since childhood, she wants to live up to the expectation. Keisha/Natalie is quite an analytical character, which is in part emphasised in her section of the story, which is divided to small subchapters that each have a separate title fitting for whatever subject matter is discussed. Her analytical personality in combination with this idea of existing for other people, causes some issues on she has on how she sees her own identity. When the girls are

teenagers, Leah makes new friends from Camden that Keisha/Natalie does not have much in common with. When Leah is going to spend an evening with them, Keisha/Natalie questions herself:

> Keisha Blake, whose celebrated will and focus did not leave her much room for angst, watched her friend ascend to the top deck in her new panda-eyed make-up and had a *mauvais quart d'heure* wondering whether she herself had any personality at all or was in truth only an accumulation and reflection of all the things she had read in books and seen on television. (*NW* 2013, 187)

I think it is safe to assume that most of us are to some extent affected by the things we read, watch or otherwise encounter, but to Keisha/Natalie this is a source of anxiety. Again, when she is writing a song with a friend from church, Layla, she doubts herself:

> Across the room hung a mirror. Two admirable young sisters, their hair still plaited by their mothers, sat on the edge of a makeshift stage, one singing and the other transforming music into its own shadow, musical notation. That's you. That's her. She is real. You are a forgery. Look closer. Look away. She is consistent. You are making it up as you go along. She must never know. (*NW* 2013, 191)

A third time this happens is when Leah has visited Keisha/Natalie at college. As they are saying their goodbyes, she tells Keisha/Natalie that she is the only person Leah can be herself with. Again, this raises Keisha's/Natalie's concerns about her own personality: "Which comment made Natalie begin to cry, not really at the sentiment but rather out of a fearful knowledge that if reversed the statement would be rendered practically meaningless. Ms Blake having no self to be, not with Leah, or anyone." (*NW* 2013, 211)

I argue that this specific type of self-doubt stems in part from a character having to, as Collins states, "negotiate" how they see themselves and how they are seen by others, as the Other. In Keisha's/Natalie's case, she is faced with the contradictory pressures of staying loyal to Caldwell and her background and also of behaving in a manner that enables her to succeed in her studies and professional career despite being marked as the Other by her race and gender. For example, when Leah and Michel visit Keisha's/Natalie and Frank, Leah mentions running into Nathan, who used to go to Brayton at the same time with them. Keisha/Natalie seems reluctant to reminisce the past. This event is told from Leah's point of view, and she teases Keisha/Natalie: "He sat next to Keisha. Back

when she was Keisha. I was very jealous about that, when I was eight. Innit, Keisha". (*NW* 2013, 64) Because this is told through Leah's point of view, we are able to see her attitude towards Keisha/Natalie changing her name and the other ways she has changed since childhood: "Natalie chews at a nail, hating to be teased. She dislikes being reminded of her own inconsistencies. Leah dares herself to put it a little stronger: hypocrisies. Leah passes the old estate every day on her walk from the corner shop. She can see it from her backyard. Nat lives just far enough to avoid it". (*NW* 2013, 64) Leah feels some resentment towards Keisha/Natalie because of these things: "Leah blushes as an illegal word thrusts itself into her mind, Shar's word: coconut. And then Michel speaks, and makes it perfect: – You changed your name. I forget that you did this. It's like: 'Dress for the job you want, not the one you have.' And it's the same with names, I feel". (*NW* 2013, 64-65) Leah's thoughts here are an example of the kind of pressure that can affect a character who moves too far away from their background. Meanwhile, there might also be counter-pressure, such as in Keisha's/Natalie's case, when she is advised by Theodora Lewis-Lane that "this [the black female body] is never neutral". She tells Keisha/Natalie to "turn yourself down. One notch. Two." (*NW* 2013, 243) Keisha/Natalie feels the pressure to modify her behaviour according to her environment. This is also manifested in her adjusting her appearance and clothing to fit different aspects of her life, as is evident in the following quote:

> 170. *In drag*
> Daughter drag. Sister drag. Mother drag. Wife drag. Court drag. Rich drag. Poor drag. British Drag. Jamaican Drag. Each required a different wardrobe. But when considering these various attitudes she struggled to think what would be the most authentic, or perhaps the least authentic. (*NW* 2013, 282, emphasis in the original.)

Pérez Zapata has analysed performativity and identity in *NW*, and states that this type of "split personality" is a recurring theme in Smith's novels, and that it stems from migration and "can still be acutely perceived in the second and third generations. Even though the younger characters are very much established within the host cultures, by no means are their identities stable". (2014, 86) When analysing the particular excerpt above, Pérez Zapata argues that Smith extends the concept of drag

here to cover not only gender but other aspects of identity as well: [h]ere, original gender and any other original identities attached to various 'axes of differentiation' are parodied, and in turn rendered impossible". (ibid., 92) I agree with Pérez Zapata's analysis here. Smith not only challenges prejudices and definitions asserted by other people on the characters, but questions the whole concept of a true identity or some "essential self".

As I stated in the beginning of this subsection, identity is now seen as fluid and subject to change. In addition to this, I argue that fluidity is also a necessary consequence of the invisible boundaries; the people who do not fit the somatic norm of the universal body, or come from an unprivileged background, have to pay more attention to their behaviour, appearance, et cetera, than those who do. However, fluidity can also be a tool for resistance; the rigid, artificial boundaries cannot completely control people because of this fluidity. As the other critics I quote in this thesis, Collins too sees identity as a process: "identity is not the goal but rather the point of departure in the process of self-definition. In this process Black women journey toward an understanding of how our personal lives have been fundamentally shaped by interlocking systems of race, gender and class oppression". (1991, 106)

In order to provide context for my analysis on identities in connection with the invisible boundaries in *NW*, I will now refer to Stuart Hall, and more specifically, his discussion on the concept of stereotype. According to Hall (2013, 247), "stereotyping reduces, essentialises, naturalizes and fixes 'difference'". It does so by taking a few specific, simple and easily recognisable aspects of a person, and then reducing that person to "exaggerated" and "simplified" versions of those aspects (ibid.). This happens on several occasions in the novel, for example when Keisha/Natalie visits people she has met online, who all seem to seek young black women to have sex with, their interest in Keisha/Natalie being based solely on those aspects of her, which leads Keisha/Natalie to question what they think she or other black women her age can do. Another example of reducing a person to a stereotype is how Leah's family and friends talk about Shar, or "the girl in the head scarf" who

tricks Leah into giving her money in the beginning of the story. Leah seems to be exceedingly forgiving in this case, as she tells her husband that Shar was probably in a desperate need of the money she took, even if she lied about the reason. The other characters see Shar as nothing but a con artist, a criminal who tricked Leah, whereas Leah goes out of her way to find Shar again, and after confronting her about the money, tries to help her by bringing her council brochures from Leah's work.

Secondly, Hall states that stereotyping works by "closure and exclusion. It symbolically fixes boundaries, and excludes everything which does not belong". (2013, 247) In other words, people are excluded by 'othering' them and reducing them to stereotypes. As my analysis of *NW* addresses the invisible boundaries the characters face, I find this aspect of stereotyping very relevant to the subject. This happens on several occasions during Keisha's/Natalie's studies and career. For example, earlier in this thesis I discussed the cloak room incident, where she is sexually harassed by a senior white male barrister, who then acts like she was in the wrong. Keisha/Natalie is later told by an elder black female lawyer that she is "an interloper" in the space of a white male judge, and needs to act less aggressively because of her race and gender, if she wants to be taken seriously. Otherwise she could be seen as a hysterical, emotional woman who should be excluded from the male spaces of the court house.

Thirdly, and again relevantly to *NW*, Hall states that "stereotyping tends to occur where there are gross inequalities of power" (2013, 248). London is a good example of this, and power inequalities are a recurring theme throughout Smith's novel. An example occurs in the novel when Keisha/Natalie has stormed out of her and Frank's home after a big fight, without any money or a phone or any of her normal clothing that would signal her status as a high paid and educated professional. She is walking around her childhood neighbourhood when she comes to a road blocked by the police: "Can't I walk down there? asked Natalie. Incident, said the officer. He looked down at her. A big T-shirt, leggings and a pair of filthy red slippers, like a junkie... What kind of incident? He

didn't answer. She was no one. She didn't merit an answer." (*NW* 2013, 303-304) This is not at all a situation that Keisha/Natalie is used to in her everyday life as a successful barrister. The officer makes a quick judgement on her based on her physical appearance. She is a black person in a poor neighbourhood, dressed in dishevelled clothing, so he assumes that she is a junkie, instead of someone going through a personal crisis. Further, having labelled her in his mind as a drug addict, he goes on to brand her as "no one", a person who does not "merit an answer". This, of course, is a single incident and the opinion of one man, but the fact that he is a police officer, representing an official authority, and in his professional capacity so misjudges Keisha/Natalie, can be seen as an example of the latent prejudices within official institutions. Of course, the incident is told through Keisha's/Natalie's point of view, so there is a possibility she is ascribing her own beliefs on the officer. However, if that is the case, it is still relevant that she should worry about this kind of thing. Mills (2005, 25) talks about the dangers that come with stereotyping: "The hypothesised forms of stereotypes are equally damaging to all, since they consist of assumptions which often clash with our perceptions of ourselves and others. These stereotypes are often authorised in some sense through being mediated and so they have an impact on us. They are not simply someone else's personal opinion of us; they are also affirmed by institutions." Even though these kinds of stereotypes might not be officially acknowledged, they can still have an effect on the lives of the people who are judged based on them.

In the subsection 3.2 I discussed how the social spaces of London are depicted in *NW*. I will now analyse the role of those spaces in connection with the identity formation and self-identification of the characters of the novel. The city is emphasised throughout the novel, and as we see the characters interact with the space and within it, we also see how identities are to some extent bound to localities, just like they are to other factors, like race, gender, class, et cetera. The connection between identity and social space can have both positive and negative effects, depending on the situation. For example, Caldwell and the NW area are home to Leah and Keisha/Natalie, and there are good things that come with that, like the sense of family and community. On the other hand, there

can be drawbacks, like Keisha/Natalie having to justify to herself moving away from the area where she grew up in. She and Frank earn more than her parents, and they move to a wealthier area of London. It is not just Keisha/Natalie who questions this, even Leah, who stays in Caldwell, thinks about how "Natalie lives just far enough to avoid it" (*NW* 2013, 64), meaning the council estate they grew up in, which Leah can still see from her and Michel's home. This issue of loyalty to an area takes place in other parts of the novel as well: after graduation, when Keisha/Natalie is already dating Frank, she moves in with Leah: "Leah Hanwell found a bleak flat south of the river, and Natalie Blake, out of respect for an old friendship, became her flatmate" (*NW* 2013, 227). This is not the most convenient arrangement for Keisha/Natalie, who spends most of her time a long tube journey away in Frank's apartment in Marylebone, a much wealthier part of London. Frank calls attention to this when Keisha/Natalie is once again preparing to take the night bus back to her flat: "She tried to force herself to get up and on to a night bus, heading south. 'Your principles spend more time in that dump than you do', he observed. She sank back into the pillows." (*NW* 2013, 228) There is of course the factor of Keisha's/Natalie's old friendship with Leah, but in my opinion Keisha's/Natalie's insistence of living with her and not Frank is connected here with the social space of the flat share as well as their long history of living close together in the council estate in Caldwell (although the flat share is actually located in a different area of London). Massey (1994, 152) states that a problem with connecting identity to a place can occur in further unnecessary boundaries between people who inhabit a specific place and 'the others', meaning people who do not. Instead of fluidity and freedom, forming an exclusionary identity on the basis of a different Other can lead to more restrictive experience of identity, space, or community. For example, Keisha/Natalie repeatedly analyses and weighs her actions and decisions in connection with Caldwell, and her family and childhood home there.

There is a scene in the novel where Keisha/Natalie is in a playground with her children. She and an elderly white woman see three young people smoking cigarettes, which is against the

playground rules. The woman and Keisha/Natalie take it upon themselves to confront the young smokers. They are joined by "a middle-aged woman, a formidable-looking Rasta in a giant Zulu hat". (*NW* 2013, 284) The confrontation does not go smoothly but an argument ensues, where the boy who is smoking tries to justify his actions by stating that he's "Hackney" (an inner city area of London) where they "don't do like you do here. In Queen's Park." (*NW* 2013, 285) This opinion is not received well by anyone involved:

> Oh, NO. Said the Rasta. No you didn't! No no no. You having a laugh? *I'm Hackney?* Listen, you can try and mess with these people but you can't mess with me, sunshine. I know you. In a deep way. I'm not Queen's Park, love, I'm HARLESDEN. Why would you talk about yourself in that way? Why would you talks about your area that way? Oh you just pissed me off, boy. I'm from Harlesden – certified youth worker. Twenty years. I am ashamed of you right now. You're the reason why we're here where we are right now. Shame. Shame! (*NW* 2013, 285)

Both the boy and the Rasta use locations as identifications here, more specifically the names of the parts of London where they come from. These are definitely loaded uses of those names; the boy's attempt at defence as being "Hackney", being different from people of Queen's Park, which is located near the wealthy area of Westminster, and the Rasta's dismissal of that because she is "Harlesden", which she sees as a stronger statement than Hackney. The boy has acted in a way that the other characters in the scene judge, and he states that this is because he is "Hackney", in other words from a rougher neighbourhood than Queen's Park, and thus, in his opinion, should not be expected to follow the rules of Queen's Park. The Rasta, on the other hand, dismisses this and emphasises her own background in Harlesden, which she sees as being rougher than Hackney. To add to this tension between different identifications and localities, the reader knows that the playground is actually the same one where Leah and Keisha/Natalie first met as children, when Keisha/Natalie saved Leah from drowning in a swimming pool. Keisha/Natalie is reminded of her own youth in seeing the kids. Still, they all view each other as somewhat different from one another, because they live different parts of the same city. In addition to this, there is also an issue of representation in the quote above: the Rasta reprimands the smoking boy on a much larger crime than smoking; she questions his negative

statements on himself and his area (negative in the sense that he uses Hackney as an excuse for his behaviour which is judged by the other characters) and goes on to state that he is "the reason why we're here where we are right now." This seems quite a severe accusation, when based on the fact that his transgression was smoking in a non-smoking space, and speaking dismissively about Hackney. There is a positive message of self-respect, but I would also like to mention the issue of over-representation I discussed in the first section of my analysis: the boy is seen as a reason for a much larger societal issue because he broke a rule and acted inconsiderate. His perceived crime is much bigger than the smoking and the attitude, because the Rasta blames all the issues that they have on the boy. She is referring to the inequalities present in contemporary London, which I have discussed in this thesis, and blames the boy on things that stem from racism, financial inequalities, et cetera.

There are several other instances in the novel where the characters identify strongly through the social spaces of their homes and areas. For example, when Leah first meets Shar and invites her to her home, the main reason seems to be that Shar is local, waving a bill with the same postal code as proof: "Leah is as faithful in her allegiance to this two-mile square of the city as other people are to their families, or their countries". (*NW* 2013, 4) Caldwell is a significant part of her identity In fact, Shar first gains access to her home by waving a bill from a nearby address, thus proving to Leah that she is "local". In addition to this, in the same scene, it is stated that Leah can see her childhood home from the window of her and Michel's current one. She points it out to Shar, and the third-person narrator states: "From there to here, a journey longer than it looks". (*NW* 2013, 13) The journey refers to Leah's life and growing up and moving back to Caldwell after graduating, so that the spaces of her first childhood home and her current one form important landmarks in her life. The physical distance between the two places is not very vast, but the events that took place between Leah's past and present are more complex than just traveling that distance. Later, when Leah has told her mother about Shar stealing her money, she tries to defend Shar's actions, saying that she

seemed, and was, desperate. Leah's mother does not agree with this defence: "I was desperate on Crafton Street and I was desperate on Buckley Road, we were all desperate. We didn't go robbing." (*NW* 2013, 16) Again, place names, and more specifically, names of former home streets, are used to refer to the times in their lives that took place there.

Nash (1994, 238) talks about the positive outcomes of spatial factors for identity: "In postcolonial literature the development or recovery of an effective relationship to place, after dislocation or cultural denigration by the supposedly superior cultural and racial colonial power, becomes a means to overcome the sense of displacement and crisis of identity." Thus, for example, the shared experiences and the feeling of belonging to a community and its space can be a reaffirming thing. To mention one example of this from the novel; when Keisha/Natalie has her first baby, she is visited in the hospital by several people: "People came with advice. Caldwell people felt everything would be fine as long as you didn't actually throw the baby down the stairs. Non-Caldwell people felt nothing would be fine unless everything was done perfectly and even then there was no guarantee. She had never been so glad to see Caldwell people". (*NW* 2013, 275) Keisha/Natalie is now entering a new phase in her life, and the company of the people she grew up with and shared a community for so long is a source of comfort and safety for her. There are times when both Keisha/Natalie and Leah are able to draw strength from their background and community. In other words, the connection between place and identity is not simple and straightforward, there are benefits as well as possible downsides, just like with any other factors that are involved in the shaping and process of identity.

As I stated earlier, the different spaces of London play an important role in *NW.* This, combined with the narrative timeline that lets the reader witness the growth of the characters from childhood to adults (and does this from several points of view as the focalisation changes), makes it an interesting depiction on how identities are formed and the different influences that affect this process. As Gilroy states, "[Individual] identity is increasingly shaped in the market place, modified by the cultural industries, and managed and orchestrated in localized institutions and settings like

schools, neighborhoods and workplaces". (2000, 106) All of these factors are present in *NW*, especially the institutions (or, to paraphrase, spaces): Brayton, the school Leah and Keisha/Natalie and Nathan "went to" is mentioned on a number of occasions. For example, adult Leah thinks about herself as a "state school wild card" who studied philosophy in university: "An unpaid, growing debt. Along with a feeling of resentment: what was the purpose of preparing for a life never intended for her?" (*NW* 2013, 33). In addition to this, Keisha/Natalie compares herself to Michelle, another high achieving Brayton student, who later suffers some type of a mental breakdown: "Stopped going to lectures, studying, eating. She had been asked to pass the entirety of herself through a hole that would accept only part. (Natalie's conclusion.)" (*NW* 2013, 215). Of course Keisha/Natalie might not know the whole story and the events that led to this, but I think it is nevertheless significant that this is the conclusion she comes to, in relation to her own experiences in a similar situation. Going to Brayton has had an effect on how Leah and Keisha/Natalie see themselves, and that effect is still somewhat visible when they are adults. It is quite natural that a school experience during the formative years of one's life has a major effect on an individual level. The issue here is the specific type of school in question; Brayton, the "thousand-kid-mad-house", is probably quite a different experience compared to, for example, smaller or more prestigious schools. In addition, the work places of Keisha/Natalie and Leah are featured in the novel, sometimes as sites of conflict. Leah is the only white woman at her work place, and her colleagues comment on her being married to a black man on a few different occasions. During Keisha's/Natalie's career, she is sexually harassed, used as a token black person in a court room, and her professional abilities are questioned because of her skin colour. Besides school and work places, the neighbourhood of Caldwell and North-West London function as the principal setting of the novel.

As I argued earlier, there is a connection between identity and space. Massey (1994, 122) states the following on the subject: "The geography of social relations forces us to recognize our interconnectedness, and underscores the fact that both personal identity and the identity of those

envelopes of space-time in which and between which we live and move (and have our 'Being') are constructed precisely through that interconnectedness." This can certainly be seen in *NW*. We are able to follow the lives of the main characters from childhood to their thirties, and can see all the ways their stories are connected to each other, and to the social spaces of their neighbourhoods, and how their identities are affected in the process. This interconnectedness can be seen as a positive thing. Gilroy mentions a positive consequence of what he calls an "exclusionary identity": "Taking pride or finding sanctuary in an exclusive identity affords a means to acquire certainty about who one is and where one fits, about the claims of community and the limits of social obligation." (Gilroy 2000, 107). There can be benefits in perceiving oneself as belonging to a tight-knit community, even if it does also result in the exclusion of those who do not, for example how passionate Leah feels about Caldwell. There are no easy answers or simple characters in *NW*; instead, the novel depicts the complex processes of social interaction and identity formation in the social spaces of contemporary London, as well as the tensions and dynamics that stem from those.

This brings me to the ending scenes and denouement of the novel, which is not simple or straightforward either. Keisha/Natalie and Leah are both in the midst of marital difficulties. Keisha/Natalie has cheated on her husband with people she has met online, and after she has been found out, they have had a big fight, and are not speaking to each other. Meanwhile, Leah has been stealing contraceptive medication from Keisha/Natalie and taking them in secret, because she is afraid to tell her husband Michel that she does not want to have children. Michel has just found out about this and calls Keisha/Natalie and asks her to come and talk to Leah. At this point in the story, Keisha/Natalie has just experienced an epiphany about her life, having spent the Carnival thinking about her life and marriage currently in crisis: "Whoever said these were fixed coordinates to which she had to be forever faithful? How could she play them false? Freedom was absolute and everywhere, constantly moving location. You couldn't hope to find it only in the old, familiar places. Nor could you force other people to take off their clothes and give it to you like a gift. Clarity!" (*NW* 2013, 334).

Keisha/Natalie sees freedom as something fluid, and comes to the conclusion that being born in Caldwell should not dictate the decisions she makes, and that she will not betray anything by moving on. She goes to see Leah with these thoughts in mind, and after they have discussed Leah's problems with Michel, they move on to talk about how Leah feels guilty that she has had a somewhat easier life than Nathan or Felix. In a way, the characters of Keisha/Natalie and Nathan make an interesting comparison, in regards to the final scene of the novel. Leah is wrought with feelings of guilt and anxiety over having an easier life than Nathan or Felix, but Keisha's/Natalie's counter argument, harsh as it is, emphasises agency and subjectivity. Her opinion is that she and Leah worked harder:

> "We were smarter and we knew we didn't want to end up begging on other people's doorsteps. We wanted to get out. People like Bogle – they didn't want it enough. I'm sorry if you find that answer ugly, Lee, but it's the truth. This is one of the things you learn in a courtroom: people generally get what they deserve" (*NW* 2013, 336)

This quote is a good example on how *NW* is not a novel that offers easy answers. On one hand, Keisha's/Natalie's opinion is quite a harsh one, as she puts quite a lot of the responsibility on an individual person (instead of the society), but at the same time she refuses to victimise Nathan, and relinquish credit from what she and Leah have achieved. I have discussed in this thesis the issues of race, class and gender inequalities, and they all play a part here, too. Keisha/Natalie states: "We wanted to get out". Again, there is this aspect of their background in Caldwell as something to get out of in order to be successful. Being born there is an obstacle to overcome, which depicts a larger societal issue of spatial and financial inequality. At the same time, Keisha/Natalie refuses to give up active agency in her life. On the other hand, at an earlier point she had a discussion with Nathan, who said that "Everyone loves a bredrin when he's ten. With his lickle ball 'ead. All cute and lively. Everyone loves a bredrin when he's then. After that he's a problem. Can't stay ten always". (*NW* 2013, 317) This is something he had heard from his mother as a child, and Keisha/Natalie is appalled at his mother telling him something like that. But Nathan sees it differently:

> "To me it's just truth. She was trying to tell me something true. But you don't want to hear that. You want to hear some other shit. Oh Nathan, I remember when you were this and that and you were all fuckin sweet and shit, you get me? Nice memory. Last time

> I was in your yard I was ten, blud. Your mum ain't let me past the gate after that, believe." (Ibid.)

This is a similar phenomenon to the discussion I quoted in section 3.2. of this thesis, where Felix and Phil talk about how the boys of their neighbourhood are called "youth", as opposed to the boys from wealthier areas. They are just called boys, which is a much more affectionate expression than "youth", which carries with it connotations of unrest and even crime.

Having exhausted the conversation on the issue of Leah's feelings of guilt, Keisha/Natalie and Leah move on to discuss the event that took place on Albert Road, meaning the murder of Felix that I talked about in the previous section of my analysis. Keisha/Natalie thinks that she knows what happened. Having encountered distressed Nathan in the area after the stabbing, she and Leah come to the conclusion that he is, as Leah states, "a person of interest. From what you've said. Added to what we already knew. About his character. At the very least he is a person of interest". (*NW* 2013, 337) They decide to call an anonymous tip to the police. Slavin argues that this has potentially catastrophic repercussions, as they could be "[initiating] a process that will send an innocent man in jail" despite having "only circumstantial evidence of his guilt". (2015, 115) It could be argued that their purpose is not outright to "report Nathan as having stabbed Felix" as Slavin (ibid.) phrases it, as it is not implicitly stated in the text. What interests me in terms of this thesis in this scene are the following excerpts from the final paragraph of the novel: "Leah found the number online. Natalie dialled it. It was Keisha who did the talking. 'I got something to tell you,' said Keisha Blake, disguising her voice with her voice." (*NW* 2013, 337) Here, again, identity is something fluid and unfixed, and Keisha/Natalie uses this to her advantage, by "disguising her voice with her voice". This is further evident by the use of both of her names in the two consecutive sentences; Keisha/Natalie is able to switch between two aspects of herself, and for the purpose of the phone call to hide her present day self by using and accentuating specific aspects of herself, in a way "acting" as "Keisha Blake". Pérez Zapata calls this "Natalie's greatest 'drag'", her having kept her old self

with her despite the changes she has gone through in her life. (2014, 93) This is another example of the fluid aspect of identity. Even though Keisha/Natalie has changed her name and her lifestyle and social class, her identity is not solely based on the present day, and cannot be conclusively ascribed in the labels of "Keisha Blake" or "Natalie Blake De Angelis."

In this section of my thesis I have analysed how Smith's has depicted bodies, social spaces and identities in her novel, and by doing so revealed and challenged the invisible boundaries and prejudices the characters face. In the next section I will move on to conclude my findings on these three aspects, and their interconnectedness.

4. Conclusion

In this thesis I have analysed *NW* from the point of view of bodies, social spaces and identities. My aim has been to show how Smith makes visible and challenges the invisible boundaries present in contemporary postcolonial London. I argue that there is a connection between the three concepts I have analysed, and that they can also be used in resisting oppressive societal structures that are based on race, gender, class, et cetera. The connection between bodies and social spaces can be explained as Sullivan (2003, 166) does: "Not only do human beings 'have' space because they 'have' bodies, but in the United States, Europe, and elsewhere, human beings embody particular kinds of spaces because of the racing of bodies." As we have seen in *NW*, the spatial divisions of the city are to some extent connected with the ethnicities of people inhabiting them.

I have also argued that the invisible boundaries the characters have encountered can also affect their identities, how they are seen by others and how they see themselves. As the focalisation of the novel changes from character to character, we are able to see the obstacles and challenges they face, that could potentially remain unacknowledged if seen from the point of view of someone inhabiting a universal body. The main characters inhabit bodies that are either non-male or non-white or both, or, in Puwar's terms, are not universal, and as they have lower-class backgrounds, they encounter particular challenges that would not necessarily concern those who do not. Making the boundaries visible and acknowledging them is important in order to resist them, as Pile (in Romanow 2006, 62) explains: "Resistance ... comes from being able to recognise the real enemy amongst a frightening array of enemies." There are power dynamics at play behind the oppressive and discriminatory structures that Smith writes about, that have to do with issues of representation. Those who inhabit universal bodies are able to represent themselves, and their actions. On the other hand, those whose bodies are marked by race or gender as something other than white and/or male are sometimes seen as representing those things, rather than just themselves. The same is true for the social spaces of the city. Wealthy areas of London, such as the City or the famous shopping area of

Oxford Street are seen in a more neutral light than areas such as Brixton or Notting Hill, which are sometimes associated with criminality and rioting, and which have historically been inhabited by people coming from the former colonies of Britain.

In the first analysis chapter I discussed Puwar's social dynamics, or the burden of doubt, the burden of representation, and super-surveillance, and how these kinds of dynamics are manifested in *NW*. The characters have to "be on their best behaviour" (*NW* 2013, 214) at all times, performing well at school and work and repeatedly proving they are capable to do their jobs, et cetera. They are seen as representing their race and/or gender, and not just themselves. Thus, their bodies are associated with what Upstone calls "narrowed meanings": for example when Tom, the wealthy white man assumed that Felix would have drugs, because, as Felix explains, he has "one of those faces" (*NW* 2013, 132), or when Felix talks loudly, his white ex-girlfriend Annie thinks he is angry. In similar vein, Keisha/Natalie is told that she cannot appear aggressive or passionate in the court room, because her behaviour would be interpreted as being hysterical. To provide context for the burdens that the characters in racialised or gendered bodies have to deal with, I also discussed whiteness. The main characters are not perfect or flawless, but neither are people like Tom and Annie. Tom and Annie, however, are judged simply as themselves, not as representatives of all the white people in London. Their experiences are different compared to characters that are non-white and poor. Both Felix and Keisha/Natalie have to tone down their behaviour in order to not come across either angry or hysterical, and Nathan states that he was only liked when he was a little boy, and after that he has been seen as a problem.

As I discussed in my analysis, bodies can also be used sites of resistance. (Upstone 2009, 147). A subtle example of this is how the senior attorney Keisha/Natalie meets, Theodora Lewis-Lane, has altered the typical work attire of their field to include things like a gold satin shirt or diamanté-trimmed shoes. However, there are also examples of bodily resistance that are somewhat more intense. Keisha/Natalie and Leah both resist the expectations other people have of them, or that

they assume they have. Keisha/Natalie and Leah do this in their own ways, but both use methods that involve their bodies. For example, Keisha/Natalie cheats meets strangers to have sex with them, while she is already married to Frank, and Leah, who does not want to have children but does not want to tell her husband this, is secretly taking stolen birth control pills. Neither of these actions are particularly honest or unproblematic, but they nevertheless mean that both characters take actions involving their bodies to oppose the pressures they feel. I view this as an act of resistance in the same way as Romanow (2006, 81) sees Karim's actions in *The Buddha of Suburbia*; "in removing his body from the usually established roles in which society would place it, as heterosexual man, son, and/or worker, Karim contests those very positions of normativity to which he has been allocated".

I also discussed the inequalities of the social spaces of London, and the connotations that are attached to different places. As I stated earlier, Massey (2007, 8) has described London as the "most unequal area of the nation", and the differences between different areas there are visible in *NW* as well. Caldwell in Kilburn is an area where the majority of people are lower-class. The council estate where Leah and Keisha/Natalie grew up in is described in Leah's mother's words as "full of people from the colonies and the Russiany lot" (*NW* 2013, 79). The different areas of London are not equal, and poverty and financial wealth tend to accumulate to specific places. Caldwell, for example, is depicted as an area that characters like Keisha/Natalie or Leah's husband Michel want to get away from, and that Keisha's/Natalie's former colleagues see as a "war zone" (*NW* 2013, 249). What Smith is doing is highlighting how these inequalities are sometimes perceived as natural and unavoidable, and what the actual factors are that contribute to them. When Leah implies to Frank that the reason why "everyone" from her school is a "criminal crackhead" is connected to "everyone" from Frank's school being "a tory minister", she means that where a person is born and what their background is can have an effect on the possibilities they will have and the struggles they may face later on. Smith also reveals moments where poverty is "understood as a personality trait" (*NW* 2013, 269) instead of a consequence of complex financial factors in the surrounding society. When Leah and Michel are

having dinner with Keisha/Natalie and Frank and their wealthy colleagues, Leah questions another guest's logic in arguing that it is a personal choice to offer one's child the best possibilities in life.

Resistance can also be spatial, as Smith shows in *NW*. The novel is named after a place, drawing the focus on the specific area of North-West London and Kilburn. This also emphasises the significance of different spaces of London in the novel. As Felix observes the London tube map, he feels that it does not represent his reality, where the centre is "the bright lights of Kilburn High Road" (*NW* 2013, 165), and not Oxford Circus. As I discussed in my analysis, this specific focus on Kilburn fits Upstone's description of "displacement" as resistance in postcolonial London (2009, 104). Favouring NW as a focus over the whole of London provides the area its own representation, and also focuses on community on a local level, which in turn offers a possibility of a smaller scale resistance (ibid.). Another aspect of spatial resistance that Upstone (ibid., 105) mentions is "carnivalisation" which I also discussed in my analysis. I used the example of mapping in the novel, where an area in Kilburn was first reduced to a simple route direction, and later described again as a lived experience, a chaotic melange of different sights, smells, foods, businesses, nationalities, et cetera. These types of resistance are based on the fluid nature of social spaces: the lived experience of spaces cannot be completely controlled by the restrictions and invisible boundaries encountered in them.

A similar type of fluidity can also be used in resistance when it comes to identities and representation. As I have discussed in this thesis, the invisible boundaries and restrictions can affect the identities of the characters. An example of this is Keisha/Natalie, who works her way up from the council estate in Caldwell to a wealthy life as an attorney, and falls in love and marries Frank who comes from a wealthy Italian family. Several times in the novel Keisha/Natalie feels that she either has to justify her choices in life or make different ones in order to stay loyal to her background in Caldwell. When she graduates, she first practices law in her old neighbourhood, where the clients are poor and come from similar backgrounds as her. Later, when she achieves more success, she feels

guilty for it, as well as for leaving her first boyfriend, Rodney, who is also from the same area, and falling in love with Frank, who is rich. Quite a different example of the negative affects to identity is Nathan, who went to school with Leah and Keisha/Natalie, and who was told by his mother that "everyone loves a bredrin when he's ten. With his lickle ball 'ead. All cute and lively. Everyone loves a bredrin when he's ten. After that he's a problem. Can't stay ten always". (*NW* 2013, 317) This has, to some extent, affected how he sees himself and the choices he has made. However, this is also a more complex issue besides the internalised racism. As Nathan explains to shocked Keisha/Natalie, he feels that his mother was trying to teach him something about the world. Here, again, Smith raises the question of representation. Both Felix and Nathan are seen as "aggressive" and as "problems", and, as Felix' friend Phil describes, as "youth", unlike "the boys from the posh bits up by the park, they're just boys" (*NW* 2013, 114). "The boys" can represent themselves but Nathan and Felix are seen as potential problems, since they are black men who live in a poor area of the city.

As with bodies and social spaces, fluidity can also be used in resisting oppression in connection to identities. When the novel is coming towards its end, Keisha/Natalie experiences a moment of "clarity": "whoever said these were fixed coordinates to which she had to be forever faithful? How could she play them false? Freedom was absolute and everywhere, constantly moving location. You couldn't hope to find it only in the old, familiar places." (*NW* 2013, 334) Keisha/Natalie comes to the conclusion that just because she was born in Caldwell, she does not have to define herself or make all her choices in life based on that. As I discussed in the earlier sections, identities are now generally seen by critics as unfixed and changing. As such, they are always more complex and evolving than rigid stereotypes would have them seem.

Smith does not offer easy answers in *NW*. While bodies, social spaces and fluid identities can be used in resisting the oppressive societal structures the characters face, they still do not solve everything. The ending of the novel is left open, and we never find out if Nathan was actually the person who murdered Felix. Further, the issues I have discussed in this thesis do not

resolve themselves or disappear completely. However, I would like to argue that Smith's purpose is not to offer complete answers to the complex issues of societal inequalities regarding race, gender and class, but to make visible the underlying oppressive structures and thus challenge them.

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