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„The Plays of Tanika Gupta –
Introducing a Contemporary British Playwright“

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Hinweis

Diese Masterarbeit hat nachgewiesen, dass die betreffende Kandidatin oder der betreffende Kandidat befähigt ist, wissenschaftliche Themen selbstständig sowie inhaltlich und methodisch vertretbar zu bearbeiten. Da die Korrekturen der/des Beurteilenden nicht eingetragen sind und das Gutachten nicht beiliegt, ist daher nicht erkenntlich mit welcher Note diese Arbeit abgeschlossen wurde. Das Spektrum reicht von sehr gut bis genügend. Es wird gebeten, diesen Hinweis bei der Lektüre zu beachten.

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1. Introduction

It is the aim of this thesis to introduce and discuss the plays of Tanika Gupta, a contemporary British playwright, as part of the recently emerging multi-faceted, multicultural and diversifying British mainstream theatre scene. Although it goes far beyond the scope of this paper to define what the contemporary theatrical canon of the UK is or which plays and playwrights it consists of, it shall be explicated why the highly controversial and elusive term of mainstream theatre is nonetheless used to place Gupta's work within the wider frame of modern British drama and not within the exclusively British Asian theatre scene. The explanation for this decision is a very simple one: loudly proclaimed authorial intention. Gupta herself has stressed several times how important it is to her to be considered part of the evolving modern theatre canon and not to be categorised as writing for a strictly Indian audience. As will be shown in the following chapters, she still highly values her Bengali origin, but at the same time does not want to be reduced to it. The interview excerpts that will be presented below show that Gupta wants to write for a mixed, contemporary audience of different skin colours, ethnicities, generations, social classes, genders and places of origin. Arguably, her plays are an attempt to discuss important political, ethical and moral questions in front of an audience that is as diverse and multicultural as Britain's population of the 21st century.

After introducing the author herself and her position in modern British drama in the first chapter, what follows is an introduction to post-colonial theory in the second chapter. Because Gupta's plays revolve around issues like race, power, immigration, gender and culture, post-colonial theory seems to be the ideal theoretical background for analysing her works. However, post-colonial theory is mostly seen as a point of departure that researchers like Avtar Brah made use of. The most important difference between post-colonial theorists like Said and Spivak, who talk about the effects of post-colonialism in the former colonies, and Bhabha and Brah is the fact that the theories of the latter are set in the former colonial centres of power to which the formerly colonised have migrated. The seemingly clear boundaries between the colonisers and the colonised become blurry. Gupta's plays present the lives of people that are characterised by diversity and diasporic movement. A theory that is used to support the analysis of her plays, must also consider, include, indeed give priority to the hybrid cultural forms that are so characteristic of Britain's multicultural 21st-century society, which is why Avtar Brah's concept of the *diaspora space* was chosen. It does not only include the (often difficult and complex) experiences that are connected to the diasporic movement from one country to the other, but it also reflects how migration changes the society the

migrants chose to move to. Because of the fact that Brah refuses to maintain a clear distinction between the 'here' and 'there' and between 'us' and 'them', but, on the contrary, insists on the performativity and changeability of a person's identity, her concept is so useful. In addition to introducing the most important theorists in the field and presenting Brah's ideas, ambivalent terms such as *hybridity*, *multiculturalism* and *race*/*ethnicity* shall be introduced as well as critically discussed in the same chapter.

In the course of the analysis, which constitutes the central third chapter of the thesis, the most prominent topics in Gupta's plays shall be considered as well as the techniques how these topics are presented in her works. The main part of the thesis, therefore, introduces and critically analyses twelve plays by Tanika Gupta that constitute the core of her theatrical work. Each play was allocated to one of the following thematic fields: relationships, youth culture, politics and origins. Within these subchapters, the plays are discussed in chronological order, whereby the analysis of each play includes information on its critical reception, its characters as well as its form and language. In addition to the just mentioned parameters, the plays will be discussed with regard to the theories of hybridity and the diasporic space that were explicated before in chapter one. By showing the topicality, relevance and versatility of her plays, this thesis intends to make an initial step towards an academic reception of Gupta's extraordinary work, which, as it is argued, not only peripherally belongs to the modern British theatrical canon, but is an integral part of it that helps to diversify and enrich the island's stage repertoire. In accordance with Avtar Brah's theories of the diasporic experience, it shall be emphasised that topics such as race (and racial violence), ethnicity, cultural diversity and hybridity as well as intercultural communication do not only concern ethnic minorities and their cultural productions in theatres with very specific audiences, but also the general British public that, as Gupta's plays show, has to face questions of immigration and ethnic diversity on a daily basis.

2. Tanika Gupta – A Contemporary British Playwright

Before presenting and analysing the works of Tanika Gupta it seems appropriate to introduce the playwright herself first. Gupta was born in Chiswick, London, on the 1 December 1963 as the daughter of two Bengali artists (Griffin, *Gupta* 223), growing up bilingually to become the British Bengali woman she is today. Her father being a singer and amateur actor and her mother a classical Indian dancer, she was raised in a "very artistic" family (Interview with Gupta in Billingham 204) that supported her creative inclinations from the very beginning

instead of forcing her into the stereotypical career paths of doctor, lawyer or teacher "as so many other Asian people's parents did and still do now, to this day" (Gupta 204). Gupta furthermore states that she grew up "in a family where stories were being told all the time" (204), a family, which "always seemed to have had songs and dancing" (204). Thus, Sierz (*Woman of Achievement* 20) argues that "she's defined less by her colour and more by her parents' enthusiasm for culture." After having graduated from Oxford University with a degree in modern history, Gupta not only worked for an Asian women's refuge in Manchester for some time, but, after her marriage moved to Islington, London, with her husband and became a community worker (Griffin *Gupta* 223).

At the age of twenty-two attempts to write a novel and get it published failed, but at the same time Gupta "stumbled across this group called the Asian Women Writers Collective" (Gupta 205), in which she was recommended to turn to drama instead of prose writing because of her "brilliant dialogue" (Gupta 205). Other than the afore-mentioned Writers Collective Gupta also participated in the BBC Young Playwrights Festival that included a workshop, in which she was noticed for being good at imitating accents and representing them in her texts. With the help of this workshop Gupta got her first radio play produced on BBC Radio 4 (Billingham 205). Starting with radio plays, Gupta additionally began to write scripts for television and finally also for theatre. As Griffin (*Gupta* 235) mentions, the time in which Gupta's plays started to become widely-known and popular is the 1990s; a time which Aleks Sierz (*Reality Sucks* 102ff.) characterises as, theatrically speaking, unproductive and uncreative. Griffin however argues that Gupta's plays are not just mainstream dramatic products, but on the contrary present "realities with a twist" (*Gupta* 236), including innovations such as the inclusion of spirits and ghosts in the plays, the disruption of socio-sexual taboos and the "portrayal of multi-cultural groups of youths" (*Gupta* 237) with the help of cross-racial casts (*Gupta* 236f.).

Initially, Gupta states, writing about her Asian roots was very important to her (Billingham 206), but in the course of her career she let go of these topics. Her plays are now predominantly set in Britain and deal, more broadly than before, with intercultural encounters of people from various different backgrounds (including many different ethnicities and not just migrants from the Indian subcontinent). Billingham (206) asks Gupta in his interview what she thinks of the label "black or Asian writer" that has very often been attributed to her. She responds that in the beginning of her career, i.e. her early twenties, she did not mind labels that much, because she did not know what preconceptions were connected to them, but now her views have changed dramatically. Understandably, Gupta vehemently refuses to be

reduced to her Asianness and to have to write about arranged marriages all the time, as she quite polemically states (Gupta in Billingham 207). Later in the interview, she comments explicitly on her completely altered attitude towards labelling and stereotyping the following way:

> Yes, I'm very clear now, I'm much clearer about this – I'm not an Asian writer, I'm a writer. You wouldn't call Tom Stoppard a Czech writer or a white writer or an English writer, would you, so why should I be labelled? In the same way that writers who are women don't want to be called women writers because, again, you put them in a box. Actually, it happens less and less that, these days (*laughs*) – partly because they're so tired of me going on about it! – but in the early days it didn't matter to me and I was proud to be called an Asian writer. Of course, I'm still proud of being Asian, but the major factor remains that it shouldn't *determine* your writing because in a sense it denigrated you as a writer – I don't know, it 'corners you'. (Gupta in Billingham 207)

Gupta's recurrent defensive statements (Griffin *Gupta* 223) reveal how important it is as a twenty-first century writer to be aware of patronising, essentialising and reductive terms. The influence of the discourses of power, religion, gender and ethnicity is not only discernible and important in academia and politics, but also in the everyday lives of people, whose ethnic backgrounds and outward appearance differ from the mainstream population as it is the case with Tanika Gupta as well. Throughout, it seems to be of paramount importance to fend off generalising terminology and stereotypes that restrict writers to imposed, heteronomous identities. In addition to refusals of being called an 'Asian writer' or a 'woman writer', Gupta quite straightforwardly claims a place within the contemporary British theatre canon. Having been born and raised in the South of England, she rightly demands to be accepted as a British writer, regardless of her sex and place of origin. Quite tellingly, in an interview with Laura Barnett (*Portrait of the Artist*), published in *The Guardian* in 2011, she describes the high point of her career as follows: "Driving along Waterloo Bridge [in London] with a newborn baby in 2000, and seeing my name up in lights above the National theatre." Clearly, having conquered one of the most important theatre venues in London is an enormous success. Sadly enough, still up to this day, such a success is even more remarkable because Gupta is a female Asian playwright. It seems to be the aim of Gupta as a writer to contribute to a reality in which it is less surprising that women like her can write plays for well-known, highly prestigious theatres like the National, to create an environment, in which it is 'normal', i.e. accepted and not unusual, that authors with different ethnic backgrounds can also be an integral part of the emerging theatrical canon. Godiwala (*Hybridised Identity* 37f.) calls this re-appropriation of the canon, which Gupta has in mind too, a "postcolonial strategy". This strategy is most evident in the playwright's adaptations of English classics such as *Great*

Expectations, *The Country Wife* and *Hobson's Choice*. By taking a canonical theatrical work like Wycherley's *The Country Wife* and turning it into a contemporary Indian piece full of slang and independent female opinions, Gupta reconfigures and updates the canon and voices a claim to be part of the ever-changing English theatre tradition. By including writers such as Tanika Gupta in the stage repertoire of a modern mainstream theatre scene in Britain, an increasing ethnic and gender diversification becomes obvious. It is the incorporation of playwrights like her that enriches the contemporary British canon; that makes it more modern and also more accessible for younger and more diverse audiences. A canon that only consists of restagings of classics by well-known, male, white writers certainly cannot attract the same mixed audiences as Gupta's plays. Succeeding in inspiring teenagers (see especially *White Boy*) as well as spectators of ethnic minorities to watch one's plays is a very positive achievement and a trend which should be further encouraged financially as well as politically, as it points in the direction of a more inclusive, well functioning multicultural society that is aware of contemporary social problems that are discussed in the plays[1]. As Gupta shows by choosing diverse topics and styles for her plays and by claiming an alternative place within the British mainstream theatre scene instead of in the exclusively Asian one[2], it is possible to be a self-determined (Asian) woman playwright in contemporary Britain without necessarily being reduced to certain aspects of this multi-faceted, changing artistic identity.

As a conclusion to this introductory chapter, for those interested in the topic, a list of references will be provided that give a detailed account of the British Asian Theatre scene that shall not be discussed here in more detail, because Gupta, in spite of acknowledging their valuable work, does not consider herself part of this cultural community (although some researchers would 'classify' her as a British Asian playwright) for the simple reason that the Asian theatre companies "were not new writing companies, so in terms of developing your craft as a writer, they didn't have the specific skills to help you" (Gupta interviewed by Sierz, *Punters* 266), as she says. For anyone doing research on the aforementioned Asian theatre companies and venues in Britain the following articles might be consulted: Osborne (2011) who mentions that "Gupta is arguably Britain's foremost Asian playwright" (536) despite the fact that she knows about the dramatist's aversion to labelling, Dadswell and Ley (2009) on *British South Asian theatres and the global South Asian Diaspora*, Dadswell (2009) on Asian theatre companies, Croft (2008) who reviews a number of books on the topic, Godiwala

[1] See Godiwala (*Hybridised Identity* 41) on the importance of social criticism in British Asian theatre today.
[2] See Godiwala (2006) and her monograph *Alternatives within the Mainstream: British Black and Asian Theatres*, in which Gupta is also discussed as one of the alternatives within the mainstream.

(2006) on *Genealogies, archaeologies, histories: the revolutionary 'interculturalism' of Asian theatre in Britain* – an article which also includes Gupta, although Godiwala later seems to have accepted Gupta's self-definition, because in her abovementioned monograph she considers her an "alternative within the mainstream", Griffin (2006) on *Theatres of differerence*, namely the plays of Rukhsana Ahmad, Tanika Gupta, Winsome Pinnock and Zindika, Godiwala (2003) on *Hybridised Identity as Counter-Discursive Strategy: A Genealogy of British-Asian Culture and its Postcolonial Theatres*, and Lo and Gilbert (2002) on cross-cultural theatre praxis.

3. Theoretical Frameworks

3.1. The Problematic Nature of Post-Colonial Theory

When thinking about how Gupta's plays could best be approached theoretically, at first glance, post-colonial theory suggests itself. It deals with all the issues relevant to the playwright's work: post-colonial power relations, gender hierarchies, questions of ethnicity and cultural encounters. However, as this chapter will show, this corpus of theory, which is essential as a starting point and conceptual theoretical background, cannot directly be applied to Gupta's plays. Why post-colonial theory nonetheless is important, what its drawbacks are and why Avtar Brah's concept of the *diaspora space* is better suited to serve as a theoretical framework for this thesis will be explained in the following.

First of all, it seems imperative to mention Edward Said and his ground-breaking work *Orientalism* from 1978 that initiated a debate on Orientalism that persists to this day[3]. In a nutshell, Said's theories evolve around the fact that what the West (i.e. Europe in Said's nineteenth-century context) thinks of as the Orient "was almost a European invention" (Said 1). Also India, and more specifically Bengali (that is nowadays divided between India and Bangladesh), where Gupta's parents and many of the characters in her plays come from, has been part of this construction of the exoticised Orient, which is, according to Said (1f.), not only

> the place of Europe's greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilizations and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other. In addition, the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience.

The idea that a region, a people, or more specifically an ethnic community is exoticised, othered, bereaved of its rights to speak and presented as different from another prevalent

[3] see Varisco and Schnepel for very topical works on the topic.

hegemonic group will be very important in the course of finding a well-suited approach towards analysing Gupta's plays. Whenever a person (or a character in Gupta's plays) with a migratory background is told to go back to where he came from or otherwise racially insulted, the offender returns to the same Orientalist conceptions of 'us' vs. 'them' and the developed, superior Western world vs. the inferior, developing world that Said so heavily criticised. However intriguing and far-reaching Said's concept is, there are also aspects to it that make it unsuitable for the purposes of this thesis. Firstly, the concept mostly deals with the origins of the above-mentioned stereotypes in the nineteenth century, which makes it rather unfit for discussing plays that have been written more than 200 years later, although traces of the heteronomous construction of the Orient persist to this day. Secondly, Said's theory was attacked for being "monolithic, totalizing, or just insufficiently nuanced, ignoring resistance within or outside the West, or the fact that the binary West/East division projects outwards, and thus masks, splits within Western society" (Childs and Williams 115). In short, Said's theory is criticised for being based on binary oppositions – East/West, old/new, passive/active, female/male, etc. – a practice that is nowadays largely avoided, because reducing complex realities to a clearly identifiable, unchangeable core does not help to theorise and understand the complexities of an ever-accelerating, globalised world. Although Said's concept might have perfectly well suited the realities of the colonial era and although it might have become so powerful exactly because it is so easily approachable and clear cut, his approach that works with stable, fixed identities and easily distinguishable boundaries cannot capture the intricacies of life in 21st-century Britain. Nowadays, the idea of believing in inborn, unchangeable identities has been discarded for the benefit of seeing identities and their constitutive aspects as performative and inherently variable[4]. Although there are also counterarguments against this kind of criticism (Childs and Williams 116), for the purposes of this thesis that deals with contemporary art forms the rigid 'here' vs. 'there' conception of his work cannot be neglected. Thirdly and most importantly, Said mostly emphasises the power relations in the colonial empire and in the aftermath of it, but does not suggest how to approach situations as they are presented in Gupta's plays, i.e. former colonial subjects moving to the West and reclaiming a position there. Nonetheless, the idea to break up heteronomous conceptions of foreign spaces and to approach them with an open mind, with the intention to let excluded groups speak for themselves, is ultimately rooted in Said's *Orientalism*, which is the reason for its inclusion in the present thesis.

[4] See Stuart Hall, e.g. *Questions of Cultural Identity* (2000), and Judith Butler, e.g. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1999).

Another theorist that enormously furthered post-colonial thinking is Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. By using an interdisciplinary approach (i.e. literary theory, feminism, Marxism, deconstructionism and psychoanalysis), she arrives at her "most common concern", which is "the position of the subject: the place from which someone addresses or conceives of an issue and formulates its areas of importance" (Childs and Williams 157). This idea of the location of an individual is also a central aspect when it comes to discussing the historical ways "in which imperialism has constructed narratives of history, geography, gender, and identity" (Childs and Williams 158). By introducing the theory of the subaltern in her essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?*[5], which cannot speak for itself, because the West in some way or another replaces its voice and represents it, Spivak draws attention to the complexities of trying to write or speak about (or for) formerly colonised spaces (Childs and Williams 163). She reminds researchers that "there is not an alternative history to be written from a subaltern position and that post-colonial critics must learn not to seek for the subaltern's voice but to point to the silence" (Childs and Williams 163f.). This idea of trying to portray others in a way that is not patronizing or overgeneralising shall also be kept in mind as an integral part of the theoretical mindset that will be used to analyse Gupta's stage productions. However, also Spivak's insightful concepts, which tell us a lot about how to approach the complex topics of identity politics and post-colonial power relations, are rooted in the post-colonial nations of Asia[6], they do not deal with encounters of former colonial citizens with 'native' Britons in Great Britain.

Another very influential researcher in the field of post-colonial studies is Homi K. Bhabha[7], whose theories, especially those dealing with the concepts of *hybridity* and the *Third Space*, have contributed substantially to the corpus of post-colonial thinking. It is Bhabha who, in contrast to the aforementioned theoreticians, goes one step further to also consider post-colonial encounters as hybrids in interstitial spaces (Bhabha 4) and not only takes into account the coloniser-colonised-perspective "to inform the aims of a theoretical perspective committed to strategies of resistance in the face of neo-colonial culture", as Childs and Williams (123) put it. According to Bhabha, "[t]hese 'in-between' spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea

[5] See Williams and Chrisman's reader 66ff.
[6] See her work *Other Asias* for more information on the post-colonial power relations in Asia.
[7] See his famous work *The Location of Culture* (1994).

of society itself" (2). The questions that concern Bhabha are summed up to the point by himself in the following paragraph:

> It is in the emergence of the interstices – the overlap and displacement of domains of difference – that the intersubjective and collective experiences of *nationness*, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated. How are subjects formed 'in-between', or in excess of, the sum of the 'parts' of difference (usually intoned as race/class/gender, etc.)? How do strategies of representation or empowerment come to be formulated in the competing claims of communities where, despite shared histories of deprivation and discrimination, the exchange of values, meanings and priorities may not always be collaborative and dialogical, but may be profoundly antagonistic, conflictual and even incommensurable? (Bhabha 2)

It is Bhabha who first theorised the highly complex situation of so-called second generation immigrants and their 'in-between-status' in the society they chose to move to and call their new home. Thereby, he, to some extent, broke down the seemingly clear distinction of colonial and post-colonial spheres and stressed what happened in the emerging hybrid spaces that he calls the *Third Spaces* (Bhabha 54f.). According to him, "[t]he social articulation of difference, from the minority perspective, is a complex, on-going negotiation that seeks to authorize cultural hybridities that emerge in moments of historical transformation", instead of seeing these encounters as "reflection[s] of *pre-given* ethnic or cultural traits set in the fixed tablet of tradition" (Bhabha 3). Childs and Williams (142), who refer to Bhabha, summarise in a very easily approachable way how Bhabha understands the term *Third Space*:

> Bhabha sees the Third Space as a place of agency and intervention because it is here that all cultural meaning is constructed, and in that sense located. The necessary Third Space shows that there is no original 'meaning' or cultural 'purity', and no evolutionary development of ideas, history, or culture; instead there is cultural difference. Culture is not an [sic] historically constituted set of authentic, self-evident traditions contributing to a definition and unification of a nation or a people, but a disciplinary practice of writing crossed by the temporal and spatial effects of *différance*! (Childs and Williams 142)

Thus, besides the shift of attention from the former colonies to the emerging multicultural, hybrid spaces of the turn of the century that are characterized by newly-emerging "'neo-colonial'" power relations (Bhabha 9), what can also be learned from Bhabha's concept is the emphasis on the performativity, discursiveness and negotiability of identities that will also prove to be essential in Brah's argumentation that is rooted in diaspora studies – a term closely related to a positive understanding of hybridity. Childs and Williams (210) summarise their thoughts on hybridity, diaspora and globalisation in the following way:

> Diaspora can be aligned with other by now familiar terms, such as hybridity, syncretism, and creolization, which promote both the liberating, pleasurable aspects of miscegenation, interrelationships and cultural difference together with a resistance to the monologic thought and oppression that colonialism represented.

However, Bhabha's theory of hybrid, interstitial cultures, which sounds very convincing and innovative in its approach, has not only been positively received, but also criticised for his complex, inapproachable style and his historical vagueness (Childs and Williams 143f.), but most importantly it is problematic for quite another reason, which lies at its very terminological heart, i.e. the idea and the origin of the term *hybridity* as such[8].

One of the most direct and straight-forward critics of the concept and term *hybrid(ity)* is John Hutnyk, who describes the term's primary use as "a convenient category at 'the edge' or contact point of diaspora, describing cultural mixture where the diasporized meets the host in the scene of migration" (Hutnyk 79). Soon after this vague introduction of the concept he raises first doubts and mentions that it is important to use the term carefully, because one should, on the one hand, be aware of its origins, which will be explained in the following and, on the other hand, of the diverse and sometimes even contrary ways the concept has been used by different researchers such as Paul Gilroy, Stuart Hall, Iain Chambers, Homi Bhabha and James Clifford (Hutnyk 80). The central question that one has to ask when working with the term *hybridity* is the following: "to what degree does the assertion of hybridity rely on the positing of an anterior 'pure' that precedes mixture?" (Hutnyk 81). To put it more bluntly: is it still possible in an academic environment that speaks of performative, unfixed identities to work with a term that is ultimately based on a formula that adds one seemingly pure cultural product with another one to arrive at the celebrated hybrid forms?[9] As Hutnyk (82) mentions, the concept itself "relies upon the proposition of non-hybridity or some kind of normative insurance". Is it still reasonable to speak of *hybridity* – a concept that in itself presupposes some form of anterior purity that adds up to what Bhabha has described as interstitial *Third Spaces*? Even more problematically, over the course of time the origins of the term in biology and agriculture became evident (mostly through their presentation in Robert Young's *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race*), which led to the demise of the uncritical celebration of hybridity in theory. Also Griffin (4) mentions that "Robert Young (1995) has shown how certain vocabularies, encapsulated in his work in and as the term 'hybridity', and commonly used in postcolonial theory, unselfconsciously and uncritically repeat ideas that informed the very coloniality which the new theories seek to critique." Not only Young (6), but also Hutnyk prominently elaborate on the term's etymology that is rooted in animal breeding, miscegenation and "the racialized discourse of nineteenth-century evolutionism" (Hutnyk 82). A word whose Latin roots denote the progeny of a tame sow and

[8] See Hutnyk, Anthias, Easthope and Alexander for a critical discussion of the term.
[9] See also Anthias 625ff.

a wild boar, seems to be very far away from the positively connoted theories Bhabha might have had in mind when writing his book *The Location of Culture*. Although the term *hybridity* also occurs in biology and agriculture and although it is used quite unproblematically in these fields, it quickly becomes very objectionable when, as has been mentioned before, referring to human beings and the category of race.

It is well known that the colonial British Empire forbade sexual encounters between colonising officers and the colonised. Hutnyk (90) relates this paranoia to "an anxiety and ambivalence about desire, sex, intermarriage and hegemonies of bloodstock". What ultimately motivated these racial discourses is the fear of losing power, the fear of losing one's profitable, hegemonic position in the colonial enterprise. Despite the biological fact that all human beings have roughly the same genes – a fact that is also stressed by Hylland Eriksen (42), who directly and rightly states that "[t]he classification of humanity into races, based on physical appearance, is arbitrary and scientifically uninteresting" – the discourses of race and colour have been used to create and further power relations between the West and the East, the colonial power centres and the corresponding exploited areas (which also includes the slavery industry and not only colonialism as such). Hutnyk (82f.) refers to Gilroy (250) and Hall (*When was the Postcolonial*) who have tried to distinguish their use of the term from its former biological and racial usages. However cleverly done, the etymological facts and the stale aftertaste cannot be talked away. The conclusion here can only be that one has to be aware of the term's origins when using it and, probably, one has "to give up the illusion that cultural and ethnic purity has ever existed, let alone provided a foundation for civil society" (Hutnyk 83) and to concede that hybridity has always existed. What is introduced and theorised as hybrid forms today, are the mixtures of cultures and imagined communities, as Anderson has described them in his well-known work *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1983), in which an ethnic or cultural community is characterised by certain distinguishable features (among them also languages), whereas other groups are recognisable for completely different markers of origin and identity. That groups of people, sometimes even whole nations, such as the British on the one hand, and Indian immigrants on the other hand, have never been homogenous groups themselves, as it is still argued in nationalist myths, is neglected. Consequently, Hutnyk (92) argues that "syncretism and hybridity are academic conceptual tools providing an alibi for lack of attention to politics, in a project designed to manage the cultural consequences of colonization and globalization." Although his criticism might be debatable, the inevitable conclusion to this dilemma can only be to try to be aware of the discourses that are historically and presently related to *hybridity*,

when working with it, and to stop to uncritically celebrate hybrid cultural forms without being aware of the political and conflictual potential they carry. Also researchers like Matthews (44), who also mentions the original "transgressive, non-essential, non-binary" meaning of the concept, have additionally pointed out how indiscriminately the term has often been used. Leaving aside the social, political and economical power relations, the concept also implies can bring about drastic simplifications and invented harmonious, homogenous hybrid spaces that do not exist in reality[10]. Thus, Matthews (44) argues that

> accounts of 'happy hybridity' which uncritically affirm disruptive strategies shift our focus from the body, thereby disregarding practices of embodiment […]. Obscured are the signifying practices of racialisation and sexualisation comprising less happy estrangements and boundary demarcations.

Also Yan (228) does not see hybrid spaces as purely "liberating gestures that have profoundly shifted the traditional boundaries of subjectivities", but rather as "problematic sites, where the globalized asymmetry of power relations in contemporary economic and cultural productions tends to be displaced or written off". Again, a critical use of the term *hybridity* is called for that does not deny "zones of exploitation" (Hutnyk 96), but includes them in a critical evaluation of cultural difference. Also Godiwala (*Hybridised Identities* 41) discusses the hybrid form of British Asian theatre and stresses that it is of utmost importance "to interrogate the still imperial hierarchies and hegemonies that determine Asian lives in Britain, and respond to the everyday experience of racism and exclusion."

Having considered the work of the most prominent post-colonial thinkers and the present discourse around the advantages and disadvantages of the term *hybridity* that proved food for thought for later, even more inclusive theories, in the final paragraphs of chapter 3.1. other essential terms shall be introduced as well as illuminated historically that will be unavoidable in the course of argumentation, namely *race*, *ethnicity* and *multiculturalism*.

The most important term that has caused great sufferings on the part of the discriminated is certainly *race*, a term that is nowadays seen as "an elastic category that can be easily defined and manipulated because of its lack of specificity or biological evidence" (Childs and Williams 189). Differences in language, culture and states of evolution were seen as evidence for the existence of races. Hylland Eriksen (42) recounts that "[u]ntil the 1930s or 1940s, it was commonly held that there are important genetic differences between human populations, that is 'racial differences', which account for some cultural variation". Any deviation in

[10] See Alexander (561) and Werbner (903) for a further elaboration on the problematic positive connotations of the term *hybridity*. See also Hutnyk (95) who includes an ironic statement about London as the cool, multicultural capital in his article, whose conflicts and sometimes highly violent culture clashes are intentionally concealed.

culture, language or behaviour from the so-called "imperial race" (Childs and Williams 190), i.e. the British in the case of colonised India, was used as part of the justification why 'natives' had to be excluded and disadvantaged. Childs and Williams (191) argue that "'[r]ace' was thereby used to justify slavery, excuse commercial exploitation, and bolster arguments maintaining the need for patriarchal imperialism." The people that are discriminated against are characterised by a "*negative difference*" (Childs and Williams 192), i.e. a visible marker that distinguishes them from the majority of the population. It seems important to mention here that although the idea of races has been discarded some time ago, most societies still face problems with racism and racial violence. What still plays an important role is the construction of race as a marker of difference and as an instrument of hegemonic power. The still prevalent phenomenon of *racialization*, which the Oxford English Dictionary defines as "[t]he process of making or becoming racist in attitude or behavior [or] the application of racist principles or criteria", needs to be countered despite the demise of the idea of human races. Although there is no biological evidence that races as such exist, the power that constructs these narratives is still being used to exclude groups of people from job opportunities, education and other paths in life. In addition to discrimination on the basis of skin colour Modood (66) mentions class as "a factor which contributes to racial discrimination and to racial disadvantage." In addition to that, he mentions that also cultural differences can be the cause of discrimination (an argument that will also be elaborated on in the following):

> While proponents of the concept of 'black' recognise how class is interrelated with race, they overlook how cultural differences can also disadvantage and be the basis of discrimination, e.g. in employment on the grounds of one's dress, dietary habits, or desire to take leave from work on one's holy days rather than those prescribed by the custom and practice of the majority community. And emphasis on discrimination against 'black' people systematically obscures the cultural antipathy to Asians (and, no doubt, others), how Asian cultures and religions have been racialised, and the elements of discrimination that Asians (and others) suffer. (Modood 67)

What is meant by the term 'black' in the excerpt cited above is also explained by Avtar Brah (13), who mentions that in the UK the label played a very versatile role in the course of the last few decades. In the following paragraph, she explains how the British 'black' political subject (i.e. almost every non-white member of an ethnic minority either from Africa, Asia or the Caribbean) came into being as a counter-discursive strategy against a hostile, white majority:

> The British 'black' political subject emerged as a signifier of the entangled racialised colonial histories of 'black' settlers of African, Asian and Caribbean descent, affirming a politics of solidarity against a racism centred around colour. The silent text of 'non-whiteness' operating as a common thematic within this discourse – despite the

> differential racialisation of these groups – served to galvanise an otherwise heterogeneous set of people. The condensation of the white/non-white dichotomy constructed certain commonalties of experience as people confronted racist practices in such diverse arenas as employment, education, housing, media, health and social services. Such relations of equivalence created the conditions in which a new politics of solidarity became possible. Although 'black' crystallized around 'white/non-white', it subverted the logic of this binary. Moreover, by addressing a wide range of diasporic experiences in their local and global specificity, the project foregrounded the politics of transnationality.

Thus, although immigrants of different ethnic communities suffered from different forms of discrimination, their overall exclusion from the hegemonic white discourse created solidarity among them. Also Alexander (554) mentions that "[t]hroughout the 1970s and the early years of the 1980s, Asian, African and Caribbean groups organized, mobilized and resisted racial disadvantage and discrimination under the banner of 'black'." However, the terminological uncertainty what 'black' actually meant and whether Asians could be addressed with that term was tackled after some time, because the British Asian population did not feel represented enough by the term *black* any more (Modood 69), which in the mindsets of the white population mostly refers to people of African or Caribbean origin. According to Alexander (556), "'[b]lack' as a symbolic unity now seems naïve and anachronistic, at once idealistic and reductively undesirable", because it negates differences within the 'black' community. Also Modood (70) comments that "[t]he hegemony of 'black' over the ethic/racial identities was doomed." Already the Asian community is highly diverse in itself; to refer to Caribbeans, Africans and Asians alike with one term seems impossible today, in a world that is increasingly connected and globalised, but at the same time also more and more diversified and multicultural. However unifying the forces of globalism seem, the global waves of migration and travel simultaneously cause diversification within national cultures. Categorising all the three different minorities – Caribbeans, Africans and Asians – as 'black', just because they share the experience of being outcast and racialised in Britain, can only result in oversimplification and the negation of lines of resistance and contradiction within the respective communities.

Nowadays, the term 'Asian' is not only used in Britain to refer to the ethnic community, but also as a political category in official forms and documents (Alexander 555). The emergence of Asian studies institutes at some universities in Britain also points towards a diversification in theorising the British 'black' community[11]. Alexander (552) mentions that after Black and Asian minorities had received different forms of address, "Black/African-Caribbean identities

[11] For an impressively long list of journals and information on Asian Studies see *The Bibliography of Asian Studies*.

have been theorized through the 'politics of difference', whereas Asian groups have been transfixed through attributions of 'cultural difference'." What she means is that black/African-Caribbean communities were often discussed and theorised regarding social inequalities and discrimination, "whereas studies of Asian communities pored endlessly over the fascinating cultural features of arranged marriages, kinship systems and religious rituals" (Alexander 556f.). Also Modood (76) speaks of a "blinding culturalism" in British Asian Studies that brings about marginalising exoticisation. Alexander (557) argues that this divide between race (African-Caribbean communities) and ethnicity/culture (Asian communities) is the reason for Asians being largely overlooked, when it comes to political and social injustice or violence. Only in the 2000s have studies in this area become more popular and cultural productions of Asians more visible within Britain[12]. Before that, "Asian identities have been defined […] as static, bounded, internally homogenous and externally impenetrable" (557f.), in contrast to African communities, which are characterised by performativity and creativity according to Alexander (557). This othering and exoticising of the "mysterious [and] incomprehensible" (Alexander 558) Asian community also caused its members' partial exclusion from social events within the hegemonic discourse and an increasing "stifling demand for authenticity" (Alexander 558) within their group that can never be fulfilled. In today's scenario Asian communities are "placed outside the boundaries of this imagined [British] culture – indeed, providing the 'Other' against which this inclusive 'cool Britannia' multiracial (and barely multicultural, unless commercially viable) society defines itself" (Alexander 558). Also Godiwala (*Hybridised Identities* 34) speaks of this demand for authentic rituals and traditions within the British Asian community, when she states that "[t]he British-Asian has a diasporic obsession with all diasporic traditions and rituals 'authentically' Indian, and, in the pursuit of the preservation of these, fossilises them." The ultimate result of these ongoing efforts to maintain and authentically reproduce one's culture, when being confronted with "the hostile exclusivity of the host culture" (Godiwala 34) is the "collective fantasy" of the Bollywood film industry, as Godiwala (34) explicates: "Quite like the Hollywood film, Bollywood marginalises its other discourses and similarly plays a major role in homogenising behaviour and attitudes as the dominant ideology becomes pervasive through Indian culture."

Keeping in mind these distinctive cultural products, it does make sense to discuss black/African-Caribbean and Asian traditions and cultures separately. However, such a strict and nowadays increasingly ossified distinction does not help to further intercultural

[12] See Gupta's plays and the productions of British Asian Theatres like Kali and Tara Arts.

communication, but rather hinders it and additionally conceals cultural controversies[13]. The conclusion that follows from an argumentation like this is that one needs "to take difference seriously, to refuse to accept either the naturalization of cultural identity or the celebratory marginality of the 'politics of difference', which from seemingly opposed perspectives serve equally to obscure the complex relations of power that construct difference and keep Britain's black communities trapped within it" (Alexander 568). Artists like Gupta are, as it could be argued, the leading figures of such a more inclusive form of British Asianness that, just as Gupta has said, is proud of its traditions, but at the same time cannot be reduced to it. Ideally, Asianness in Britain today is not an essential, unchanging, homogenous set of cultural beliefs any more, but inherently more flexible and less exclusive, while at the same time aware of the disruptive lines that run across it (Alexander 559). As it is argued in the main chapters of this thesis, Gupta's plays on the one hand celebrate a positively connoted multiculturalism and hybridity (for instance in *Meet the Mukherjees*), whereas they also focus, on the other hand, on violence and brutal clashes within one or between different cultures (for example in *Gladiator Games*). They show that it is possible to describe complex, multiracial and multiethnic spheres without being essentialising, homogenising and unrealistically harmonising, but rather critically aware of the existing problems and cultural complexities in an ever-shrinking globalised world. In conclusion, I would argue that since the publication of Alexander's article in 2004, Asianness has become not only more visible in Britain, but also more objectively and more open-mindedly theorised in academia "as a discursively produced construct" (Alexander 565). Gupta herself also comments on the changed terms of address for people of Indian descent like her:

> Yeah, yeah, the rules change, don't they? When I first started writing we were all called black and then we were all Asian or black Asian or Afro-Caribbean or African and now there's this thing, which is 'Muslim writers'. Now Muslim writers don't come under Asian and so where does that leave us who are a) not Muslim and b) not religious? (Gupta in Billingham 208)

By mentioning religious belonging Gupta further complicates the discourse of race and adds another highly complex and controversial topic to the already established classifications, i.e. faith. Since 9/11 the topic of Muslim extremism, religion in Asian communities and the role it plays in 21st-century British Asian immigrants' lives is hotly debated – both in academic journals[14] and journalistic articles[15]. Alexander (564) polemically calls the Islam and its

[13] See the Bollywood film industry and its colourful, exoticised, non-violent and idealised versions of what they sell as Indian reality.
[14] See Shannahan on British-Muslim youth identities and Eade and Garbin on Bangladeshi Muslims in Britain.
[15] See, for example, the webpage of *The Guardian*, which uses *Islam* as an overarching category that features articles related to the Muslim world.

different movements "the latest object of academic desire", which mostly is not considered "a resource but an obstacle […] to integration and the success that is thereby guaranteed". This ascription of very negative stereotypes to believers in the Muslim faith results in a hostile reality, in which Muslims "become the ultimate 'Other', transfixed through the racialization of religious identity to stand at the margins: undesired, irredeemable, alien" (Alexander 564). Also Griffin (*Contemporary Black and Asian Women Playwrights* 29) points to the changed situation for Muslims in a post-9/11 world: "As that terrorist attack was associated with Muslims, so in the aftermath of that attack did people of Asian appearance find themselves vilified if suspected of being Muslim, and a new differentiation among Asians – between Hindus and Muslims – arose in western cultures." Only recently, namely on 3 June 2013, the *Guardian* (Andreou) featured an article about an English actor that had to grow a beard for a role he was to perform, which apparently made him "look like a Muslim" and caused him to be racially (or religiously? or culturally?) insulted. Still to this day, racializations and stereotyping hurt innocent individuals of a differing outward appearance that are sweepingly blamed for bombings and assassinations committed by extremists that they have nothing to do with – regardless of whether they are part of an ethnic minority or the mainstream population as in the example recounted above. Quite obviously, the time has not yet come to celebrate 'happy hybridity' (Matthews 44).

Another term that is related to concepts of race, religion and culture and that is crucial when it comes to analysing the relationships of individuals from various backgrounds is *ethnicity*. Seemingly more 'politically correct' than the already previously discarded term *race*, it also comprises ambivalent aspects that need to be kept in mind when working with it (Anthias 629ff.). In a scenario where culture is defined as "signifying practices" (Brah 235) and not as a fixed entity, "[c]ultural specificities do not in and of themselves constitute social division. It is the meaning attributed to them, and how this meaning is played out in the economic, cultural and political domains, that marks whether or not specificity emerges as a basis of social division" (Brah 235). Thus, "[e]thnicity emerges out of shared socio-economic, cultural and political conditions and is played out in the construction of *cultural narratives* about these conditions which invoke notions of distinctive genealogies and particularities of historical experience" (Brah 238). Ethnicity is therefore nothing that can be defined without closely inspecting what people see or characterise as distinctive ethnic traits vis-à-vis other groups. There is no definition of ethnicity that would work in every culture, rather, "*ethnicity is best understood as a mode of narrativising the everyday life world in and through processes of boundary formation*" (Brah 241). Even more importantly, Brah (241) stresses

that "'ethnicity' is no less or more 'real' than class or gender, or any other marker of differentiation. What is at issue is the specificity of power that configures and is exercised in a given articulation of these differentiations." Modood (71) follows the same kind of thinking and mentions a necessary "critique of 'ethnic absolutism'", which is "the idea that ethnic identities are simply 'given', are static and ahistorical and do not (or should not) change under new circumstances or by sharing social space with other heritages and influences." What should therefore be kept in mind when analysing cultural products such as Gupta's plays is not the simple fact that, for instance, a woman on stage is wearing a sari, but what meanings she attributes to that sari, whether she uses it as a means of distinguishing herself from the nativised population around her or whether it has a myriad of other meanings that are more important to her. Thus, the term ethnicity is an essential one, as it describes what is an integral part of community life, namely culture, but it should be used attentively. It should be kept in mind that the self-ascriptions of individuals belonging to an ethnic group are what counts and not the cultural differences that the mainstream population, constructed as the superior 'natives', creates and enforces to set themselves apart from people that they refer to as 'foreigners' and the unwanted other.

Another concept that should not be forgotten in the context of introducing plays that describe complex, 21st-century British realities is *multiculturalism*, a concept that has also been enhanced by the state after assimilationist politics "expecting 'immigrants' to submerge into some imagined and imaginary British national culture" (Brah 229) had been discarded. Although largely positively connoted, the term has, according to Brah (230), been used "as synonym for 'minority cultures.' It is essentially a discourse about the 'Ethnic Other' – one which *ethnicises* ethnicity. It conceals 'othering' processes around class, gender, and so on." To put it differently, the concept of multiculturalism may, if not used circumspectly, reduce groups of people to their cultural otherness, but does not perceive them as also being characterised by discourses such as class and gender. Their individuality is neglected in favour of presenting them as exotic, fascinating others. In addition to ascribing fixed, exoticised identities to people of different ethnic backgrounds, multiculturalism was also adopted as a state policy in the field of education. It was, however, often criticised as being unable to prevent or minimise so-called "'institutional racism'" (Brah 230), which is still a problem in 21st- century Britain, as Gupta's *Gladiator Games* powerfully demonstrates.

Taking into account the theoretical context that has been presented above, one can venture the following introductory remarks: most of Gupta's plays are not set in post-colonial countries

and newly emerged states, but, on the contrary, at the former heart of the colonial empire itself, i.e. London. Except for one of her very early plays, *Skeleton*, which is set in India and which made theatre critics notice Tanika Gupta for the first time, her plays are, as one could argue, very consciously set in contemporary Britain and not in the former colonies. From various angles, they try to depict what experiences the members of different diasporic communities have made in the course of their journeys and in their newly set up lives on another continent. However, also the discourses that influence the lives of indigenous British people are not neglected. It seems to be important to Gupta to subvert the popular distinction of insider vs. outsider, of native vs. foreigner and to present the ethnic minorities' experiences as part of what being British means today. She seems to suggest that upholding classifications that follow the trajectories of class, gender, nationality, ethnicity and race will not help to create a tolerant, accepting and welcoming space of living together, but rather work against that. Still, as Britain today is not a place of complete harmony and happiness, matters such as racial and domestic violence need to be addressed in order to raise awareness and cause changes to happen (see esp. *Gladiator Games*). It is exactly this complex area of assigning heteronomous labels to individuals and their communities which are reduced to being some kind of 'other', and of opposing efforts of self-determination of these groups that try to make themselves understood that shall be dealt with in the next section, in which a theory, namely Avtar Brah's approach to diaspora studies, will be presented that seems well-suited as an analytical framework for addressing prominent issues in Gupta's plays.

3.2. Conceptualizing the Diasporic Experience

As has been mentioned in section 3.1., it is important to choose an approach for providing a context and analysing Gupta's plays that is capable of including a broad variety of the discourses that influence and determine present-day life in Great Britain, and more specifically its multicultural capital London. As stated above, not only the migratory experience per se shall be discussed, but also how native Britons react and consciously contribute to the changing society around them. Too general assumptions about first and second generation migration shall in the following be disregarded in favour of stressing the individual experience with its own very specific discourses that influence it. I would argue that it is exactly this focus on the individual and its inclusiveness that make Avtar Brah's theories, as they are presented in her monograph *Cartographies of Diaspora. Contesting Identities* (1996), so appropriate for analysing Gupta's plays. Also Stuart Hall praises Brah's "diasporic reasoning" (100), which he considers "an approach which is sensitive to the always already contradictory condition of 'reality'" (100).

Interestingly enough, not only Bhabha (*Location of Culture*, introduction: x) and Spivak[16] bring to the fore their own biographies in their works, but also Brah (1ff.) justifies and explains the inspiration for her works and theories by her place of origin and ethnicity, i.e. Ugandan Asian. Already in the beginning of her monograph, Brah explicitly states her aims in the following way: "I analyse the economic and social conditions marking Asian experience, highlighting the interplay of state policy, political and popular discourse, and a variety of other institutional practices in the construction of 'Asian' as 'post-colonial' other." It is precisely this construction of Asian immigrants as the unknown, foreign 'other' that also plays a crucial role in Gupta's works, because this ascription of certain stereotypical characteristics to groups of 'others' can unfortunately very often create racism and social exclusion (be it the job market or other aspects of daily life). Brah (11) also lists the still prevalent racism as one of the reasons why books such as hers are still needed today. Whether they deal with the exclusionary mechanisms among young people, as it is the case in *White Boy* and *Fragile Land*, or even more violently among young offenders (*Gladiator Games*) or within the family (*Meet the Mukherjees*), all of Gupta's plays present groups of people that are from various different (not necessarily Indian/Asian) ethnic backgrounds and cultures. Their encounters are characterised throughout by lines of in- and exclusion, that were and are still to a certain point based on concepts revolving around race or, more generally, racialised identities. Brah (13) argues that in the British context, the term 'black' was initially used "as a signifier of the entangled racialised colonial histories of 'black' settlers of African, Asian and Caribbean descent, affirming a politics of solidarity against a racism centred around colour", a fact that was also presented in the preceding chapter. On the basis of "non-whitness" (Brah 13) very diverse sets of people came to solidarise with each other in order to ward off racism as a collective, which brought about strengthening and unifying experiences among very diverse groups of immigrants, a "new politics of solidarity" as Brah (13) puts it. Over the course of time, however, the term 'black' fell out of use in academia, as was argued in 3.1., because its hegemonic position became obvious, as it mainly denoted and was associated with people of African or Caribbean decent, but not Asians, who were neglected and underrepresented. In the course of her argumentation, Brah makes the reader aware that the patterns of "differential racialisation" (15), which is the exclusion immigrants suffer from, cannot be described in a unitary way. She casts doubt on "binarised forms of thinking" (15) and tries to explore at the same time "how different racialised groups are positioned differentially *vis-à-vis* one another" (15). But how does this approach distinguish Brah from

[16] See Childs and Williams 158f. for more information on Spivak's origin and upbringing.

the afore-mentioned other post-colonial researchers? It can be argued that it is exactly her way of conceptualising diaspora that makes her theories more flexible and inclusive than, for example, Bhabha's theory of hybridity, which is, as has been argued, still to some extent based on a dichotomous conception of (post-)colonial power relations and additionally problematic for etymological reasons.

Before explaining in more detail what makes Brah's approach so special, the term *diaspora* itself shall briefly be explained. According to Brah (181) "[t]he word derives from the Greek – *dia*, 'through', and *speirein*, 'to scatter'[,] […] [h]ence the word embodies a notion of a centre, a locus, a 'home' from where the dispersion occurs. It invokes images of multiple journeys." Brah also mentions the "dispersion of the Jews after the Babylonian exile" (181), but she discards the Jewish diaspora as a 'model type' for her theories, but rather stresses that she understands the term more broadly. She states that "to speak of late twentieth-century diasporas is to take such ancient diasporas as a point of departure rather than necessarily as 'models'[.]" Thus, an inherent continuity between different diasporic constructs is implied that is, however, not reducible to one specific historical diasporic formation like the Jewish diaspora, but rather freely associated with it. As reasons for diasporic migration movements Brah (182) lists conquests or colonisation, slavery, conflicts or war and the global flows of labour. She cautions, however, against falling into the trap of seeing diasporic communities as fixed, unitary entities that do not change over the course of time. Brah (183) states that "[e]ach such diaspora is an interweaving of multiple travelling; a text of many distinctive and, perhaps, even disparate narratives." This also holds true of the South Asian diaspora that is at the core of Gupta's plays. The term "*confluence of narratives*", which Brah (183) introduces, very aptly describes that there is no such thing as *the* South Asian diaspora in Britain, but that it rather constitutes a very complex, multi-layered construct that not only characterises its members as being of South Asian origin, but also as women and men, children and elderly people, higher or lower class. The emerging individuals are characterised by various different discourses such as gender, age, class and religion and cannot be reduced to their place of origin or their ethnicity. This belief in performative, ever-changing identities is also apparent in Gupta's plays, which feature complex and multifaceted 21st-century characters that all in some way or another have experienced diasporic realities.

The characteristics and benefits of working with an approach stemming from diaspora studies shall now be more thoroughly explained. According to Brah (16), "the concept of diaspora offers a critique of discourses of fixed origins while taking account of a homing desire, as distinct from a desire for a 'homeland'. This distinction is important, not least because not all

diasporas sustain an ideology of 'return'." In contrast to the term *hybridity*, which rather evokes ideas of harmony and cultural exchange, the term diaspora or diasporic experience is aware of and implies a lot more: movement across politically constructed borders, painful parting from the homeland and the desire to find a new place, where one can feel at home (with the possible but not obligatory option to return to one's homeland as well) and the wish to succeed economically as well as socially (Brah 178). Brah's theoretical concept is neither naïvely celebrating harmony, nor is it only focussed on violent clashes between cultures. I would argue that it is a well-balanced and realistic concept of how to approach multicultural spaces such as contemporary London. Brah's main concept is the so-called "diaspora space" (16), which is explained as follows:

> The concepts of *diaspora*, *border*, and *politics of location* are immanent, and together they mark conceptual connections for historicised analyses of contemporary trans/national movements of people, information, cultures, commodities and capital. This site of immanence inaugurates a new concept, namely *diaspora space*. (Brah 16)

In contrast to the above-mentioned researchers, Brah metaphorically speaking goes one step further and does not only include the groups of people in her analysis that have experienced some sort of displacement or migration themselves, but also the 'indigenous', 'native' people to whose country the former have migrated. More pointedly, "[t]he diaspora space is the site where *the native is as much a diasporian as the diasporian is a native*" (Brah 209). If we keep this thought in mind, the essence of her theory is very concisely summarised in the following paragraph:

> Diaspora space is the intersectionality of diaspora, border, and dis/location as a point of confluence of economic, political, cultural and psychic processes. It addresses the global condition of culture, economics and politics as a site of 'migrancy' and 'travel' which seriously problematises the subject position of the 'native'. My central argument is that diaspora space as a conceptual category is 'inhabited' not only by those who are constructed and represented as indigenous. In other words, the concept of *diaspora space* (as opposed to that of diaspora) includes the entanglement of genealogies of dispersion with those of 'staying put'. (Brah 181)

Interestingly enough, Brah (191) draws attention to the fact that diasporic subjects have to cope with a very complex and unjust form of discrimination. In their former homeland they were not accepted because of their status as inferior "'colonial Native[s]'" (Brah 191) and then, in contrast, having migrated to the centre of colonial power, "in Britain the 'metropolitan Native' is constructed as superior" (Brah 191) and the aforementioned migrants are doubly discriminated against for different reasons. Brah (191) rightly states that "nativist discourse is mobilised in both cases, but with opposite evaluation of the group constructed as the 'native'." Exactly because of being aware of historical as well as contemporary lines of

discrimination, Brah's theoretical concept is not only well-suited to describe the intercultural and mixed race casts and settings Gupta usually works with in her plays, but it also mirrors the playwright's attitude towards labelling and being put into boxes. Her refusal to be categorised as an Asian writer goes hand in hand with Brah's refusal to uphold a distinction between foreigners/immigrants and natives/the indigenous population. In twenty-first century London identities are not stable, but fluid and multiple aspects of a person's identity might constantly or temporarily play a role in the construction of his or her self image. In his book *Questions of Cultural Identity* Stuart Hall, who, as has been pointed out above, speaks very approvingly about Brah's theories and who often follows the same lines of thought as Brah, also mentions that identities

> are never unified and, in late modern times, increasingly fragmented and fractured; never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions. They are subject to a radical historicization, and are constantly in the process of change and transformation. (4)

For Brah (195) herself, an "identity is always plural and in process, even when it might be construed or represented as fixed." Thus, deprecatingly calling somebody a *Muslim* in a post 9/11 and 7/7 world[17], ascribing fixed identities to someone and bereaving him/her of his/her right of self-determination and neglecting other aspects of his/her performative self, can lead to traumatising experiences on behalf of the 'othered' individuals as well as to disseminating racial and cultural stereotypes in what is constructed as the native population. Because Brah's theories abstain from generalising statements that reduce individuals to some state of 'otherness', they have been discussed in such great detail here.

Thus, it is not surprising that also Gabriele Griffin chose Brah's theories as a background for her highly relevant book *Contemporary Black and Asian Women Playwrights in Britain* (2003). It is also Griffin who stresses that the playwrights discussed by her can neither be seen as part of the postcolonial nor intercultural nor world theatre scene (Griffin 2), but as belonging to the British literary tradition, as artists like Gupta "were born and educated in Britain" (Griffin 1) and because these theoretical approaches do not "engage with the work of those who migrated to Britain or who are the children of such migrants, now living in Britain" (Griffin 2). In contrast to world theatre studies and the post-colonial theories that were presented in 3.1., also Griffin (7) argues that "Brah's conceptualization privileges the here and now, and it is this which makes her theoretical framework relevant here". It is Brah's idea that the diasporic subject as well as the 'native' are affected by the movements and travels in our

[17] 11 September 2001: bombings of the World Trade Center in New York; 7 July 2005: bombings on the London subway.

increasingly globalised world that makes it so suitable for this thesis, and also for Griffin's publication. It is in these diasporic spaces that people from various backgrounds meet and that they perform diverse identities that help them to conceptualise who they are. By trying to test where the boundaries to the imagined and constructed 'Other' start, these diasporic people realise who they are not and which role they want to perform in the new surroundings. Consequently, Griffin does not discuss writers active in the former colonies, who might also contribute to the ethnic community's discourses about Asianness in Britain, but, on the contrary, Black and Asian women playwrights "*of* the centre" (7) themselves. She contextualises her choice of dramatists by stating the following:

> Their [The immigrants'] arrival into Britain shattered the presumed dichotomy between Britain and its colonial 'others', creating the beginning of a transformation of what 'being British' means, a shift encoded, *inter alia*, in the various successive immigration and race relations acts designated to regulate the collapse between 'margins' and 'centre' as a consequence of migration […]. (Griffin 8)

The artists analysed by Griffin all have the same characteristics as Gupta: foreign background, but British education and life experience. Exactly such artists live in Bhabha's interstitial spaces and write about what happens there, which is why they are so interesting. According to Griffin (9) this body of work "has escaped […] attention […], because it does not readily fall into the remit of postcolonial, intercultural, or world theatre. The latter frequently perpetuate historical divisions by exploring 'the other' as *other*." What she argues, in contrast, is "that although the plays under consideration bear the mark of those divisions, the work itself is produced by writers who do not necessarily view themselves as 'other' within Britain and who are now claiming their place at the table of British high culture" (Griffin 9). Although she does not explicitly mention Gupta in this context, I would argue that she is one of the best candidates to fit into this category. To make her point clearer, Griffin (9) also goes into more detail as to why the mentioned women do not belong to the exclusively migrant theatre scene:

> Their points of reference – in theatrical terms – are thus not the rituals, performances, or theatre works that are prevalent in the West Indies, parts of Africa, India, or Pakistan, but those of contemporary British theatre, [which is why they] should be viewed as part of British theatre now.

Interestingly enough, the work of the discussed playwrights not only "bears the signatures of the multi-locationality that informs their lives" (Griffin 15), but also "provide[s] performing/acting opportunities for women from diverse ethnic groups who are still rarely seen on the British stage" (Griffin 15). Not only does the work which Griffin presents in her book, discuss topics like race, ethnicity and colour, but it also "engage[s] with historical and contemporary social and political issues that impact on their communities in particular ways,

not only in Britain but also in the places from which they migrated to Britain. Migration thus features both as a historic and as a contemporary phenomenon" (Griffin 16). Not only are the writers and often also their characters influenced by diasporic movement, but also by their consequent bi-culturality, which is "the question of how to negotiate effectively between two cultures with frequently very different norms, values, and demands", as Griffin (29) points out. As the aims of Griffin's monograph closely resemble the aims of the present thesis, which in more detail discusses the work of one of the playwrights mentioned in her book, i.e. Tanika Gupta, they shall be quoted here as a concluding remark to this chapter: Griffin (35) discusses

> a body of work by Black and Asian women playwrights which interrogates the colour regimes, social codes, and cultural imperatives that govern British culture. The invisibilization of that body of work in (feminist) theatre history replicates and reinforces the marginalization of Black and Asian women's work in British culture. This volume attempts to intervene in that process, arguing implicitly for the need to establish a critical and theoretical apparatus to accompany the publication of works by Black and Asian women playwrights in Britain.

How the themes of race, violence, history, sex, gender, class and age, which are so central to both Brah's (more theoretical, sociological and cultural) and Griffin's (more literary) reasoning, are featured in Gupta's plays will be at the core of this thesis. All of Gupta's plays available in print were classified into one of the subchapters of chapter 4 according to their most important thematic trajectory. In some cases, what the central theme is might be debatable, but in the case of very new plays that were up to the point of the composition of this text only sparsely discussed in reviews the categorisation was made according to the aspect that especially attracted my attention, in the case of older plays, the aspect that was prominently discussed in secondary literature was chosen as a means of classification.

4. The Plays of Tanika Gupta

4.1. Choice of Texts

The texts that will be presented in this chapter have been chosen, because they are Gupta's original works. The adaptations *Hobson's Choice* (2003), *The Country Wife* (2004), *Great Expectations* (2011) and the co-written work *Catch* ([2007] with the co-authors Stella Feehily, April de Angelis, and Chloe Moss) were excluded. In addition, also Gupta's early plays that were not available in print could not be considered, as it is impossible to arrive at convincing, academic conclusions about a text just by relying on sparse secondary material and the opinion of other theatregoers without having had access either to a performance of the play or its script. For the same reasons of inaccessibility, also Gupta's work for TV (writing scripts

for series) and the BBC radio plays could not be included in this thesis. Thus, the analysis of the twelve discussed plays will necessarily be a text-based one. Although the discussion of the different productions of the plays all over Great Britain might lead to additional insights about Gupta's plays and her conception of modern theatre, and although the importance of performance in theatre should not be belittled, it is impossible to go back in time and watch a play as part of the audience at that time, in that place. However, if special theatrical devices were used on stage that heavily influenced the overall message of the play or if one production was especially scandalous or memorable, reviews from British newspapers will be consulted to try to include the performative aspects connected to the playwright's work as well.

Having discarded all the inaccessible plays and adaptations as well as the radio plays and her TV work, the pieces that remain are the works that have made Gupta well-known and famous in the English/British theatre scene. As has been mentioned at the end of the previous chapter, each play was allocated to one of the subsequent thematic areas of *(sexual, generational and domestic) relationships, youth culture, race and violence,* and *history and colonial relations*. In the following, an attempt will be made to elaborate on the thematic core of the plays. However, not only content shall play a role in the forthcoming analysis, but also form, as it is the combination of these two aspects that makes new writing so special and compelling. Sierz (*Rewriting the Nation* 47ff.) defines new British theatrical writing by using the following guiding principles in his book that distinguish it from older, less innovative forms of theatre: "[d]istinctive and original" (49ff.), "[r]elevant and resonant" (54ff.), outstanding "[f]orm and content" (59ff.) relationship and "[s]timulating and provocative" (65ff.). He mentions that *new* not only means written by young playwrights, but also "being contemporary, original and somehow virtuous" (see Sierz, *Rewriting the Nation* 48) as far as language, content, form and social relevance are concerned. It is not surprising that Gupta is mentioned several times in his book, because her writing, as will be shown, fulfils many of his criteria. In the following, the analysis of every play will be interwoven with a brief summary, as the plays' content might not be so widely known and as it is important to understand the complex, intergenerational and interethnic as well as intercultural relationships of Gupta's characters. Within the subchapters the plays will be discussed in chronological order of their publication, but as the structural principle of this thesis is a thematic and not a temporal one, within each section one can find early as well as very recent plays concerned with a specific topic, which makes it easy to track Gupta's fields of interests and development over the course of her dramatic career.

4.2. Relationships and the issues of AGE, SEX and the FAMILY

4.2.1. Introduction

The first topic discussed is also the broadest and vaguest one – relationships. This subchapter is not only thematically speaking a very wide one, it also consists of more plays than the other subsections. After some careful consideration, however, it turned out that splitting up the plays *The Waiting Room* (2000), *Sugar Mummies* (2006), *Meet the Mukherjees* (2008), *Wah! Wah! Girls* (2012) and *Mind Walking* (2013) into different sub-categories would not make much sense, as they all in their own way deal with different and often difficult relationships at their centre. Despite the fact that plays like *Inside Out*, *Fragile Land* and *White Boy* also contain interesting relationships between family members or friends, they were excluded from this subcategory, because their focus and angle of presentation is a more specific one: youth culture and the way in which young adults deal with their multicultural and often racist surroundings. Because the three plays are in many ways very similar they were accorded their own subcategory. In contrast, the plays presented in this chapter revolve around the general concept of living together as a family without focussing specifically on its younger members. Nonetheless, the way the central social unit is presented in the five chosen plays is by no means always the same: just like the changing social realities in 21st-century Britain also the representation of the family in the plays varies considerably. Whereas *The Waiting Room*, *Meet the Mukherjees* and *Mind Walking* are about conflicts and the consequent attempts to (re-)establish harmony within the family circle, *Wah! Wah! Girls* and *Sugar Mummies* present attempts of breaking out of traditions or the daily routine. Although the formerly clear concept of the nuclear family becomes increasingly varied in the globalised, accelerated world described in Gupta's plays, it still seems to be the case that all the characters – be they young or old, men or women – look for attachment figures that they can rely on and consider a safe haven in all the complexities of their surrounding world. Also Sierz (*Rewriting the Nation* 163) mentions the substantial changes that the concept of the family has undergone in the first decade of the 2000s (which are then reflected in modern theatrical productions): "If the traditional family was dead, the new extended families developed eye-wateringly complex ways, with a plethora of relationships, from single motherhood to multiple varieties of step-parenthood." Focussing on the dramatic output that tried to process these changes in society, he adds that in the last ten years "new writing rediscovered the family play" and that British theatre became interested again in "conflicts between generations, divided loyalties and emotional density" (Sierz, *Rewriting the Nation* 164).

Thus, the positive picture of the family as a safe haven in an ever-changing world cannot always be painted – families are also places where longstanding conflicts are carried out and, at best, resolved. That family feuds and problems like missing fathers or abusive and offensive family members do not always vanish into thin air, is evident, mostly perhaps in the plays focussed on youth cultures that will be discussed in the following chapter. Also Griffin (*Contemporary Asian and Women Playwrights* 231) speaks of the importance of family-related issues in the work of contemporary Asian women playwrights in Britain, when she states that the "family functions as a site of oppression, is vulnerable to the effects of diaspora, displacement, and migration, and ultimately is sustained more effectively, and sometimes devastatingly, in the imaginery than in reality." As her statement suggests, relationships and families are increasingly diversified. The same holds true for the relations that will be discussed in this chapter: they are (quite palpably and problematically) sexual and exploitative (*Sugar Mummies*), inter-generational (*The Waiting Room, Mind Walking* and *Wah! Wah! Girls*) as well as inter-ethnic and 'inter-racial' (*Meet the Mukherjees*). In addition to that, also the re-negotiation of gender roles in the family often plays a role in Gupta's works. How all these different discourses interrelate and how they are intrinsically linked will be analysed in some detail, as the fictional characters' lives are complicated by the diasporic experience, just as Griffin (231) states, and by the fact that their families are often spread across more than one country, indeed more than one continent. Family disputes and the struggle for a self-defined, non-essential, changeable identity have to be fought out, while trying to cope with the surrounding diasporic realities. Although these plays are not overtly political, it will quickly become obvious that the well-known slogan of the second wave feminists is still topical today: the private and personal is always also political[18].

4.2.2. The Waiting Room (2000)

The first play that shall be discussed in connection with the topic of family and relationships is *The Waiting Room* (henceforth in quotes: *WR*), which was not only Gupta's first big stage play, but also the piece that "helped [her] to establish [her] reputation as a writer for the stage", as Billingham (208) states. In addition, the play also "marked a transition in her work in terms of setting – moving from India to Britain, where her subsequent plays are all located" (Griffin, *Gupta* 224). As regards content, the play presents the life of a contemporary British Indian family, in which the mother, Priya, suddenly dies at the age of 53. Sadly enough, the play is autobiographically inspired, because by writing it, Gupta tried to process "the death of

[18] See Rampton for more information on the three waves of feminism.

her father and his history of immigration" (Griffin, *Gupta* 227). *The Waiting Room* was first performed on 25 May 2000 at the Cottesloe Theatre (Griffin, *Gupta* 227), which is an additional auditorium of the highly prestigious National Theatre, of which Gupta was writer-in-residence from 2000 to 2001 (Griffin, *Contemporary Black and Asian Women Playwrights* 26). In the above cited interview with Billingham (208), Gupta in a very humorous way comments on the importance of *The Waiting Room* in her life:

> I was totally fazed by the attention and glamour of it all – of having a play produced at the Cottesloe Theatre. I think I drove up and down Waterloo Bridge about fifteen times to see my name flash up and off on the 'concret box', which is terribly sad, but I did later discover that more famous writers than me had all done the same thing, except that some of them hadn't got a car and so went up and down on the bus! (*Laughs*.)

Generally speaking, the play was well-received – "a career highpoint, enjoyed by bluerinses as well as by Asian audiences", in Sierz's (*Woman of Achievement* 20) words. Also the well-known theatre critic Michael Billington (*Look Back in Death* 22) speaks favourably of the piece, although he quite patronisingly reminds Gupta that she "still has plenty to learn about drama's need for narrative tension and orchestrated climaxes." However, he concludes that "her play catches touchingly the sense of disappointment that runs through most lives as well as the possibility of spiritual redemption."[19] In contrast, Taylor (18) states that Gupta's dialogues lack the "intimate mood" that would be needed for the topics she introduces and Woddis (21) mentions that *The Waiting Room* is a "curiously static" play, as its form is not really innovative: it consists of two acts that include rising action and a climax towards the end of the play – with Priya being able to solve all her problems. Although Woddis' criticism of the play's form seems reasonable and understandable, her conclusion does not do justice to Gupta's vivid portrayal of lives that are characterised by the diasporic lines of ex- and inclusion: "The Waiting Room still offers a poignant reminder of ritual's importance, both to impoverished westerners and those caught betwixt and between, in cultural no man's land." It is exactly this kind of reductionist terminology of 'us' vs. 'them' that shall be avoided in the following and that is the reason why a post-colonial theory context is needed to analyse Gupta's plays. Essentialist ideas of reducing Gupta's characters to belonging to either one culture or the other, and thereby ossifying these cultures as fixed, unchanging entities that negate long existing forms of hybridity not only goes against the idea of performative identities, but also against the playwright's refusal of being catalogued once and for all.

[19] For another positive opinion about the play see Awde (12), who considers the play "at times moving, at times suspenseful and always entertaining."

Introducing the tragicomedy on a note of magic realism, the late Priya does not know that she is dead and therefore cannot or rather does not want to let go of her earthly existence. She is, however, granted three days as a ghost to walk the earth and deal with her unfinished business. In that process of settling her affairs she is guided by an "immortal soul" (*WR* 9) that comes, in Gupta's words, "in the guise of the veteran famous Bombay film actor" (*WR* 9) Dilip Kumar, whom Priya has loved all her life. Already these first few introductory sentences point to a distinctive feature of this play: it includes the presence of ghosts on stage – a theatrical feature that was popular in Shakespearean times, but that is rather unusual in the social realist tradition of modern British drama. Sierz (*Rewriting the Nation* 207), however, states that, looking back on the first ten years of the 2000s, "[p]lays featuring ghosts were also a feature of the decade. A ghost or spirit presence is a theatrical device which quietly questions British secular identity."[20] Following the same line of argumentation, Aston (*Feminist Views on the English Stage* 172) also comments on the play's unusual spiritual aspects: "*The Waiting Room* blends magic and realism, white suburbia with Indian tradition exceptionally to 'naturalise' Asian family drama on the 'national', English stage." She goes on to say that "[w]hile the family struggle to cope with Hindu funeral rituals in English suburbia, Priya endeavours to come to terms with her life so that she can leave for the heavenly 'waiting room'" (Aston 172), which already gives away the clue to the play's title.

The family in this case consists of Pradip, Priya's husband, his friend Firoz, who are both 60, and the children of the couple: Akash, the 27-year-old son, and Tara, the 29-year-old daughter. Already in the beginning of the play, it becomes quite obvious that religious Hindu rites are not something that the family thinks about every day. On the contrary, they are presented as secular and unable to cope with traditions that they are not familiar with, but that their community seems to expect from them. By presenting the family members' struggle with tradition Gupta shows not only how difficult it is to uphold long-established rituals in a diasporic context, but also that these cultural bonds become weaker over temporal and geographical distance. Tara and Akash, so-called second-generation immigrants, find it even harder to understand the importance of religious rituals than their father, who, however, also seems to have become estranged from Indian customs, as he is characterised as very self-conscious and insecure regarding the 'correct' procedure of the funeral preparations. Firoz, who has travelled the world as a photographer, is even more alienated from Hindu rituals and

[20] Griffin (*Contemporary Black and Asian Women Playwrights* 21) also considers this aspect relevant and innovative, as "spirituality and manifestations of the spirit world, of ghostly presences, are treated much more matter-of-factly than the secularity of western culture normally allows."

religion. By including these seemingly "mysterious [and] incomprehensible" (Alexander 558) rites, Gupta does, however, not exoticise, but, on the contrary, problematise the idea of Asian communities being excluded from British mainstream culture, because they are 'too different'. On the one hand, Gupta dramatises the still prevailing importance of 'authentic rituals' from the homeland that, as has been stated before, culminates in the "collective fantasy" (Godiwala, *Hybridised* Identities 34) of the Bollywood film industry. Thus, it is not surprising that the troubled Priya looks for some comfort in the guiding figure of Dilip Kumar, a famous Bollywood actor, who represents all the harmonious, non-violent and uncritical values the film industry stands for. On the other hand, Gupta shows that the alleged all-pervasive, unified cultural difference, which is said to be so characteristic of the Asian community[21], is in itself disrupted by lines of generational and geographical distance and not so exclusive and unified at all. All in all, Gupta neither negates the significance of traditional discourses in the British-Asian community, nor does she forget to mention that the importance of religious rites is ever more decreasing in the diasporic space of modern London, especially in the younger, more cosmopolitan, liberal-minded generations.

Apart from the fact that Akash "looks puzzled" (*WR* 15) when his father puts up glasses of water to "quench [Priya's] thirst" (*WR* 15), the alienation from religious traditions in the family becomes apparent when Akash finds himself faced with a rite that he is not willing to perform. He has "to put a live burning coal in [his mother's] mouth – before – the cremation" (*WR* 18). Although also Firoz finds this rite appalling, Pradip refers to the unavoidability of tradition: "It's the way things are done" (*WR* 18). Whether a return to stable traditions and religion gives him strength to cope with his feelings of bereavement or whether he really believes in the necessity of these rites, remains open. On the next day, the day of the funeral, however, Akash cannot gather enough strength to set his mother's mouth on fire. It is Tara, his sister, who has been working abroad as an environmental lawyer and who arrived late at night for the funeral, who is strong enough to place the flame in the mouth of her mother (*WR* 37), although she is more than once accused of having been away too long and of having neglected the family. Tara is displeased when she hears that Akash was out in a pub when Priya died, but he counters: "At least I was in the same country" (*WR* 30).

It is, however, not only religion that plays a role in this play, but also long suppressed family debates that re-surface over the course of time: Priya's unfinished business is a complex net of unresolved, never debated issues. Griffin (*Gupta*, 228) succinctly summarises the problematic areas:

[21] See as quoted above Alexander (558) and Godiwala (34).

> They include Priya's sense of failure at never having made anything of herself except being a housewife, her affair and resultant child with Firoz, the death of that child in an accident involving Priya's son Akash when he was six, Akash's sense of guilt about this and his feelings of rejection by his mother, as well as the revelation that Pradip knew of Priya's affair with Firoz and that Tara, Priya's daughter, felt unable to tell her mother that she is a lesbian.

Billington (*Look Back in Death* 22) sardonically mentions that "Priya's three-day roaming period of transition is being used to clear up more unresolved plot-lines than you'll find in EastEnders." This statement might be interpreted as an accusation or a compliment. In any case, it relates Gupta's stage writing to her scripting for TV, a fact which is both used in the playwright's interest and against her, which will become obvious in the discussion of *Sugar Mummies*.

In the following, I want to comment in more detail on the above-mentioned issues. First of all, there are Priya's doubts about herself as a woman and her social role as mother and housewife, which characterises her as subordinate to her husband who works in academia. Her own needs, dreams and desires are never discussed while Priya, the mother and wife, is still alive. They only re-emerge as a subject for debate within the family after her death. Priya's insecurity about her role in life is accompanied by regrets of not having advanced her own career as a student and future academic, for which she filled out enrolment forms every year that she never turned in (*WR* 32). In addition, there is also Priya's deeply troubled relationship with her son Akash and unacknowledged issues with her daughter that permeate the whole story. When Tara arrives from abroad, and she gets highly emotional at the sight of her mother's corpse, Akash is very harsh and does not find any comfort in euphemistic re-interpretations of their mother's character, whereas Tara, the mother's favourite child, still tries to paint a positive picture of her:

> TARA. She always stood by us.
> AKASH. She's dead, Tara. You don't have to re-invent her. I know. I was there. She was a crap mother. Locked you in your bedroom when you were revising for your A-levels, always pressurising, putting us down, nothing we did was ever good enough.
> *Priya looks upset.*
> TARA. That's just not true. (*WR* 31)

In the course of the narrative, the audience gets to know the reason for Priya's deeply troubled relationship with her son: the death of her third child, Chand, in a tragic accident. Dilip gives Priya the chance to talk to her son in his dreams to resolve their problems, but the first dream conversation between Priya and Akash ends in bitter accusations and Akash's desperate exclamation "I'm glad you're dead" (*WR* 59). In a climax close to the end of the play (*WR* 88ff.), Priya gets another chance and they both live through the dramatic scene again, in

which Akash's sister died when he was only six years old (*WR* 92ff.). Despite Akash's incredible guilt and his feelings of not being loved any more, mother and son are re-united, because they both confess their mistakes and thereby forgive each other (*WR* 94f.)

Although Priya manages to settle her affairs with her son, not only filial relationships trouble Priya, but also her marriage with Pradip. Priya met Pradip and Firoz, the globetrotting photographer, at the same time, when they were all young, but married the former, because the latter "never asked" (*WR* 67). In the course of the play, the readers/viewers get to know that Priya and Firoz used to have an affair with each other behind Pradip's back and that Chand was Firoz's child. When the two men lay bare their thoughts and feelings in the process of trying to cope with their grief, all the bitterness that Pradip has held back over the years manifests itself in his confession that he knew about Chand being Firoz's child, which the latter, its biological father, never met while still alive because of his job and his endless travels (*WR* 74f.). All of Pradip's anger and disappointment culminate in the following statement: "You betrayed our friendship, not just once – but for years. This is your punishment" (*WR* 75). However, after a cathartic conversation that makes it clear how much Priya – problematically – has loved both her husband and her lover (*WR* 77), the two men have said everything, and, in Dilip's words, "have faced their demons and can move on" (*WR* 78). Thus, also this subplot has come to a fragile, but hopeful end.

Another plot strand that Gupta introduces is Tara and the life that she leads, mostly, apart from her family. Not only the parents' relationship is characterised by diasporic travels, but also Tara's life revolves a lot around movement. In contrast to the diasporic migration her parents have undergone, Tara's lifestyle is ultimately rooted in the global market flows. She works wherever she is needed. Because of the mother's death, the remaining three family members fear that their meetings and feelings for each other might "disappear" (*WR* 44), because Priya "was the one who held [them] together" (*WR* 44). The figure of the mother that one can always return to seems to play a very important role when it comes to upholding family ties in a diasporic context. It also once again stresses the domesticity of Priya's life in Britain, which is clearly contrasted by her daughter's many business trips. Altough Tara has achieved everything that Priya had actually had in mind for herself – a good education and a successful professional career – what they have not managed to form amongst themselves is a loving, honest mother-daughter relationship.

In addition to Tara's spatial alienation from her family, she is homosexual. Having an official coming out within the family is not at all easy for her: her father, who is still the head of the

family, strongly believes in traditional role allocation patterns and the institution of marriage (*WR* 43). Maybe because of the difficulties with her parents' traditional conception of sexuality, Tara still does not seem to have come to terms with her sexual/gender identity. In contrast to Akash, who knows about her real sexual orientation, Tara chose not to tell her mother about her homosexuality, although she claims to have had a very good relationship with her. Sadly, she has to conclude: "I couldn't tell her the only thing that really mattered (*WR* 84). Thus, as will also be discussed in the analysis of *Meet the Mukherjees* below, performing a homosexual identity in the diasporic context of the British Asian community seems to be impossible and linked with a fear of social shunning. Although we do not know how Priya would have reacted to Tara's coming out, it can be assumed that she and her husband are – despite their secular way of life – still characterised by traditional gender conceptions. That Tara feels inhibited to perform her real gender identity as a modern, British-Bengali, lesbian woman is a clear indicator of this fact. Generally speaking, the role of marriage in British-Asian families seems to be a very important one up to this date, as Griffin (*What Mode Marriage?* 1ff.) argues by analysing the reflexes of these social and cultural realities in plays by British-Asian dramatists. Coming out as a lesbian even goes one step further on the scale of breaking with tradition than, for example, refusing arranged marriages, as is often the case in the plays discussed by Griffin. Because of fears of not being accepted any more in her own community, Tara decides to withhold the information about her real sexual identity from her mother and to perform the traditional role of a woman in search of 'mister right' to please her parents[22].

In conclusion, *The Waiting Room* can be considered a rather complex tragicomedy about various issues that permeate the lives of a contemporary British Asian family that is not only defined by the diasporic experience the parent generation has gone through, but also by religious and sexual discourses both from their homeland and within the surrounding diaspora space of modern London. Billingham (231) considers Gupta's first big stage production "a play with an emotional and psychological range exploring the territory of bereavement in which family tensions, past disappointments and moments of warm humour convey an important snapshot of British Indian family life at the end of the twentieth century." He continues to say that it "is ultimately about contemporary British multicultural society in which lives, hopes and aspirations are daily rehearsed by individuals and communities seeking assimilation and acceptance. Simultaneously, they also need to affirm the autonomy

[22] For an account of queer identities in a diasporic context in the theatrical productions of British Asian playwrights, also Griffin (*Questions of Mobility and Belonging* 731ff.) might be consulted.

and independence of their own cultural, ethnic and religious identity" (Billingham 231). Not only do processes of assimilation take place (Tara, Akash, Firoz), but, as has become very clear in *The Waiting Room*, also tradition plays an important role (Priya, Pradip). These two antithetical discourses continuously influence each other, be it in the immigrant generation of the parents or in the lives of their so-called 'second-generation' children. Aston (*Feminist Views on the English Stage* 172f.) ends on a positive note about the play:

> While [Priya] expresses regret at her own lost opportunities, she also discovers self-knowledge and acquires the agency to help change her children's future: she acts as a catalyst for them to reassess their own lives and also reassess her own view of each child. In particular, negotiating the difficult relationship Priya has had with her son ensures that his future will be less damaged by their past: more certain of happiness.

Aston's interpretation is supported by the tragicomedy's ending: Priya walks into a "beautiful" (*WR* 102) light after having settled her affairs. She can happily start the next life in the waiting room and leave behind her family that she has successfully re-united in a (very fragile) state of peace. Thus, the future might not be without conflicts, but Gupta's play at least presents a positive outlook on it.

4.2.3. Sugar Mummies (2006)

In contrast to *The Waiting Room*, the next play that shall be discussed only uses the family and the restrictions it sometimes inflicts upon its members as a background that the female protagonists in *Sugar Mummies* (henceforth in quotes: *SuM*) struggle with. Similarly, though, topics such as homosexuality, the right to sexual self-determination and extramarital affairs are also dealt with in the play. Whereas some of the female characters run away from their dreary everyday lives, others explicitly long for a stable relationship and children. As both of these extremes are, however, seemingly unattainable for the women concerned, they decide to look for diversion somewhere else, namely in the female sex tourism industry of Jamaica. Building on a clear 'us' vs. 'them' and 'here' vs. 'there' structure, Gupta surprisingly leaves the diasporic space as a thematic trajectory behind and turns to a construction based on binary opposites to present the encounters of wealthy ladies and their impoverished lovers. In how far her approach is motivated, advantageous or problematic, will be elaborated on in the following analysis.

The play was first performed at the Royal Court on 5 August 2006 and, in contrast to *The Waiting Room*, it is a much more openly political play, as it deals with the increasingly

popular topic of female sex tourism[23]. Gupta herself went to Jamaica and its famous white Negril beach to research the controversial and hotly debated topic (Gardner, *Arranged Marriage*). In her play, she explores the relations of the First and the formerly colonised Third World as well as the poverty and economic dependency the latter still suffers from. It is not only a piece about women of different origins and skin colour and their way of living out fantasies and escaping the daily grind (featuring a cast of two British middle-aged women, Kitty and Maggie, an American woman in her fifties, Yolanda, and a "mixed-race woman in her late twenties" (*SuM* 255), Naomi, who, in contrast to the other women is not looking for sexual adventures, but for her biological father), but also a work exploring mutual emotional as well as physical and financial exploitation. In the following, Gupta comments on the motivation of the play and the findings of her research:

> You can, of course, see it as white people colonising and objectifying black sexuality. It's almost like a return to the slave days, with white women checking out the men's teeth, limbs and dicks before they buy. But that is only half the story. It is equally objectionable and racist the way the men call the women milk bottles. What makes this story interesting is the fact that it's a mutual exploitation that is going on. (Gupta in Gardner)

The fact that Gupta is aware of the often contradictory lines of exploitation and abuse arguably makes the play worth reading/watching and discussing, because thereby the binary opposition that was established at the beginning is blurred. Although she implicitly criticises the harmful, global forms of exploitative sex tourism, she never passes judgement on the women involved, but lets them make their own seemingly realistic and all too often rather negative experiences of such journeys, involving shattered illusions and facing the real-life poverty of the men. That her way of presenting the topic also includes humour and self-irony should not be considered a drawback, but rather an asset of the play. Although the complex subject of female sex tourism needs to be discussed with enough seriousness, the physical reality of the flirtatious encounters between good-looking young 'natives' and (slightly) aged, overweight female tourists from more wealthy countries is sometimes inherently funny. Such meetings between the two different parties constitute a farce and illusion in themselves, as it is their ultimate aim to create an atmosphere of imagined harmony and well-being that deludes not only the visiting women, but also the male prostitutes, who, consequently, negate every connection with the negative connotations of the sex industry and euphemistically speak of working in "romance tourism" (Martin 22).

[23] See Winsone Pinnock's *Talking in Tongues* (1991) and debbie tucker green's play *Trade* (2006) for other contemporary, female playwrights' takes on the topic.

After having experienced for herself the complex net of discourses that is related to the topic, Gupta came back to London "to challenge her audience" (Griffin, *Gupta* 234) – not least because she was fascinated by the completely different kinds of women that spent their holidays in the Caribbean. In an interview with Martin (22) she talks about four different types: The 'Ibiza-type', who are young, attractive women "just looking for a good time", who were not so interesting for the Jamaican beach boys "because they didn't have that much money". Secondly, there are women in their mid- to late thirties that were "desperate for a baby, perhaps a cute brown one" (Martin 22), a statement that is in itself indicative of many, contradictory and also problematic discourses like reproduction, the rights (and duties?) of the unknowing fathers, single motherhood and the often cited ticking of a woman's biological clock that is connected to living a life under the dual burden of working and being a mother in the industrialised world. Thirdly, Gupta "saw many simply looking for love" – a type that is probably most deluded about the experiences they are going to make in their holidays and that completely negates the financial aspects of these encounters. Lastly, Gupta mentions "the grandmother-type" as the fourth kind of women, who are still being wooed by the gigolos, because they are, if not necessarily physically, but often financially the most attractive. In these relations between the above-mentioned diverse women and their temporary lovers, the economic aspect is always present, at least unconsciously in the background, but never foregrounded (Martin 22). Thus, *Sugar Mummies* not only includes the re-negotiation and performance of sexual identities, but also a discussion of economic relations and dependence. However, not only do the female protagonists exploit the gigolos, but they themselves want to use the "milk bottles" (*SuM* 288) to migrate to the west. In this play, migration – as discussed by Avtar Brah – has not taken place yet, but, on the contrary, it is the beach boys' ultimate aim. In addition to presenting a rather delicate and complex subject-matter, *Sugar Mummies* was the first play in Gupta's theatrical career that "hasn't got a single Asian character in it", as she states in the interview with Gardner. In accordance with her attitude towards labelling, she quite consciously decided on this cast, which she finds "very liberating" (Gupta in Gardner, *Arranged Marriage*).

According to Griffin's (*Gupta* 223f.) interpretation and evaluation of the play, Gupta was successful in putting her plan of shaking up the audience into action. However, *Sugar Mummies* was not universally well received, but "opened to mixed reviews" (Griffin, *Gupta* 233). Besides some positive criticism[24], Gupta's portrayal of sexually inspired journeys by

[24] See Kellaway (on the London production), Grimley (*Sweet and Sour*) and Parkes (both on the Birmingham production of the same year).

women was more than once blisteringly criticised for different reasons[25]. Firstly, Hutchinson mentions that "[w]hen the action gets more serious and profound matters of identity, racism and human relationships are unpackaged the balance between comedy and drama is lost." The view that the play is lacking earnestness is also held by Nicholas de Jongh (*More Soap than Sugar* 32) and Billington (*Sugar Mummies* 30). The latter mostly criticises it for its "sudsy" soap-like style, accusing Gupta of having "spent too much time dallying with soaps." In addition to the criticism evolving around the proximity of Gupta's style to TV scripting, Billington (*Sugar Mummies* 30) advances the rather strange argument that "[b]ehind the play lurks a puritanical assumption […] that there is something wicked about female sex tourism. If men can go on holiday looking for sex, why not women?" One could object here and show that his statement has little foundation in the play, which also allows for positive experiences with the "romance business", as can be seen by taking a closer look at the character of Yolanda, who comes back every year for a satisfying holiday stay as a financially independent, self-determined and strong woman (*SuM* 269, 313). Although criticism is passed on the mutually exploitative nature of the system, Gupta is not opposed to the idea that also women, in contrast to men, want to participate in sex tourism[26]. Also Sierz (*Introduction* 14f.), in contrast to the other critics, presents Gupta's take on the topic in a favourable light:

> With enormous wit, pace and style, *Sugar Mummies* explores gender politics in a post-imperial context. It is brilliantly written, very funny and acerbic, but at the same time it takes very seriously the issue of the exploitation of black men. Although Gupta never moralises, the play implicitly condemns the tourist industry which ships women across the world for cheap sex; in an ironic take on feminism, women now have the economic power to buy sex in exactly the same way that men have done for centuries. But Gupta makes clear, the exploitation is mutual: the local men are looking not only for money, but also for a ticket to escape the poverty of the island.

In addition to Sierz's more constructive, academic criticism, also Aston (*A Fair Trade?*) features *Sugar Mummies* in an article about female sex tourism, in which she also discusses the above-mentioned *Trade* by debbie tucker green. Interestingly, she elaborates on the controversial relationship of female sexual pleasure and feminism, whereby she arrives at the conclusion that firstly, a separation of "feminism and fucking" (Aston 182) should not be upheld anymore and, secondly, that feminism needs to broaden its perspective by working with an inter- or transnational framework to avoid a preference for the Western female

[25] See also Cavendish (*Caribbean sex tourists*) and Edwardes (*Sugar Mummies*).

[26] Surely, also de Jongh's (*More Soap than Sugar* 32) accusation that Gupta's play has "a sexist, fairytale bias" that makes the "males implausibly sweet and weak" and "the women sour and stronger" can only be called simplifying, too short-sighted and exaggerated. Counter-examples can easily be found in the play: among the men, Sly certainly does not fit de Jongh's description, as I would rather characterise him as cunning and clever. Similarly, Naomi, the mixed-race girl looking for her father, cannot be called "sour", but, on the contrary, nice and sensitive.

perspective. In the following, Aston's argument will be summarised, because it critically discusses the play from a feminist point of view that nicely adds to the journalistic criticism presented above. In her essay, she considers "[f]eminine pleasures […] an important, if tricky, critical terrain for feminism" (Aston 187), but only if they are not seen as opposed to feminism, but as constitutive parts of it that lead to sexual encounters on a level playing field that are free of coercion – an aspect that is central to *Sugar Mummies*, in which "the beach boys are economically driven to perform (in all senses of the word) for the women tourists" (Aston 188). However, just because the women have turned the tables on the men and revised the stereotypical sexual hierarchies, it is not equality that we arrive at, but directly opposed exploitation. The women use their Western economic power to commodify the underprivileged black men. Although the female tourists are now financially and socially enabled to perform the same kind of exploitation white men have been performing for years or even centuries, this global system of sexploitation is objectionable per se – no matter whether men or women hold the purse-strings. Despite speaking positively about the play, Aston (190) criticises Gupta's failure "to realise the politicising possibilities of her subject"; especially because the play ends on a rather positive, romantic note and is not consequent enough to show the fruitlessness of the exploitative encounters between her characters, a critique that seems comprehensible and justified, especially in comparison to tucker green's *Trade*. Gupta's "double view point" (Aston 191), which creates very clear-cut boundaries between 'us' and 'them', seems rather simplistic in comparison to the latter's polyphonic voices and multiple viewpoints that are achieved by casting black actors for the roles of the (probably white) tourists as well as of the indigenous, black population.

As has become clear by now, *Sugar Mummies* is not a light-hearted story of a beach holiday. On the contrary, "sexual pleasure [is presented] not as romance, but as an economic transaction: 'trade' as the labour of prostitution; 'sugar mummies' as a gender take on the idea of the sugar daddy (while sugar also alludes to the British, colonialist slave trade of the Caribbean sugar plantations)" (Aston 183).[27] In the same way that sugar production happens in the formerly colonised world ('there') and consumption in the far away Western, industrial countries ('here'), also Gupta's play develops a very clear distinction between the 'here' (Britain, the US) and the 'there' (Jamaica) – using the mixed-race Naomi as a rather contrived link between the two worlds. Aston (193) goes on to elaborate on the significant sexual and economic implications that the tourists' stay has for the men and women who are living their

[27] For more information on the importance of sugar as a product that connects the developing and the industrialised world and that metaphorically symbolises similar lines of in- and exclusion like *Sugar Mummies* Sidney Mintz's *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (1985) can be consulted.

lives in a space that others consider a foreign and strange 'there'. By her taking up the notion of the exoticising "tourist gaze" (Urry, qtd. in Aston 183)[28] that allows the tourists to reduce the people they see on the beaches to commodities belonging to the holiday environment like palm trees and sunloungers, a theoretical conception is presented that enriches Aston's analysis with an economic background. In addition, this exoticising gaze causes the women to behave differently than at home in their familiar surroundings, because the only people that could pass judgement on them are the 'natives', which they do not care or worry about, because they are considered inferior and part of the holiday entertainment machinery. Thus, the notion of the tourist gaze enforces, just like Gupta's "'double point of view'" (Aston 184), a very clear distinction between the two parties concerned.

Because Aston only marginally mentions the concept of the double view point, I want to expand on this idea and combine it with the analysis of Gupta's version of the Jamaican patois that the beach boys use to flatter the ladies as well as to express their deep desperation and sorrow. Although the characters in the play engage in sexual encounters with each other, apart from the physical proximity no intermingling of opinions or cultural traditions takes place between the punters and the gigolos. The two parties are strictly separated along the lines of race/skin colour, sex/gender and also language. The only couple that overcomes the seemingly clear-cut distinction of black vs. white, female vs. male and Standard English vs. Jamaican patois – Naomi and Andre – is, unfortunately not fully credible, but, considering the omnipresent context of poverty and inequality on the island, a little bit too optimistic and too idealistic.

Firstly, regarding the *politics of colour*, the distinction is more than obvious: the impoverished islanders are black and clearly dependent on the rich, white tourists' (sexual) wishes and demands, which is often thematised throughout the play. Whereas the women objectify their lovers in connection with the myth of the black man's sexual prowess, the men, in turn, also reduce their clients to objects and contemptuously call them "milk bottles" (*SuM* 288). What they want to extract from them, however, is not milk, but money to survive. Secondly, the same lines of separation are visible, as far as the topic of *gender relations* is concerned: the island is presented as a space dominated by men and their sex business. The only female islander in the play, Angel, is not taken seriously and her doubts about the business, in which her AIDS-infected husband and her sons partake, are marginalised and ultimately ignored.

[28] *The Tourist Gaze* (1990) by John Urry is a concept that explores tourism in a very critical way. It questions how tourists approach the countries they visit and which consequences their travels have. For more information on his interesting work see an interview by Franklin (2001).

The clear distinction between the Westerners' 'there' and the islanders' 'here' is emphasised by the fact that the female form of prostitution the Western world is used to is never even alluded to or mentioned, which even further contrasts the holiday destination from the tourists' home countries. Thirdly, also *language* creates clear binary opposites: whereas the women, although distinguished from each other by their British or American accents (*SuM* 266), belong to one group, namely the more powerful one that speaks Standard English, which is used in business transactions and political meetings all over the world, the men are characterised by their local patois, which the women love (*SuM* 262), because it further exoticises and subordinates them. The men could never participate in the global market flows with their nativised form of English that again evokes the context of colonialism and slavery, as it also consists of African words that are undecipherable for the Western tourists. That their language, however, is not only a farce or an additional tourist attraction, but really their means of communication becomes clear in emotional situations like the whipping of Antonio by Maggie at the end of Act one (*SuM* 302), in which the foreign lexemes increase, whereas the proportion of Standard English grammar and vocabulary decreases.

Employing the technique of the double point of view, Gupta has in mind to criticise the mutually exploitative system by showing how the women use the men for their purposes and vice versa. However, this kind of logic is problematic for the same reasons that were mentioned in connection with Said's *Orientalism*. Although both approaches point to the exploitative nature of the binary system they discuss, they do not suggest (convincingly) how the seemingly insurmountable barriers between 'here' and 'there' or 'us' vs. 'them' can be overcome and changed. Because of the fact that Gupta does not include credible links between the two worlds that would challenge the system, of which she actually thinks very critically, the fixed binary conception of her play re-enforces and confirms the industry rather than questioning it. Naomi's and Andre's love relationship is too idealistic and too uncritical to be considered a successful attempt of overcoming the barriers, whereas debbie tucker green's cross-casting seems to be a very effective way of criticising the clear distinction of 'here' vs. 'there' and 'us' vs. 'them'. Gupta herself, as becomes obvious by looking at an interview with Aleks Sierz, knows about the largely negative criticism that was passed on her play, but she is also aware of the financially interesting fact that it "was the second biggest selling show at the Court that year" (Gupta in Sierz, *Punters* 268), which indicates that the audiences, who are an essential part of the theatre industry, were in favour of *Sugar Mummies*, probably partly also because of its easily accessible structure that was so heavily criticised. Seemingly, Gupta does not worry too much about negative criticism "as long as the

punters enjoy it …" (Gupta in Sierz, *Punters* 268), who in this case are the female, middle-aged theatregoers.

Now, the play's characters and its complex plot structures shall briefly be considered. The play opens with presenting an idyllic, "perfect beach" (*SuM* 257), a painfully beautiful environment that will soon fade into the background to give way to heated discussions about sex, the family and ultimately also (unattainable) love. Thinking about the iconic cocktail 'sex on the beach' that is featured on the cover of the printed version of the play, it is quite obvious that the beach as such constitutes a sexually charged scenery[29]. This practice of associating the beach with intercourse is already featured in one of the first conversations of the women, in which Yolanda, the American in her fifties, seems to consume the beach like a young lover and, after sighing deeply, states: "I think I just came" (*SuM* 265). Only seconds afterwards, one of the attractive beach boys arrives and completes the seemingly paradisiacal picture. Soon, however, the setting becomes less important and the conversations among the women are given priority. The bifocal point of view is used from the very beginning, as the women from abroad are juxtaposed with the indigenous population, who are all male, except for the already mentioned 48-year-old Jamaican, Angel. Among the men are Reefie (a 50-year-old Rastafarian and Yolanda's long-time lover), Andre (Angel's son and grill chef at the hotel, he tries to stand clear from prostitution, as he believes in education as the only way of overcoming poverty), Antonio, who is only 17 years old and a newcomer in the "romance business" and Sly who, as his name already suggests, is a very experienced gigolo.

To begin with the women, it seems interesting to note that none of them are content with their romantic relationships at home, either because they have no such relationship or because it has become dreary and predictable over the course of time. Inspired by their (sexual and general) dissatisfaction, they start a conversation about their experiences with black men's physical advantages, which is, on the one hand, heavily loaded with racist stereotypes and, on the other hand, full of illusions and deluded dreams of a more adventurous and satisfying love life:

> KITTY. Men here certainly know how to treat a lady. They love us!
> MAGGIE. Least they pretend to.
> KITTY. They're so sweet.
> MAGGIE. And really black.
> KITTY. Blue black.
> MAGGIE. Nice smiles – white, white teeth against black skin.
> KITTY. Tall and strong.
> MAGGIE. Big, luscious, kissable lips.

[29] A fact that is also elaborated on by Aston (185ff.).

KITTY. Real men.
MAGGIE. Much bigger than white men. The Big Bamboo.
KITTY. Jamaican Steel.
The both laugh.
And it's not over in two minutes. They can keep going all night.
MAGGIE. And they've got the rhythm – so they can move – so athletic.
KITTY. Such supple bodies.
MAGGIE. 'Once you've had black, you never go back.'
They both laugh happily.
KITTY. Pretty much the pick of the bunch. They don't look at your wrinkles – just at your face. They like eyes. They're so romantic.
MAGGIE. Know how to talk the talk.
KITTY. Wouldn't do this back home.
MAGGIE. It's not illegal to have a good time.
KITTY. I know … but still.
MAGGIE. You're on holiday! Enjoy yourself!
KITTY. I have every intention of enjoying myself.
MAGGIE. Good. (*SuM* 264f.)

It is not only the alleged sexual prowess of the Jamaican men that seems to turn the women on, but more than anything else also their skin colour. Often, the men are compared to chocolate (*SuM* 307) and thereby mentally linked to the metaphor of consumption, which, as standing for sexual intercourse, is a very old and widely used one that can already be found in the sexually allusive plays of the Shakespearean and the Restoration period. Except for Yolanda, the women are not conscious of their racialising, sexualising and exoticising practices. They do not consider their lovers' feelings, but use them as objects of erotic desire in a foreign setting to fulfil their most intimate sexual fantasies.

As becomes obvious by looking at the longer passage quoted above, a seemingly funny conversation between two women can quickly turn to topics that are very political: the rights of women to sexual pleasure and their relationship with their own body. Firstly, the discourse of the female body and what it should look like according to Western societies and the media is mentioned. Not only the above-mentioned "wrinkles" pose a problem to the holidaying women, but also their size, which does not conform to the ideals presented in holiday journals, where only skinny girls in tiny bikinis are presented. The women in *Sugar Mummies* yearn for more self-confidence and affirmation, as far as their un-normalised, 'un-photoshopped' bodies are concerned. The compliments they receive from the beach boys "regardless of size" (*SuM* 320) are, as Kitty puts it, "[j]ust what the doctor ordered" (*SuM* 385). Thus, what also contributes to the success of the female sex tourism industry in the Caribbean is the sweet talk of the beach boys that enables the women to liberate themselves of the normalising discourses of the perfect, youthful female body in the West and that allows them to enjoy their bodies the way they are, without any modifications by

cosmetics or the aesthetic surgery industry. By putting middle-aged women on stage that freely talk about and have sex with younger gigolos, a clear taboo of the Western world is broken. In mainstream film productions, it is still quite unusual to show or even allude to elderly people, who are still sexually active, whereas in stereotypical Hollywood movies with young, attractive protagonists sex is virtually omnipresent.

Secondly, however, it seems important to note that Kitty in the scene presented above, is still very much dominated by the discourses of acceptable, 'normal' forms of female sexuality back home in Britain: for a woman in a respectable position – Kitty is deputy head teacher at her school (*SuM* 306) – it is unthinkable to have casual affairs with younger men. The most accepted form of female sexuality is still to be found within the confines of a (hetero)sexual marriage: a working woman performing her role as a wife and preferably also mother. Because of these long-standing schemata about fixed social conventions in her head, it takes some time for Kitty to get used to the freedom she has in a country so far away from home. After lots of sweet talk by Sly (*SuM* 285), however, Kitty quickly accepts getting involved in an adventurous holiday romance. When Sly suggests accompanying her to England, she is tempted to accept his offer, but does not understand to what extent her lover's sweet words are driven by economic necessity. The situation gets even worse, when she accuses Sly of eating "like a savage" (*SuM* 310), not realising that he is hungry. Although Sly is deeply humiliated when being called a "savage" and thereby re-allocated in the historical discourse of slavery and colonialism, he feels obliged to please 'his mistress' in every way to obtain the money he so desperately needs to make a living on the poverty-stricken island. Despite this precarious scene, Kitty is still deluded. She does not face the fact that the beach boys' flawless slenderness is caused by "a lifetime of not getting three square meals a day" (Yolanda, *SuM* 320). Her dreams are only shattered in a violent post-coital scene, in which she realises that Sly's kind words were part of his performative self that he uses as a shield to protect himself from being harmed in the sex business. After unbelievably crude, racist and sexist insults by Kitty, Sly decides against physical violence, but robs Kitty of all her money and leaves (*SuM* 348-350).

However racially charged and emotionally unbearable their encounter might be, it is exceeded by Maggie's final showdown with her lover, Antonio, who is a newcomer in the business and because of his inexperience lets Maggie tie him to a tree. In an excruciatingly racist and brutal scene at the end of Act I (*SuM* 297ff.) that reminds the viewers/readers of Jamaica's colonial past, the historical hierarchies of slavery are re-visited, but reversed from a gender

perspective, when a furious Western woman starts to whip an innocent black boy with a palm branch, because he cannot perform for her sexually. The situation becomes even more complex, when Maggie suggests homosexuality as the cause for Antonio's inability to satisfy her, which he takes as an insult of his evolving masculinity and sexual identity (*SuM* 302). After the painful whippings and Antonio's emotional exclamations in the local Patois that are hardly understandable for outsiders, but that express his innermost feelings, Maggie leaves behind the scratched boy with a few dollars.

The last remaining couple that partakes in the sex business is Yolanda and her long-time lover Reefie, who, in contrast to the (at least emotionally/verbally) violent encounters of the other women with their gigolos, seem to enjoy themselves as responsible, undeceived adults (*SuM* 274ff.). Unlike the other holiday guests, and although she is also heavily influenced by misconceptions and racialised stereotypes about the islanders, it is only Yolanda who sees her beach boy as a human being with feelings and wishes, although she is not deluded about the way he earns his income (*SuM* 277). Despite trying to reunite him with his long lost daughter Naomi, apparently, she has come to the conclusion that they "ain't going no place" (*SuM* 341) in the future and that this was her last visit, which leaves Reefie puzzled. In addition, Yolanda is also alone in seeking contact with the only native woman in the play, Angel, with whom she talks freely and without inhibition about men, her marriage at home and the wishes and sorrows Angel has as a mother and wife (*SuM* 311ff.). When she gets to know that Angel's husband suffers from AIDS, she does not hesitate to give her additional money for her children (*SuM* 315).

The plot line that was most heavily criticised as soap-like in the play is the love relationship between Andre, Angel's son who refuses to be part of the sex industry ("I is not for sale." [*SuM* 290]), and Naomi, the mixed-race girl, who is in search of her father. Naomi's journey to Jamaica therefore cannot be seen in connection to sex tourism, but rather constitutes a kind of a reverse diasporic movement and return to one's roots. Griffin (*Contemporary Black and Asian Women Playwrights* 32) argues that the homeland of the second generation children's parents is often more of a strange place for them than the environment they have been raised in, which, in turn, was new and foreign to their parents. She states that when returning to their actual place of origin they experience a "new sense of unbelonging where difference is articulated not through skin colour but through the attitudes and behaviours which second-generation migrants have acquired as a consequence of living in a racialized and racist western context" (Griffin 32). This only holds partially true for Naomi, because she is half Jamaican and half British, and, because, as Angel puts it, "[she] look mix" (*SuM* 317). Not

only does she attract attention because of her non-native behaviour and inability to communicate in the local patois, but also due to her skin colour, which is neither typically British nor typically Jamaican. Although Naomi never learns that Reefie is her father, because he is ashamed of his existence as a gigolo (*SuM* 352-355), the trip to the Caribbean was nonetheless successful for her, because she falls in love with Andre, who seemingly reciprocates her feelings despite being ridiculed by the other beach boys for his romantic attachment to Naomi. Whether one considers this mutually supportive relationship a credible link between the two directly opposed worlds Gupta presents, is, as has already been stated above, debatable.

As a conclusive remark to *Sugar Mummies*, it could be noted that the play, in my view, very convincingly presents the different discourses that define female sex tourism in the Caribbean. It does not only establish a connection with Jamaica's colonial past, but it also dwells upon the dangers of an industry that at its core consists of deceptions and financial as well as racial hierarchies. Although it might be quite simply structured in two acts and constructed around a double point of view that suggests unrealistically clear divisions between the two worlds, it still successfully draws attention to the problematic discourses of the increasingly normalised female body and female (hetero)sexual pleasure. Whether one decides to approve of the play's easily approachable, TV-like style or whether one considers it a drawback, will depend on the spectator. However, Gupta's take on the topic is in any case a very contemporary, linguistically innovative narrative that focuses on the wishes and needs of modern women in the context of exploitative post-colonial power relations, which, as I would argue, certainly makes it worth reading.

4.2.4. Meet the Mukherjees (2008)

The idea that also humour can convey criticism, when it comes to racial, sexual, age and class relationships has already become obvious when analysing *The Waiting Room* and *Sugar Mummies*. In contrast to the tragicomic and political works discussed above, *Meet the Mukherjees* (henceforth in quotes: *MM*) is the first play that is classified as a comedy, or more specifically a romantic comedy that presents the life and loves of Anita, a 31-year old Asian woman on the lookout for 'Mister Right', and Aaron, a 32-year-old Afro-Caribbean man and infamous womaniser. When their respective families of different descents are informed about their children's relationship that has slowly evolved over the course of the play after a heated affair or, as the Octagon theatre's website calls it "lust at first sight", culture clashes, prejudiced and stereotype-loaded discussions about what is best for one's children are already

foreseeable. Although the plot line of meeting the future in-laws is not outstanding as such and also said to have been inspired by the rather mindless Hollywood comedy *Meet the Parents*, as Smirke mentions in his review, one cannot call *Meet the Mukherjees* an adaptation. The play might allude to the movie, as far as its title is concerned, but when looking more closely at the play's plot lines and characters, the similarities come to an end, as Gupta's work is an independent, original, funny, but also highly critical narrative that comments on 21st-century realities in Great Britain. At its core, she presents intercultural communication and the overcoming of stereotypes via getting to know the character of a person instead of jumping to conclusions about him or her as the path to a more diverse, peaceful and multicultural (in its most positive meaning) co-existence of different cultural communities in Britain's vibrant capital.

The play was first performed at the Octagon theatre, Bolton, on 1 May 2008 and received mostly positive reviews. According to Dibbits (*Comedy with a serious side*), the "excellent comedy" *Meet the Mukherjees* "proved that comedies can sometimes make a serious point", especially because the actors' performance was so outstandingly emotional and convincing. Also Smirke, who only finds "minor faults", remarks that the play "taps into familiar culture-clash territory", but "avoids repeating tired clichés" because of its "witty script" and "a strong ensemble". In another article focussing on *Meet the Mukherjees*, Dibbits (*Bolton Octagon actress set for culture clash*) interviews the actress who performs the role of Anita's mother in the play, Pooja Ghai, who stresses that the key to the success of the play lies in its humour, because audiences are not fond of being "preached at", as she states.

Before examining the central relationship between Aaron and Anita in more detail, their familiar milieu shall be introduced. The set up of the two-act play is as follows: Chitra Mukherjee, a 50-year-old Asian woman and head receptionist in a doctor's surgery, and Montu, who has died three years before the play's present, are Anita's parents. Interestingly enough, her father is present in the play as a ghost that is on hand with help and advice for his wife Chitra, who suffers from panic attacks since her husband's death. She feels alone when it comes to worrying about the fate of her unmarried daughter. Just like in *The Waiting Room*, the presence of a ghost on stage is not further questioned. By fusing the social realist tradition of modern British drama with foreign influences the contemporary theatrical canon is enriched. In addition to Anita's parents, there are also her chauvinist and very traditionally minded uncle, Raj, who takes up the role of the head of the family after Montu's death, and

his female counterpart, the open-minded, loyal Fran, who is one of Anita's best friends and her flatmate.

On Aaron's side, we find a very similar picture as far as the parent generation is concerned: His mother Leticia Jackson, who works as a nurse, cannot stop worrying about her son, because he vehemently refuses to settle down. Although she is heavily prejudiced against 'the Asians', ironically enough, her behaviour is shown to be very similar, if not exactly the same, as Chitra's. Another parallel can be found when taking a closer look at Aaron's father, Neville, who is a bus driver in the public transport system of Manchester, where the play is set. Just like Montu, he is much more relaxed when it comes to letting one's children find their own way in life. There is, however, one main difference between the two families. In contrast to Anita, Aaron already has a child, namely his 13-year-old mixed race daughter India, whom Leticia considers "a beautiful accident" (*MM* 82). Not only does the girl in the end unite the two completely different families with the help of her witty and cheeky comments, but also her name leaves room for interpretation: *India*, who has had nothing to do with the subcontinent she is named after, brings the opposed parties together again, although – or probably because – she is the child of an English woman and a second generation Jamaican immigrant. By introducing her as a character the play is considerably complicated as regards subject matter: the next generation, which did not have to go through the act of migration per se, can easily mediate between the different migrant cultures, their children and the 'natives'. India is a UK citizen, but in addition to her British nationality and upbringing, she has the cultural and ethnic background of the Afro-Caribbean community as well. The naivety of her young age and her multicultural education make her open-minded and unbiased towards the Asian community, which is why she is the ideal link between the two families and the epitome of what Bhabha might have had in mind as a person shaped by hybrid discourses. In addition to her metaphorical importance in the play, India substantially contributes to the play's humour and topicality, as there are more and more children like her in today's society, whose lives are determined by the complexities of growing up in a diasporic space.

As the migratory experience has already been alluded to, it needs to be discussed that both parental couples are similarly influenced by their travels and change of home country. Whereas the men abstain from glorifying their places of origin, the women seem to long for the social stabilities and clear role allocations that they associate with their native countries. In contrast to their children, who enjoy the social and sexual freedom they are granted in Britain, the parent generation quite clearly disapproves of the contemporary liberal sexual politics.

Both of the mothers want their children to lead a stable life that includes marriage and grandchildren. The social roles of the wife and mother that they have always been performing and that have determined their lives much more than their professional identities constitute the basis on which they develop plans for the future of their daughters. Considering the discourses of traditionality within the British Asian community that have been mentioned repeatedly in the course of this thesis, it does not come as a surprise that Chitra has an impressive collection of Bollywood movies at home (*MM* 120).

To show the still prevailing importance of marriage in British Asian culture, the opinions of the two mothers shall be analysed. Chitra, in contrast to her daughter Anita, is not only presented as very conservative, but also as quite radical and direct: the mother sees her daughter as a product on the romance market that needs to be sold, before she is "past [her] sell-by date, on the shelf, soiled goods" (*MM* 32). Additionally, she states that she is "ashamed" (*MM* 32) of Anita, because she does not get married, which singles her out as distinct from the rest of their community. Instead of having a bad conscience, Chitra uses emotional blackmailing to exert pressure on Anita: she draws on the negative diasporic experiences she has made in Manchester just for the sake of her children and their education, that she has endured racism at the school gates and that all her sacrifices would have been made in vain if Anita were unable to find a husband, which would make her "a failure" (*MM* 33) in her mother's eyes. Anita feels supervised and persecuted all the time by her whole family. She calls her "nosy auntiejies" the "secret service" of the Asian community and humorously describes them as "[l]oads of plain-clothes sari detectives with walkie-talkies patrolling the streets" (*MM* 27). The discussion between mother and daughter ends in bitter accusations when Chitra exclaims: "Everyone knows about you. You behave like a … like a … prostitute!" (*MM* 34). What seems even more repulsive to her than the fact that her daughter is a modern, liberal woman who has premarital sex is the loss of reputation that is irreparable on the marriage market and within the diasporic community.

A similarly radical and very conservative point of view also characterises Leticia. After she is informed that Aaron is seeing an Indian woman, she is very clear about the fact that she wants him "to stop it" (*MM 51*) – a relationship "with one of dem" (*MM 51*) is unthinkable. Despite the two cultures' similar histories of exclusion and oppression, the racist Leticia is convinced about the impossibility of the match: "Just because we similar in colour, no matta! We like from differen' planets. Sometimes, mixin' don't work" (*MM* 52). As discussed in the theory chapter, the term black cannot be used any more to refer to both the Asian and the Afro-Caribbean community. The lines of division are stronger than the shared experience of

exclusion within the diasporic space of modern Britain. The discussion culminates in completely opposed viewpoints between husband and wife, whereby Neville expresses deep disappointment with his wife: "Me ashame on you Letty. Absolutely ashamed. After everything we face when we came here, I not expect you to speak like … like … a white person" (*MM* 53). Neville turns the tables on his wife by reminding her of their own painful history of racialisation and exclusion from the mainstream discourse and is shocked that his wife uses the same insults against her son's future in-laws that they have been suffering from for so long themselves. The above-mentioned quoted clearly shows that racism, as discussed in the theory chapter, is not reduced to white vs. black, but very flexibly adaptable to different communities. Only towards the very end of the play, are first tendencies of a reversal in the mothers' points of view discernible, when the women give their blessing to the long-desired (intercultural and interethnic) marriage of their children.

What even more complicates the discourse of (arranged) marriages, is the topic of the sexual orientation of one's children. For Chitra, who in the following excerpt is talking to Aaron's father, her bus driver, the alleged homosexuality of her daughter Anita is a worst case scenario that she could not cope with. The topic is so immensely terrible and taboo for her that she cannot even use appropriate terminology, but has to resort to an ominous acronym that further obscures the subject matter she is not willing to face. Even the more liberal-minded Neville completely agrees with his discussion partner when it comes to the delicate topic of homosexuality – he only objects to 'curing it' with physical violence:

> CHITRA. And then I worry that maybe, just maybe she … you know … you know … (*Conspiratorially*.) perhaps, she's GTG.
> NEVILLE. GTG?
> CHITRA. 'Got the gay'.
> NEVILLE. (*Laughs in agreement*.) Ha! White man disease.
> CHITRA. It *is* a disease! She lives with this girl – Fran – nice girl but there's something funny about her. She has very short hair.
> NEVILLE. Hmmm …
> *NEVILLE shakes his head as if to say CHITRA is over-reacting.*
> CHITRA. What would the family say? What would my poor late husband say? If she was … if she turned out to be … *hai Ram*. Back home, they would parade her round the village and beat her with sticks.
> NEVILLE. Not every ting dem do back home is good Mrs Mukherjee. (*MM* 11f.)

In this quote, the stereotypes about lesbians are not only developed on the lines of gender, but also race: homosexuality is a "disease" that only white people get, a statement that shows that also immigrants can use racialised discourses against the hegemonic, white population on the basis of their skin colour. Furthermore, to complete a prejudiced picture, the lesbians they

imagine ‘naturally’ have short hair. Although Chitra acknowledges that Fran is a “nice girl”, she still sees her as a threat to her daughter’s normative, heterosexual identity. The situation in *Meet the Mukherjees* is quite similar to the one of Tara and her (dead) mother Priya in *The Waiting Room*. Homosexuality is not yet an acceptable discourse within the British Asian community (as presented in Gupta’s plays) that one can freely talk about. It seems to be a long way until it might turn into a socially approved form of sexuality that can be performed in everyday life without having to fight against stereotypes, prejudices and social exclusion.

For the women of the next generation, Fran and Anita, traditionally arranged marriages are seen as a last resort. Fran funnily sums up their situation like that: “Problem is, we’re getting to the age where they’re either married, taken or just too weird which is why they’re still single” (*MM* 16). Moreover, they state that the good-looking men are often homosexual, which they, in contrast to Anita’s parents, accept as part of the normal everyday reality. After having discarded divorcées as potential partners as well as turning to the internet or speed dating, Fran mentions that “[t]here’s always the arranged marriage thing” (*MM* 17), which Anita rejects as a “totally bloody desperate” (*MM* 17) option. However, Fran’s idea of the Asian marriage market is a bit different from what Chitra might have in mind: “Can’t you try [the men] out? You know like, give them a road test? See if they pass the bedroom MOT? Then if they’re no good in the sack, you move on to the next one …” (*MM* 18). Anita can only counter: “Doesn’t work that way Fran. It’s all about houses, cars, good jobs, viable career prospects, nice families, good genes” (*MM* 18). A discussion that started off with the advantages and disadvantages of the contemporary romance market ends in a declaration of female companionship over relationships with men. In contrast to *Sugar Mummies*, the women do not compete with each other or fight, but are loyal. This fact also becomes obvious, when Fran – despite her own bygone relationship with Aaron at school and her consequent doubts of his sincerity – passes on Anita’s phone number to Aaron and thereby establishes the foundation of their future romance. Moreover, when Aaron and Anita struggle to overcome the fact that Aaron has not told his partner that he has a child and that Anita only wanted to go out with him to shock her mother, it is again Fran who helps the two to find together again. Characteristically for the genre of the comedy, loyalty and companionship rule out rivalry and hatred.

The most apparent often-quoted ‘culture clashes’ all evolve around Anita and Aaron. Already when the two meet for the first time at a party, it is very clear to Anita that Aaron is “a typical black man” (*MM* 25), which in this case means that he prefers one night stands with “leggy blondes” (*MM* 25) to relationships with intelligent, mature women. Despite her

preconceptions about Aaron, who is "so fit" (*MM* 25) according to Anita, they still get to know each other in a very comic scene full of situational and physical humour. That the present Fran gave to Anita for her promotion in the law firm is a vibrator, is as such not surprising in a 21st-century comedy. However, that it starts to buzz during the first conversation of the two protagonists and that Anita desperately tries to quieten the thing down while countering Aaron's sleazy chat-up lines with witty comments, can only be called amusing (*MM* 26ff.). With the help of India, Anita over the course of time not only reconsiders going out with Aaron, but also decides to do it to take revenge on her mother, who called her a prostitute. As it turns out, her plan is successful, as the vibrator scene mentioned above is still exceeded by Aaron's and Chitra's unintentionally hilarious introduction to each other. Chitra comes by at Anita's place for a surprise visit, where the naked Aaron is lying around in her daughter's bed. Anita quickly hides him in her wardrobe before her mother comes in. Of course, this manoeuvre can only go wrong and Chitra is faced with the reality of finding a *naked*, *black* man in her daughter's bedroom. Unsurprisingly, the scene ends there – Chitra is finally speechless and, as far as dramatic technique is concerned, the first act ends in a humorous climax (*MM* 58).

This encounter also makes Anita and Aaron consider the racial, ethnic and cultural differences between their communities for the first time. Although Anita is furious with her mother for not accepting Aaron, the family bonds still seem to be very strong, as she nonetheless defends her when being confronted with accusations by Aaron, who is angry that "she obviously thought [he] was a criminal" (*MM* 67). A lively discussion about the everyday experience of racism evolves that is additionally complicated by the politics of religion and extremism:

> ANITA. […] Asians suffer too from racism. I get it all the bloody time. Especially with this 'war on terror'.
> AARON. Yeah but you're not Muslim.
> ANITA. Tell that to the white kids that scream 'Muslim cunt' or 'Osama's whore' at me out the car window.
> AARON. You gotta remember, we were enslaved. We were packed into ships, we were shackled and dehumanised. We lost our language, our families, our names. It goes on. Even to this day. If you're a young black man in this country, you're more likely to go to prison than you are to university. Fact.
> ANITA. So, you're more oppressed than I am? Is that it?
> AARON. Just accept it.
> ANITA. Okay, I accept that the experience of slavery is a much bigger thing that [sic!] the Brits ruling over India. I accept that in effect the African slave experience is one of genocide.
> AARON. Thank you.
> ANITA. But I don't accept that my mum thinks you're all criminals. (*MM* 69)

However much Anita might defend and love her mother, she cannot yet anticipate her next step: Chitra decides that male support is needed to bring Anita to her senses. Her late husband's brother Raj arrives and demands to be treated as royally as his name suggests. He is a chauvinist, conservative and outspoken racist ("We mix, we dilute; we lose everything" [*MM* 63]) that uses the logic of anti-miscegenation just like the white colonialists have understood it. Quite clearly, Raj and Chitra have not accepted that the diasporic reality of contemporary Manchester is different from the social and sexual conventions in Tanzania, from whose Indian community they come. Their Tanzanian-Indian identity complicates the discourses of ethnicity, race and culture even further, as will be seen in the first meeting of the parents discussed below. However, as the genre of comedy demands, the villainous uncle Raj, who plans on threatening Anita with disowning her forever "if she refuses to give up this negro" (*MM* 61), is not successful in separating the young couple. Additionally, his alleged plans of getting involved with his former sister-in-law, for whom he "ha[s] the hots" (*MM* 74), as Anita puts it, are also thwarted with the heavenly help of Mantu.

To return to the problematic issues between the two families, which are at the very centre of the play, the parents' first secret meeting shall be discussed, in which they negotiate the conditions of what I would term an arranged non-marriage. As can easily be imagined, the encounter of Chitra and Raj on the one side and Neville and Leticia on the other can only end in accusations and lack of comprehension, although Chitra and Neville already know each other from their daily bus ride, which is an enormously unpleasant surprise for Leticia. Whereas the Jamaicans are, generally speaking, in favour of the relationship, the Indians, on the contrary, are more than anything else occupied with their preconceptions about their dialogue partners. A complex net of racial and ethnic interrelations evolves:

> RAJ. It would not be seen in a very good light in our community if Anita took up with an African man.
> NEVILLE. We from Port Antonio in Jamaica. From what Aaron tell me, you de African ones.
> RAJ. I was born in Tanzania yes – but we're Indian.
> NEVILLE. You speak Swahili?
> RAJ. Yes.
> NEVILLE. Den you African. (*MM* 80)

This excerpt makes it obvious how complex the backgrounds of the two families are: in addition to having migrated to the UK, Anita's family is now influenced by three national as well as cultural discourses – the 'original' Indian one of their ancestors as well as the Tanzanian and the British ones. Apart from choosing culture and cultural difference, which is said to be essential in the Asian community (Alexander 552), as the decisive aspect of one's

performative identity, Neville reminds the 'Indians' that also language plays a key role in determining a person's ethnicity and nationality, which has also been argued in connection with the Jamaican patois in *Sugar Mummies*. This side remark is deliberately ignored: what counts for the conservative Raj are traditions and rituals, just as Godiwala (*Hybridised Identities* 34) argues. His unwillingness to welcome change and a different, more hybrid lifestyle in the diasporic community might be motivated by a fear to lose his Indian identity that he is defending so persistently. However, the most absurd line of thought is yet to come in this conversation, when the two sides start to discuss who has suffered more in the violent history of their people. Loudly proclaimed hierarchies of oppression are put forward, when centuries of colonialism are compared to the experience of slavery (*MM* 81). Neville uses his people's history to argue that exactly because both groups have a similarly violent background they are "all the same", that one should "show respec' for all fellow humans" (*MM* 82) and accept that two young people have fallen in love with each other. However, when Raj is informed that Aaron is a good *father* he completely loses his temper because of the impossibility of the match. Angrily – and stupidly – he states: "You have to ask yourself why you allowed yourselves to become slaves. In India we fought back. We were never slaves." Now even the tolerant Neville cannot stand this racist kind of talk any longer, which is why he resorts to violence and punches Raj on the nose, who ends up lying on the floor, whimpering.

The parents' fight is followed by the next crisis among the lovers, which leads to a heated discussion, in which they, just like their parents, also return to the seemingly unavoidable topic of race that obviously still plays an enormous role in the lives of the people concerned (*MM* 86), although science has long discarded the idea of different races. With the help of Fran and India, however, also these differences can be settled and the second meeting of the parents, including India, is a lot more peaceful. Raj has finally been sent home and especially Chitra's viewpoint has changed because of Montu's heavenly influence. Although Anita does not accept Aaron's proposal right away, in the end, as is typical for comedies, they marry (off-stage) and go on their honeymoon. The play ends with a heart-warming scene of India keeping her newly found grandmother Chitra company, while she is open-heartedly and without prejudices discovering what she considers the advantages of Indian culture: samosas and Bollywood movies. Montu can now leave for heaven again, because Chitra is being taken good care of.

All in all, *Meet the Mukherjees* is much more than a typical, light-hearted comedy. As has been shown above, it is a complex tale of love, lust, trust, intercultural relationships, history and its influences on the everyday lives of people who all have, to some extent, been influenced by the phenomenon of diaspora. By drawing on the experiences of more than three generations it depicts multicultural life in the vibrant city of Manchester, whereby multicultural does not only have positive implications: differing viewpoints on social roles, sexuality and lifestyle choices as well as racism from both the hegemonic white community and from the different immigrant communities influence the decisions of the characters. As becomes especially clear by looking at the characters of India and the two young women Anita and Fran, Gupta is extremely gifted when it comes to presenting serious, contemporary topics with a laugh-out-loud twist.

4.2.5. Wah! Wah! Girls (2012)

The next play that shall be presented in this thesis is *Wah! Wah! Girls* (henceforth in quotes: *WW*). Whereas *Meet the Mukherjees* has been considered a comedy with a serious side, *Wah! Wah! Girls* could be called a musical with an earnest touch. As the subtitle *Britain meets Bollywood* already suggests, Gupta once again returns to the Asian community's diasporic culture and traditions in the UK, but she does not remain within the confines of the typical genres of modern British drama. Instead, she uses the genre of the musical as a means of presenting her themes, which – just like Avtar Brah's theories around the diaspora space suggest – do not only concern the diasporic community alone but also its environment. Just like the diaspora space is characterised by its hybridity, also Gupta's *Wah! Wah! Girls* is an essentially hybrid musical: it interweaves classical Indian Mujra dancing with Bollywood movies that belong to the realm of Indian popular culture as well as with the tradition and rich history of modern British drama. Once again, the canon is challenged, as her ideas about today's society are in this case transported mostly via songs and dancing. Interestingly enough, Gupta does not seem to be afraid of risking her reputation as an acclaimed playwright. Instead, she seems to be interested in developing her writing in the most diverse directions to reach different audiences, which might be inspired by her childhood experiences in an artistic household. In an interview with Hughes (38) Gupta herself comments on her intentions when drafting the play: "Wah! Wah! Girls is a woman-centred script and we wanted to give it all the glamour, great songs and dances from the old films but also the vivacity of the East End and the energy of today's new India." Essentially, the play is about Sita, a 17-year-old British Asian girl from Leeds who runs away away from her traditionally-minded family, more precisely from her brother, Anish. She finds refuge in a so-called Mujra

dance club that is run by the strict Soraya, who tries to uphold the old Indian dancing rites that are nowadays in danger of being seen as pole dancing or even prostitution with an ethnic make-up; thus clearly leading in the direction of sexploitation. Gupta in the above-cited interview with Hughes explains the ritual background of these dances as well as what they have turned into in contemporary British society:

> Mujras were courtesans who performed for their wealthy patrons. Skilled in the kathak dance form (wearing dancing bells on their feet and tapping out fast rhythms and performing breathtaking pirouettes in time to the tabla beat), these women were also accomplished singers and poets. Well versed in the art of flirtation and seduction, they often became the lovers of their patrons. In today's Britain, however, a more sinister form of the mujra has sprung up. Underground and secretive, young women dance in private rooms where they are paid in hard cash. Gone are the days of perfecting the classical dance and art forms – now it's all about gyrating hips, Bollywood tunes and sometimes even topless dancing.

The forms of sexual and even more importantly ethnic exploitation Gupta alludes to are similar to the ones mentioned in *Sugar Mummies*. The women, just like the beach boys, are not only reduced to their physical attributes, but also their ethnic background is important for the exoticisation that substantially contributes to their allure and popularity. Gupta, in the interview with Hughes (38), goes on to talk about a global business of shipping Mujra dancers from threshold countries to the West: "In the hands of organised gangs, impoverished young women are lured over from India and Pakistan with promises of fame and a film career. It is a thinly disguised ploy to force them eventually into prostitution." Although such human rights violations are only hinted at in the play, they are still present as a context, which is, as I would argue, surprising for the light-hearted genre of the musical. In addition to the background of Mujra dancing, also the aesthetics of Bollywood movies play a role. Gupta in the same interview, however, mentions that there is more to a Bollywood movie than a Western audience might expect:

> In the West we tend to think of it as glitter, songs and dances, set against a backdrop of idealised romances and high melodrama. In fact, many of these films have a strong storyline and deal with important subjects such as rape, domestic violence, class and caste, religion and poverty – as well as the well-trodden storylines of star-crossed lovers and estranged families.

Thus, the musical that will be presented in the following actually has a lot of potential of enchanting as well as making audiences aware of the discourses of alleged traditionality and culture fixation in the British Asian community.

Considering the play's conception as a musical, it is not surprising that it premiered at the Peacock Theatre, London, on 24 May 2012 – a venue that is known for staging dance performances, concerts, shows and musicals. Although such a project could all too easily go

wrong and get stuck in presenting clichés, Gupta once again managed to steer the middle course between sincerity and entertainment, however, as I would argue, not as convincingly, funnily or critically as in *Meet the Mukherjees*. The emphasis seemingly was on the dancing and the songs – the political potential of the play is not exhausted, but on the contrary rather marginalised, probably due to genre conventions. Stressing the negative aspects, the critics, in general, spoke rather disapprovingly of the production, although there are also positive opinions to be found: Thompson (30), for instance, not only praises the musical and acting skills of the cast, but also mentions that Gupta's plot "is an intriguing mix of high Bollywood melodrama and earthy British realism." In contrast, Lovett states that "this confused masala fails to satisfy", although he is also convinced by the cast's intriguing performance. However, he considers Gupta's script "leightweight" and finds that it "lacks the interesting provocation and toughness which enhances such previous work as Sugar Mummies." In comparison with her play about sex tourism, I would fully support his argument, but the question here is whether a musical can be expected to be as critical and thought-provoking as a piece of new writing that was supported and first staged by the Royal Court. Also Loxton calls Gupta's text "contrived", but he attributes this fact to the musical's roots in Bollywood movies, which feature the same ups and downs. Mountford is the most negative among the critical voices presented here. Not only does she call the show "cliché-ridden", but additionally she locates "the source of the problems" in "Gupta's pedestrian book and lyrics"[30]. Whether one can at the end of the production whole-heartedly call out "wah! wah!", which means "bravo!" in an Indian context (Gardner in *The Guardian*), or not, might be debatable, but considering the restrictions of the genre, the general agreement about the marginalised criticism in the musical might become more easily understandable. Before drawing any premature conclusions, the heavily criticised plot shall briefly be considered.

Wah! Wah! Girls revolves around the young run-away Sita, the dance-club owner Soraya, her son Kabir, who to the great displeasure of his mother falls in love with the enchanting, liberal-minded newcomer, and the other Mujra girls Anita, Shanti and Fauzia, who are, however, not further characterised, but presented as a quite homogenous loyal group of friends to Sita. The play is devised along the lines of a frame structure: Bindi, a contemporary British Indian woman living in London's East End is alone for the weekend. Instead of concentrating on the scientific paper she has to write, she turns on the TV to watch one of her beloved Bollywood DVDs, whose importance within the diasporic British Asian community does not have to be

[30] Also Laura Barnett and Lyn Gardner (*Bollywood musical fails to come out singing*) heavily criticise the play for the same reasons: Gupta's "bland" script and an unconvincing stage design, as the latter states.

explained any more. However, the interesting fact is added here that watching Bollywood movies is not something that only people from lower social classes would do, but that also academics find it important to uphold the link with their home country and their community by watching these films (*WW* 94). To know Indian popular culture seems to be essential to first as well as second generation immigrants, the young or the old as well as the working class and the academics. Interestingly enough, however, there seems to be one restriction: in Gupta's plays the movies produced by the famous Asian film industry are only watched by women – be it Priya in *The Waiting Room*, Chitra and India in *Meet the Mukherjees* or Bindi and Sita in *Wah! Wah! Girls*. The typical Bollywood fan Gupta creates is female. However, she does not overgeneralise here, as the women that do watch these movies are not reduced to types, but, on the contrary, independently drafted female characters that are very different from each other. In contrast to the other Bollywood fans, Bindi has a special function in *Wah! Wah! Girls*: disregarding the laws of physics, via the TV-set Bindi is involved in the actions on stage. Sometimes she is just watching and admiring the scene, but at times she is also joining in. Gupta considers her "our [i.e. the audience's] point of view" (*WW* 9) that relates the traditional dances to the contemporary setting in East London, which is why one could consider her a theatrical device that physically manifests the diaspora space on stage and that links Indian traditions to contemporary multicultural life in London. How Gupta imagines London's East End, as it is presented in the musical, can be found in the stage directions. What she describes in the following, is *the* prototypical diaspora space:

> *We see: White youths, women in hijabs carrying their briefcases, pushing their babies, power dressed, low life, down and outs, flash Harries, high-heeled beauties, and ordinary folk go about their daily lives.*
> *We see two halal butchers with their prayer caps on unloading a large carcass and carrying it through to their shop.*
> *We see a couple of Polish builders hanging about in their work clothes. This scene should be full of the vibrancy and colour of the city*. (*WW* 12)

How well Gupta's vision was implemented by her team on stage cannot be analysed here, but looking at the secondary text she provides, this scene does not come across as contrived or artificial, but on the contrary as very much aware of the issues that are relevant to multiculturalism today. In three sentences she mentions the discourses of race, generation, fashion, immigration and religion (especially interesting are the terms hijabs, which are the hotly debated Muslim headscarves, and halal, which designates the special techniques with which Muslim butchers slaughter their animals in an religiously acceptable way), whereby all of these elements are not just motivelessly included, but really constitute essential aspects of everyday life in London's vibrant East End.

In addition to the convincing setting, the already colourful ensemble is completed by Cal, an Afro-Caribbean man in his forties, Pavel, a Polish handyman and Mansoor, an elderly Asian shopkeeper, who in the end turns out to be Soraya's impoverished father who sold her to a Mujra company when she was a child, which we get to know via sung flashbacks that are presented by Soraya herself. The second of Soraya's memories leads the audience back to a time when she was working in the dance club of Sameena, the woman her father sold her to. There, she not only soon becomes the mistress of one of the rich visitors, Tariq, but also gets pregnant by him. Her merciless lover, however, does not allow her to keep the child after its birth, which Soraya cannot accept. Because of the fact that the self-confident dancer does not give in to his demands, Tariq tries to get his way by cutting up her face, which would ruin her beauty and, consequently, also her career. The teacher Sameena, however, defends her and kills the attacker. Additionally, she also takes the blame for the murder and tells her most talented Mujra girl to run away for the sake of the baby, i.e. Kabir. At the end of the play, a similar incident happens, when Mansoor is stabbed by Anish, because he tries to defend Sita from her violent brother that tries to bring her back home by all available means. Despite this tragic accident, all's well that ends well, when both Sita and Kabir and Cal and Soraya are united in love. Especially the latter's love relationship is astonishing, because in contrast to *Meet the Mukherjees* the Asian woman and the Afro-Caribbean man do not continuously discuss matters of race and ethnicity, but love each other for their character, despite their different descents, but maybe this harmonious, conflict-free picture of inter-ethnic and intercultural love is also due to the genre conventions of the musical.

The most important trajectory that runs through this play is the role of tradition and innovation within the Mujra dance club, but, more generally, also within the British Asian community. How central are traditional rituals to the lives of contemporary Indians living in Britain and how true are the theoreticians' statements that Asians tend to ossify their culture in a diasporic context? The picture presented in the play is an ambiguous one. Although there are characters in the musical that embody conservative mindsets and that stand for the importance of 'authentic', unchanging traditions like Mansoor, Anish and, at least in the beginning, also Soraya, Gupta also includes roles that clearly challenge the discourse of traditionality and "blinding culturalism" (Modood 76) within the diasporic community. Among them are the Mujra girls as well as Sita and Kabir, who are of the opinion that only modernisation and inclusion of different dance styles can save Soraya's financially stricken club (*WW* 20). That Sita, however, is not just a naïve girl, but actually a young woman with ambition becomes obvious when she states how important education is to her. Although she

loves dancing, she is aware that having "a back-up plan" (*WW* 38) is important in today's quickly changing society. Against her brother's will, who tries to keep her from studying accountancy (*WW* 23), Sita decides for a self-determined professional career and against performing the role of the mother and housewife all her life. Her behaviour is quite similar to Tara's in *The Waiting Room*: both young women are determined to live their lives as modern British-Asian women. Although neither of them negates the importance of traditionality within the generation of their parents, who themselves have made the experience of travelling the world to start a new diasporic life in Britain, they embrace the aspects of tradition they can relate to, but reject what they consider too conservative. Whereas Soraya has a very traditional conception of Mujra dancing, Sita makes a cautious counterproposal against "[a]ll this coaxing and holding back" (*WW* 51): "But Soraya Bibi, what you're teaching is from back in the day. We don't have to dance for men anymore. We could try just … dancing?" (*WW* 50). Drawing on feminist ideas, Soraya calls the traditional dance forms "subservient" and adds: "It's a statement – we're not afraid of our sexuality anymore" (*WW* 51). The other girls join in against Soraya and the discussion culminates in Sita's following statement: "Men have to take us on our terms as equals and this Mujra dance you teach, to me, it's all about flirtation and the art of pretence. […] We can build on the old and make something new: But I'm just expressing who I am" (*WW* 51). Thus, Sita comes across as a self-determined young woman that is aware of the performative aspects of dancing. However, in contrast to Soraya's approach, she does not want to negate her real modern and self-confident identity, but perform in a way that embraces who she is and that does not force her to adopt a role she is not comfortable with. When Soraya consequently throws Sita out, she is shocked to see that her son leaves with the girl he has fallen in love with, but, as the laws of the musical demand, in the end the family is re-united and also the older generation has realised that fighting off new influences will not help to trade down the old rituals, but in contrast, make people lose interest in them and then cause their ultimate decay. The last stanzas of the final song all play on the idea of independence and strength of beautiful women (*WW* 96f.). In the multicultural British society of the musical female beauty and autonomy do not have to be opposites any more. What is celebrated is "[b]eauty and brains" (*WW* 97) as well as the fact that women are strong and successful when being loyal to and respectful of each other.

To conclude, one could state that *Wah! Wah! Girls* is in its form and dramatic technique a very conservatively drafted musical, in which existing conflicts are overcome without further problems in the end. Once again and, as is typical of Gupta's works, the musical is not characterised by formal inventiveness, but by the inclusion of a seemingly endless range of

different themes that are all related to contemporary life in Britain. Among them are race and racialisations, ethnicity, culture, age and the question in how far the transmitting of rituals is linked to how one's children, who in this case are second-generation immigrants, approach the topic of traditionality. What makes it especially interesting is the fact that the discourse of an all-pervasive culturalism within the British Asian community, which has been discussed in connection with most of the other plays above, is in this case treated in connection with traditional Indian dancing that not only tends to be ossified by the diasporic culture, but also exoticised by the hegemonic British population. All too easily are Bollywood movies denied their critical potential and considered the same as more traditional forms of Indian dancing culture by an unknowing Western audience. Interestingly, in *Wah! Wah! Girls* the issues of the modern popular culture industry as well as century-old traditions are presented in front of a contemporary English setting. This musical, although almost free of social criticism, presents London as the ultimate diaspora space, in which not only ethnically English people, but also Polish immigrants, Muslims and Asians find a place to live.

4.2.6. Mind Walking (2013)

The last play that will be presented in the subchapter of families and relationships is one of Gupta's most recently published works. In contrast to *Wah! Wah! Girls*, in which the topic of the family is connected to social restrictions for women and the traditional roles of men as the head of the social unit, from which Sita is running away and trying to break free, *Mind Walking* (henceforth in quotes: *MW*) paints a more positive, supportive picture of the family that is, however, also a lot more complex than the relationships presented in the musical. Although the cast of the play only consists of four characters, a level of complexity is reached in this play that can be compared to *Sugar Mummies*. In a very compelling and also highly emotional, touching way the lives of people from three different generations are presented that are all connected not only by family ties, but also by the serious topic of how to deal with a beloved person that is suffering from Alzheimer's disease and increasingly losing every link to reality, thereby drifting off into a world of his or her own. In *Mind Walking*, Gupta again remains within the confines of the British Asian community and their diasporic lifestyle, but her protagonist is not of Bengali descent, like she is, but an elderly Parsi man in his seventies, called Bobby, whose mind is strongly affected by dementia. The fact that his past is connected to the highly exclusive religious community of the Parsis will be very important in the course of the analysis. In the play's present, Bobby is married to the Scottish Moira, who is probably most grief-stricken because of her husband's mental prostration. The cast is completed by the couple's 40-year-old daughter, Rosa, and her 16-year-old son, Matty. The father, Mike,

however, is only mentioned and not present on stage, because the married couple are on "a trial separation" (*MW* 20). In *Mind Walking*, Gupta presents a cross-generational and intercultural picture of a modern family, in which three characters try to understand what happens to their beloved husband, father or grandfather, when he takes walking tours through his puzzling mind.

According to the script (*MW* 2), the UK premiere of *Mind Walking* took place at Watermans Theatre, Brentford, on 29 September 2011. Interestingly enough, the play was produced internationally: it was also staged in India, where it premiered on 8 November 2011 at the Delhi International Arts Festival. In this case, a play that is very much inspired by the diasporic experience of its main character was both presented in the Western diaspora space of Southern England and in the original home country of the characters, which certainly contributes to its contemporary and mutually inclusive flair. According to an article in *The Northern Echo*, the production "combines aerial trapeze with emotionally-charged character driven narratives to tell a story which celebrates enduring love and cultural honesty." This review already draws attention to the play's most outstanding feature: the hoop trapeze that was present on stage and that the aerialists/actors made use of during the performance. The hoop is not only used as a means of reminding Bobby of his childhood and happy memories of sitting on a swing himself, but also as a means of calling attention to his role as a father, when he was at the playground pushing his own children on a swing. Additionally and most importantly, the hoop is used as a theatrical device that helps the audience to distinguish between the contemporary setting of the play in a nursing home for the elderly and Bobby's memories of his youth in the 1940s in Bombay, India, where he was an active member of the Parsi community. The circeau, as Gupta calls it, thus becomes a metaphorical window or a door to another time and another space.[31] Over the course of the play and with his mental decay progressing more and more, the audience gets to know about this hidden part of his identity that he never talked about: because of marrying a Scottish woman, i.e. outside of his community, he was ostracised by his family and consequently also had to abandon his faith. This brutally and painfully neglected part of his identity re-emerges when Bobby's mind starts to unravel and he starts to speak in his mother tongue, Gujarati, again that his family cannot understand.

[31] This seemingly very effective device was, however, also criticised for being superfluous. Brennan (20) writes that the actor who was playing the role of the demented protagonist "brings such charm, anguish, dignity and longing to Bobbie s [sic!] inner journeyings [sic!] that the aerial fragments, and some of the resulting material, could be dispensed with."

Mind Walking more than anything else focuses on the complex character of Bobby, who keeps all the other thematic strands together. In contrast to the other plays discussed above, in the presently analysed work religion is not only present, but put centre stage. It is not only used by people within the hegemonic discourse to racialise or exoticise others[32], but actually it is the determining force in the life of a Parsi, as described in Gupta's play. When Bobby came to England in the 1960s to be educated as a doctor, what he had in mind was a temporary stay. He could not yet know that his first passage from India to Britain would also remain his last one and that his whole life would be lived in the British diaspora – if one can call it diaspora, if all the ties with one's relatives have been cut and the connection to one's homeland and culture have completely been lost. The question that permeates *Mind Walking* and that also Bobby's family members pose several times is why he decided to negate his roots and keep them a secret. As it turns out, that Bobby so harshly broke with his upbringing, culture and place of origin was not a self-determined decision, but, on the contrary, a forced one. His decision to marry the Scottish nurse Moira that took care of him when he was ill with pneumonia led to the permanent exclusion from his community. Bobby's mother tells her son what to do in an unforgiving and very radical intercontinental phone conversation: "You're a doctor and a man – babies can be flushed out. Wives can be abandoned. When you have discarded this foreign woman, then come home and we will forgive you and it will be forgotten" (*MW* 54). Her unbelievably harsh reaction to her son's marriage additionally indicates that tradition, in this case, is not receptive to change, but rather constitutes a set of obligatory social rules that cannot and will not be questioned. The Parsi mother presented in the play shows the same racist fears of miscegenation that are presented in *Meet the Mukherjees* by the ultraconservative Raj. Whereas the latter is afraid of the wrong genes, the former rather fears the dilution of their community's cultural heritage. Unsurprisingly, Bobby always told everyone: "My parents are dead" (*MW* 55) to cover up the wounds that this rupture has caused. However, Gupta does not exoticise here and blame the community for its reactionary ways of thinking or re-establish lines of division of West vs. East and developed vs. underdeveloped, which Said and Spivak so heavily criticised, but she points to the fact that the Western community is at least as much a space characterised by stereotypes and racism. When Moira's parents get to know that she has married an Indian man, of whom she is expecting a baby, her father coldly states via the phone: "You're no daughter of mine. And if you have any bastard black children, don't even try to bring them here" (*MW* 54). The politics of colour, which was discussed in the theory chapter, is of no interest to Moira's father –

[32] See, for example, Anita in *Meet the Mukherjees*, who is called a "'Muslim cunt' or 'Osama's whore'" (*MM* 69) despite the fact that she is not even a Muslim.

"black" in this case not only means African or Asian, but also foreign, unwelcome, subordinate and unworthy. Both communities – the Scottish as well as the Parsi one – create strong in-group identities that are linked to a certain number of rules that cannot be neglected. Just like the discourse of homosexuality seems to be a very negatively connoted one within the contemporary British Asian community, interethnic and interracial relationships were impossible in the 1960s in the above-mentioned social environments. What is most interesting about this scene, however, is the way the rupture with the families is presented on stage: both Moira and Bobby simultaneously talk on the phone with one of their parents, the exclusion from their respective communities seemingly happens at the same time when they look back to these moments in retrospect, which gives the scene an enormous emotional immediacy (*MW* 52ff.).

However, in the course of the play it becomes clear that Bobby could not fully leave behind his heritage, but that he actually feels a part of his identity is missing. When he loses control of his mind because of the dementia, suddenly issues of cultural belonging resurface that obviously trouble the old man. This becomes most obvious when Bobby resorts to Gujarati, his mother tongue, throughout the play to express what is troubling his mind. Moira in the beginning believes that Bobby is "ashamed of his heritage" (*MW* 36). Actually, the contrary seems to be the case: not only does the protagonist miss the traditions of his community, but he has a bad conscience for having abandoned his roots. He is convinced of the fact that there are "[h]ardly any Parsis left, because of [him]" (*MW* 39), which his grandson Matty can only counter with a sarcastic "Ah – so it's all your fault" (*MW* 39). The deepest psychological wound, however, seems to have been inflicted upon him by his beloved brother Farhad, who also negated his existence since his marriage to a non-Parsi woman. That he is deeply hurt, because of having lost his brother, becomes clear, when Bobby starts to call his grandson Farhad instead of Matty, which again shows that language is used to other and exoticise migrants in a foreign country, and when he sees his daughter Rosa as his own mother, with whom he has probably more unfinished business than Priya from *The Waiting Room* with all her family. All these issues overstrain Bobby's physical and mental strength, which is why all the discussions with his family that feel betrayed for not having been told about their roots and the confrontation with old memories culminate in the old man's desperate exclamation: "Who am I?" (*MW* 28). The person he sees himself as starts to dissolve more and more, when he retreats with increased regularity into the more peaceful world of Alzheimer's.

What additionally complicates the contemporary story of a family trying to understand the remediless disease of Alzheimer's, is the fact that Bobby was a successful doctor himself. Tragically, he remembers all the medical details and consequences of the sickness, but he has to concede: "I have the diagnosis. I know what the problem is. But I don't have a cure! No, no cure" (*MW* 27). Besides the fact that the family cannot comprehend the issues Bobby has with his roots, they are also challenged to accept that they are losing the person they knew for so long. While Moira, the loving wife, and Rosa, the daughter, suffer immensely and are hardly able to face the facts, it is Matty who brings some comic relief to the play. Because of his disregard of taboos and his rather explicit language (*MW* 21), he makes the other family members laugh and eases their mutually shared burden. When Rosa states "I can't deal with any of this" (MW 49), Matty sarcastically points out: "Mum. *I'm* supposed to be the teenager" (*MW* 49). The generation gap between Bobby and his daughter is in *Mind Walking* bridged by the grandchild. Additionally, the teenager is intrigued by the fact that his roots might be more complex than he would have expected. As is typical for the younger generation presented in Gupta's works, he is empathetic and has an open mind for new cultures, which is why he starts to do research on the internet about the Parsi community. Matty's sudden interest in his grandfather's biography and roots might be motivated by the fact that he is currently suffering from the temporary separation of his parents. At an earlier point of the play, Matty indicates that he misses his healthy and active "Gramps" (*MW* 22). What troubles the teenager is that he is losing both of his closest male attachment figures at the same time, one to Alzheimer's and the other one because of a looming divorce. Also as far as the troubled marriage of his parents is concerned, he is presented as very mature for a 16-year-old. Rosa, his mom, suggests it might be best that he does not get involved. Matty, however, states: "This affects me too you know. I'm the one who has to watch my mum and dad both, separately, sad." However, not only Matty manages to establish close ties with his grandfather, but also Rosa learns to accept her demented father for what he really is, including his troubled Parsi past. Although the audience cannot be sure whether Bobby recognises Rosa, he is convinced of one fact: "I know that I love you" (*MW* 50). In an instant of momentary recognition, he assures Rose of her importance in her parents' lives: "We called you Rosa because you were born when our garden was full of roses. You filled our lives with sweetness and light" (*MW* 50). It is implied here that the diasporic life Bobby, Moira and Rosa led in Britain was so full of love and happiness that the loss of his culture was compensated.

On a similar note, the ending of the play is both hopeful and extremely sad at the same time: on the one hand, Matty's parents seem to be in touch again, because Mike has sent his father-

in-law a traditional Parsi outfit that he immediately puts on and apparently likes a lot, which indicates a reappraisal of his roots and the coming to terms with his past. In contrast to ossifying and upholding the traditions of the Parsi community, he chose love and a fulfilled life: "Surely blood is thicker than religious dogma? Surely love is more important than stupid rules? And happiness? What about that? Are we to live our lives according to someone's pronouncements from deep history? How do we progress as human beings if we live in the past?" (*MW* 56). On the other hand, the marriage of the old couple is put to its ultimate test, although always characterised by its outstanding loyalty and devotion. After a moving confession of love, Moira can only state: "I hope you always recognise me Bobby. And even if you don't, I hope there's something somewhere that recognises that I'm an old friend" (*MW* 56). At the very end, Bobby steps through the circeau one last time, but it seems clear to the rest of the family that he has ultimately exchanged their life reality for one of his own. Moira concludes: "I don't think he's coming back this time. Not the Bobby that we knew anyway" (*MW* 59).

In conclusion, it can be said that Gupta in *Mind Walking* insightfully presents topics that are important in today's multicultural society. The issue of caring for the elderly is a popular trigger for heated discussions in politics and the media in the rapidly aging societies of the West. In her play, the situation is increasingly complicated, because its protagonist has a background of migration that is troubling him. In a generation-spanning take on Alzheimer's the family is presented as deeply affected, but devoted and loving. Although they decided to get Bobby a place in a nursing home, they are not presented as neglectful of their duties within the family. Especially the younger generation as represented by Matty is shown to be open-minded and supportive, which is surprising, because the young man has his own problems related to the probable separation of his parents. Finally, it should be mentioned that *Mind Walking* is one of Gupta's most innovative plays as regards its form. The theatrical device of the circeau that connects the audience to Bobby's Alzheimer's world and that helps the family members to navigate between his confusing memories makes the play quite outstanding. Certainly, no critic could accuse this play of using a style similar to writing scripts for TV. Quite to the contrary, *Mind Walking* features a sensitive, moving and also hopeful, but never lachrymose approach of talking about a topic that is increasingly getting media attention these days and that Gupta complicates with a diasporic background.

4.3. Contemporary YOUTH CULTURE

4.3.1. Introduction

The topic that this subsection deals with is a very versatile, quickly changing and contemporary one. In the plays *Inside Out* (2002), *Fragile Land* (2003) and *White Boy* (2008) Gupta presents her take on the subject matter of youth culture, which not only includes capturing the lifestyle and language of a generation, but also highly political issues such as domestic violence and women in the criminal justice system (*Inside Out*), migration and the threat of deportation (*Fragile Land*) as well as the worrying increase of knife crimes among teenagers in London (*White Boy*). However serious these topics might sound, humour is still one of Gupta's most essential means of getting across important, socially relevant messages to her audience. Even if the three works cannot really be called tragicomedies, their humorous aspects are at least as important as the serious discussions that evolve in the plays. How well she manages to balance out serious subject matters with funny side remarks will be analysed in more detail in the respective chapter on the three plays.

By mostly working with cross-racial, multicultural casts that meet in the diasporic space of the British capital, Gupta makes it clear at first sight that hybridity and the Third Space, as discussed by Bhabha, certainly cannot be understood as conflict-free, harmonious concepts, but rather as the spaces where identities are being formed and re-negotiated – be it violently, harmoniously or both. Although matters of race, age and growing up, intercultural love, sex and tradition consciousness in a group of second generation immigrants are highly political topics, it was decided to discuss the three works mentioned above separately from what I would call overtly political plays like *Sanctuary* and *Gladiator Games*. The reason for this decision is the plays' outstanding focus on youth culture and Gupta's respectful way of treating young people's opinions without being patronising; her way of presenting difficult subject matters from the teenagers' perspective without marginalising them, but working with casts in which young actors are the protagonists instead of secondary characters. She facilitates that young voices are increasingly heard on main British stages instead of being disregarded and hushed, as is often the case. Just like Spivak's postcolonial voices that are not allowed enough room to be heard, the children's and young adults' voices are only rarely considered in contemporary plays, at most mentioned en passant. In addition to the still prevalent marginalisation of youth culture from the dominant discourse, Inchley (327) argues that because of the serious increase in youth unemployment, young people are more and more demonised and othered because of being associated with rioting and social resistance and thereby posing a threat to the dominant wealthy, white, middle-aged society. This chapter can

be considered the anti-thesis to *Mind Walking*, in which the topic of neglecting the voices of the old is introduced. In today's neoliberal societies of the West only the voices of the physically fit and economically successful are heard and considered – the poor, young and old, as well as the ethnically/culturally and racially different, all of which are groups that cannot or are not allowed to fully contribute to the dominant discourse, are underrepresented and ultimately ignored. Moreover, Inchley (328) draws attention to the fact that the exoticisation of the younger generation is mostly associated with and exercised via language: "deviances and deficiencies from 'proper' English become signs and symptoms of moral and behavioural deterioration, rising crime and slipping standards in society." In connection with the tradition of British new writing in the 2000s, however, the increase of young voices on stage became apparent (Inchley 329), a new trend that also Gupta contributed to, whose plays appeal as much to teenagers as to an adult audience. Because it seems to be of utmost importance to Gupta, a mother of three herself, to voice the concerns of the younger generation in her plays, the results of her efforts deserve to be treated prominently and separately in this thesis.

4.3.2. Inside Out (2002)

The play *Inside Out* (henceforth in quotes: *IO*), which will be discussed in this chapter, has an interesting background both as far as its production and Gupta's personal inspiration are concerned. In 2002, Gupta was the commissioned writer for Clean Break, which is "the only women's theatre company in the UK that works with women in prison, women ex-offenders and women who have been sectioned under the Mental Health Act" (*IO* 9). The theatre company uses the arts as a means of re-integrating female ex-criminals and of providing them with possibilities "to develop personal, professional and creative skills" (*IO* 9). The writing workshops Gupta ran at the Winchester Women's prison proved to be a "rather life-changing experience" (*IO* 7) for her, because the women that regularly participated in the workshops were interested in and mutually supportive of each other's ideas and writings instead of being frightening and gruff. At first, Gupta was rather critical of the project (Billingham 216), because the theatre company works with the premise that the plays should be written for a cast of three actresses and without male characters. However, the meetings with the women from various different backgrounds made Gupta aware of and interested in the complex trajectories and the institutional racism running through the British justice system that she would return to three years later in the even more radically political verbatim drama *Gladiator Games*. She summarises her experiences the following way:

> I could not and still do not believe that locking people up is an effective solution. Almost all the women inmates I met at Winchester were from impoverished backgrounds whose lives had dealt them a very bad hand. I was shocked to see how many black women languished inside for relatively minor offences, serving long sentences for trying to cheat their way out of poverty and deprivation. (*IO* 7f.)

Additionally, just like *The Waiting Room*, the play was inspired by Gupta's family history. In the preface to *Inside Out* (*IO* 7) she explains that her great-uncle, Dinesh Gupta, was an Indian freedom fighter in the colonial period and that he, considered a terrorist by the British authorities, was hanged in 1930. Not only did the letters he sent to the family inspire Gupta to start writing, but they also caused the fact that she has "often ruminated on the subject of crime and punishment" (*IO* 7). Gupta realised over the course of her research for *Inside Out* that a generalised take on the topic of women in the criminal justice system would be impossible. Instead, she decided to present the audience with a very emotional and personalised picture of a lower-class family suffering from the consequences of female criminality, which in the end makes *Inside Out* "simply a story of two sisters" (*IO* 8).

The play premiered on 16 October 2002 at the Salisbury Playhouse. Mostly, *Inside Out* was appreciated by the critics, who more than anything else stressed the outstanding performance of the three female actors[33]. Baker considers the aims of the Clean Break theatre company "laudable" (9), but more importantly mentions that "the play stands in its own right as a fine piece of work" (9). The three central characters in the play are the 17-year-old, mixed race Di, her white, 15-year-old sister Affy, and their mother Chloe, an alcohol addict and impoverished prostitute, who suffers from the threats and violent outbursts of her boyfriend/pimp, Ed – called Godzilla by the girls – who never physically enters the stage, but who is always present as a looming threat to both the neglectful, abusive mother and her frightened daughters. Together, they "form a totally dysfunctional family", as Baker (9) rightly states in her review. Griffin (*Gupta* 229) remarks that "[t]wo of the play's key themes are women's relations with men and women's relations with each other", whereby both are "constructed as highly fraught" (Griffin, *Gupta* 229). Essentially, *Inside Out* presents Affy and Di as sisters who are united in their dream to escape from their poverty-stricken, mad mother and her violent lover. The first act presents them as cheeky young women that have learned to toughen up, emotionally as well as far as language is concerned. The two sisters worry about the men in their lives, about school, plans for the future and their home, which is haunted by Godzilla, who is always present in the back of their heads (*IO* 17). The

[33] See Mountford (*Ishoos of yoof, innit*) , Baker, Cavendish (*Be prepared for a long stretch*) and the *Time Out* review by Powell (on the production in London's Arcola Theatre) for reviews that emphasise the performance of the cast.

appropriate way of dealing with sexuality as a young woman is also discussed. Once again, sexual intercourse is metaphorically compared to the consumption of food, implicitly also race plays a role: Di's boyfriend Jake said to her that her "skin's like dark chocolate" (*IO* 14), her "hair's like black candy floss" (*IO* 14) and her "tits are like ripe mangoes…" (*IO* 15). Affy sarcastically points out that his devotion to her sister might have another reason: "He just sounds like he's hungry" (*IO* 15). Although Di has been going out with Jake for months, she has never been invited to his house and Affy has heard rumours that he is "two-timing" (*IO* 25) her with a white girl, who has been introduced to his parents already, whereas, apparently, the mixed race, poor Di, whom Jake allegedly has called a "nigger" (*IO* 28), is not good enough to be his official girlfriend. Race in this play not only distinguishes the two sisters from each other, but is mostly used to show Di's status of subalternity in her hostile surrounding world. Just like the beach boys in *Sugar Mummies*, the fact that she is not white exoticises and others her, makes her more of an outcast than Affy.

The topic that makes this play so compelling and that renders its youthful perspective so credible is domestic violence. The scenes in which the helpless girls and the mother get beaten up, not only bind the sisters together, but also make the audience aware of the hopelessness of their situation. They cannot turn to their mother for help, who is dominated by Ed herself, but neither can they tell someone else about Chloe's abusive lover, because they fear that the consequences might be worse than the beatings they are already used to. The young Affy desperately and with a blood-smeared face poses the inevitable question: "Why does she [i.e. their mother] let him do this to us?" (*IO* 29). She has to conclude: "She doesn't love us. If she did, she'd protect us." The mother has nothing to say to her girls that could calm them down or explain the situation. She exculpates herself by stating: "I love him. He's the only bloke whose [sic!] ever loved me back" (*IO* 35). When Affy asks "What about when he beats the shit out of you? Is that what you call loving you back?" (*IO* 35), she only "*puts her hands over her ears*" (*IO* 36) and problematically blames herself instead of accusing Ed of physical and mental abuse: "It's my fault he gets angry. It's all my fault. I egg him on and then he loses his rag and takes it out on my girls" (*IO* 36). Di softens to her words, but Affy's decision has been made – she has to leave.

Although the two sisters fight together against their difficult situation, each of them has a different starting point. Whereas Affy's life is mostly complicated by poverty and domestic violence, Di is a mixed race young woman that is characterised not only by her lower-class background, but also by the politics of colour. Starck (360) points to the fact that also the

mother's "value system [is] based on a racial hierarchy" and that she always preferred the white Affy over the mixed race Di. In a critical take on racial politics in the UK, Gupta only presents the white character of Affy with the life-changing option of living with her middle class biological father, which she accepts. When Affy departs, the relationship of the sisters is put to the ultimate test, but although Di is jealous and sad about her sister's departure, she defends her decision in a conversation with their mother (*IO* 49). The multiply disadvantaged and subaltern character of Di, on the other hand, cannot leave, does not see a way out and is left behind on her own with her victimising mother, who is presented as completely hopeless and childlike. Although Chloe has always neglected her oldest daughter, when Affy is gone she suddenly seems to take notice of Di, who has to take up the role of the mother, because Chloe is unable to face the facts. Instead, she is sitting on the sofa, daydreaming and sucking her thumb like an infant (*IO* 47). Despite promises by Chloe that "[she]'ll be a good mum" (*IO* 54) and that Godzilla will never be allowed inside the house again, neither Di nor the audience believe her and Chloe can only be called a failure as a mother, which becomes more than obvious when Affy comes by for a visit over the weekend. Because Chloe has stopped working as a prostitute, Di and her mother find it very hard to make ends meet, but Chloe has the perfect solution: "What's the point of exams? If you strutted your stuff a bit more, we could get some proper cash. Men pay well for black pussy" (*IO* 60). Again, racialisation and sexualisation go hand in hand. That it is the mother who suggests selling her own daughter as a racial object of lust to foreign men makes the deed even more horrid. However, the situation between the sisters is at least as tense as the relationship between Di and her mother. Affy, who is treated very well at her father's, understandably nonetheless misses her family and the "[parental] support structures" (Griffin, *Gupta* 230) she never had. Di, however, cannot feel sorry for her: "You got in touch with him, you fucked off and left me to deal with her … how dare you feel fucking sorry for yourself?" (*IO* 64).

When Chloe some weeks later gets drunk and not only hooks up with Ed again, but also brings him back into her house, Di decides to leave for Brighton too. In an excruciatingly brutal scene, the drunken Chloe confesses that Di was an unwanted child. When Chloe tries to stop her with a knife from going away, too, she blames her daughter for her disastrous life in an extremely racist way: "My mum threw me out because of you. Half-caste, frizzy haired, bastard. I should have chucked you in the bin the day you were born. My whole life ruined – because of you." In act three, which takes place five years later, the viewers/readers get to know that Di has killed her mother in the play's horrific climax at the end of act two and that she went to jail for her deed, whereby the murder "leaves the audience with ambiguous

feelings" (Starck 362). On the one hand, one feels pity for Chloe, because she is suffering from Ed's violence herself, but her "deeply ingrained racism" (Starck 362) cannot be forgiven. At the beginning of the final act, the troubled young woman is released from jail and in the end, Di tracks Affy down and thereby re-establishes contact with her sister, who is living together with her fiancé Sean and two babies. Their life, however, is just like her mother's characterised by poverty and desperate efforts to make ends meet, which according to Griffin is a clear indication of Affy, the teenage mother, "replicating Chloe's pattern" (*Gupta* 229). Although Affy has not acquired any qualifications and "her future looks unpromising" (Griffin, *Gupta* 229), at least she is raising her children with a loving father that works as much as he can to support his family. That the sisters only have each other and no one else left brings them closer together again, although their talk about Di's murder and her consequent feelings of guilt and Affy's evaluation of the situation is one of the tensest in the whole play. When Affy accuses Di of having "ripped the heart out of [their] family" (*IO* 93), Di counters: "We didn't have a family" (*IO* 93). Both biographies are haunted by guilt and desperation, by doubts about one's role in life as a woman, about not having finished school and having made a career that would have saved them forever from ending up in a situation like their mother's. Affy desperately states: "I couldn't cope – not with you on the inside and me outside" (*IO* 96), whereby she at the same time means the inside of the prison and leaving her sister behind inside the harmful house of their mother. In this conversation, the sisters' innermost feelings are turned inside out and it becomes obvious that Di's deepest wound is not having been loved by her mother, which then results in the sisters' reconciliation and a shared understanding of the other's motives, which, however, does not come across as a contrived happy ending, but a very fragile though hopeful outlook on the future by two women, whose lives were determined by violence, abuse and hopelessness.

What makes the play interesting apart from its political subject matter is that it again invokes "presences that defy material definition" (Griffin, *Contemporary Black and Asian Women Playwrights* 21) and that are not normally used in the social realist tradition of modern British drama. Affy and Di discuss a ghostly presence at the riverbank that once saved their mother from a "weird bloke" (*IO* 20). The female ghosts that can be found there are said to have been drowned as witches centuries ago and now they do their best to defend other women from the persecution they suffered from. Thereby a historical connection between suppressed and socially excluded women is formed that gives the sisters strength to stand up against the violent, hegemonic male discourse. Affy quite seriously states: "Makes me feel safe – you know? Like there's someone lookin' out for me. I can feel her" (*IO* 21). Sadly enough, it

becomes apparent here that the two young women have no one else to turn to, the only comfort they have in their lives comes from immaterial ghostly apparitions and from each other. However, when Affy leaves for good, Di sees violence as a last resort to escape poverty and physical as well as emotional pain. She is not predisposed to commit crimes, but her brutal social surroundings seemingly leave her no other option.

In addition to challenging the mainstream theatrical scene by including silenced female voices and ghosts in a play, Gupta once again returns to the discourse of multiculturalism, which, as could be seen in the analysis above, is very negatively connoted in *Inside Out*. People like Di from impoverished, uneducated backgrounds that are additionally mixed race have a clearly disadvantaged position in society in comparison to white people from similar origins. Hybridity and multiculturalism are not discussed in the lower class family and not at all accepted, instead Chloe proves to be careless and racist. Additionally, the play can be seen as another example of Gupta's ability of thinking 'outside the Asian box' and of thematising contemporary British realities instead of solely focussing on her own diasporic community's culture (Starck 348ff.). In *Inside Out*, the only other character that appears on stage and that also contributes to the discourse of multiculturalism and diaspora is not an Asian, but the Brazilian Mercedes, an ex-inmate and friend of Di's. The readers/viewers do not get to know why she left her home country, husband and son and came to live a diasporic life in Britain and also the reason for her imprisonment is not mentioned. However, she points to the problematic issue of immigrants going astray instead of managing to lead a stable life in the new surroundings, which again points to Gupta's initial statement that many of the women in prison were driven to commit crimes because of their ethnic background and their poverty. The immigrant's dreams of starting a better, financially secure life in the West are all too often not fulfilled. In contrast to *Meet the Mukherjees*, which celebrates multiculturalism, *Inside Out* rather emphasises its downsides and complexities.

In conclusion, *Inside Out* is a compelling story of domestic violence that is presented from the point of view of two teenaged half-sisters that struggle to overcome their impoverished, violent family backgrounds, in which they only partially succeed. The white sister Affy is given the opportunity to start all over again, whereas the mixed race Di is brought close to madness by her helpless, abusive and insulting mother, whom she kills in an act of self-defence. The play is an outstanding example of female loyalty put to the test in an extreme situation. Although the act of matricide is terrible, Di's motives are made very clear and the women find a way to reconciliation against all odds. Thus, other than presenting a youthful take on the topic of female criminality, the play is also a clearly hopeful metaphor of the

importance of family in the 21st-century. Despite all their problems and their past, the women in the end feel that they need to stick together and stand up for each other to be able to break free from their restrictive social conditions and start a life of their own with a functional, supporting family and a job that provides them with a stable income.

4.3.3. Fragile Land (2003)

In contrast to *Inside Out*, which presents the dramatic life of an English lower-class family, in *Fragile Land* (henceforth in quotes: *FL*) Gupta returns to a more mixed cast of British Asian teenagers in central London that, while growing up, try to find out more about their sexual, religious and national identities. However, her story does not only concern the Asian youngsters living in the diasporic space of contemporary London, but also the white, English children that are in touch with them. *Fragile Land* is a play that embodies Brah's concept of the diaspora space and that additionally once again clearly points to the fact why Gupta, who presents both the lives of immigrants as well as 'natives', can be seen as one of the *Alternatives within the mainstream* (Godiwala). The young immigrants discuss highly political matters of race, origin and group belonging, while chatting about personal subjects like first relationships, their parents and their aims in life. Soon it becomes clear in this play that the political discourses the older generation and the media discuss also concern the teenagers, who are, however, not allowed to participate in the hegemonic discourse. Griffin states that

> underneath all the swearing, banter and horseplay lurk anxieties about their futures that the youngsters themselves – who have either been deprived of their parents through war and displacement, or who are overly controlled or seemingly abandoned by them and their generation – have little sense of or faith in. They do not want their parents' life, which they regard as all work and no reward, but they also feel unsupported and unwelcome in the fragile land that is Great Britain, where they are the object of constant rejection. (Griffin, *Gupta* 231f.)

Once again, Gupta tries to give the younger generation room to voice their problems and dreams in a commissioned play for *The Space* in the Hampstead Theatre, London, at which the work premiered as the new space's first production on 25 March 2003. Although Gupta finds "a kind of 'urban bleakness'" (Gupta in Billingham 220) in both *Inside Out* and *Fragile Land*, she states that "the possibility of 'moving on' for at least one or two of the characters" (Gupta in Billingham 220) was equally important to her. She does not pass judgement on her young characters, but mentions that she feels strongly for Asian kids like Omar, who is one of the play's central characters, "who are badly parented, often abandoned or left by their parents so that they [the young people] could get a 'good education' in England. Actually, of course, a

good education isn't enough in itself; you need a sense of family and belonging" (Gupta in Billingham 221). Obviously, Gupta managed to successfully stage the concerns of a young, contemporary audience, as the play was very popular with the teenagers that she represents as individuals with different aims and dreams instead of essentialising and demonising them as a group. In the following, Gupta muses on the great diversity of her crowd:

> [T]here might have been fifty different cultures represented in the audiences – white punk-haired kids sitting next to young Asian kids who were perhaps sitting next to older Asian women. I was fascinated about that. I remember on the first night that there was this huge pile of skateboards in the foyer of the theatre outside the doors and I thought, where have all these come from and the Stage Manager said, 'That's what they all came on!' (Gupta in Billingham 221f.)

Not only the teenagers liked the play, but it was also discussed positively in the major newspapers. Billington (*Fragile Land* 20), for example, mentions that Gupta "accurately exposed the group's internal tensions and external threats", but criticises that she "resolves the individual problems rather too neatly." He suggests that the ambiguous nature of multiculturalism that is presented in the play is a drawback: "You feel that the logic of her play is despair at the plight of disadvantaged young British Asian, but, at the same time, her instinctive optimism leads her to suggest there is hope in dual identity and mixed-race relationships" (Billington, *Fragile Land* 20). In contrast to Billington, I would interpret the unclear stance of the play towards hybridity and diaspora as advantageous and reflective of the real life realities of the teenagers. Although one might theoretically speaking think of London as a diasporic Third space for many different cultures, the realities show that conflicts and violence are also part of the everyday experiences of migrants, which Gupta includes in her play, which speaks up against an uncritical celebration of "happy hybridity" (Matthews 44). Nonetheless, Billington casts his doubts about the play's unclear message aside, draws attention to the actors' superb performance and the stage design and stresses that it "clearly went down a bomb with the young people in the audience, which is what really matters" (Billington, *Fragile Land* 20).[34] Also Maxwell (144) states that the production "keeps the pace up and the humour upfront. Among a lively young cast […] [t]here are awkward moments, but there's also heartening amounts of empathy, wit and local relevance. A strong start for a smart new space." The many issues Gupta brings up in her "salty, sharp and compassionately funny play" (Taylor 38), are also the basis of some light criticism. Her play is, according to Taylor (38), "a bit too obviously issue-based", which, however, ensured that it

[34] Also Mountford (*Ishoos of yoof, innit* 34) talks about "an engaging sextet of actors" and Peter (24) mentions how much he liked the audience involvement the "excellent, both energetic and intimate" acting brought about.

"caught the zeitgeist" (Kolawole 28). How Gupta fuses lots of heavy-weight topics into a lively, young story-line will be discussed in the following.

The play, which mostly takes place inside and in front of an Indian sweet shop, at its heart discusses the topics of immigration and diaspora, but also the fear of deportation from a youthful perspective. There are two characters in the play that are characterised by their fear of being deported against their will: Tasleema, an almost 18-year-old Asian young woman, and her boyfriend Hassan, a 19-year-old Afghanistani youth. Although Hassan is the only character in the play, who is really driven by the wish to make something of his life and to use his second chance that he has achieved by migrating to the UK, ironically it is he who is ultimately deported, because Tasleema, whom he claims to love, heavy-heartedly does not accept his wedding proposal that would save him from being sent back to his home country. Again, the role of marriage within the immigrants' religious and cultural communities is questioned by Gupta. Although it is not fully made clear, Hassan seemingly only tried to talk Tasleema into marrying him to en passent receive a British passport. In contrast to *Meet the Mukherjees*, in which a traditionally arranged marriage is seen as a kind of social last resort, in *Fragile Land* the institution is seen as the ultimate way of being granted asylum in a foreign country. When Tasleema hears rumours that Hassan has allegedly already asked four other girls to marry him over the course of the last two years, she cannot trust him any longer and is strong enough to refuse his proposal with a broken heart (*FL* 82ff.). Tasleema knows about the seriousness of his situation, but cannot help him: "I know you're being deported. I know you're desperate to stay in the country – but I can't just be your passport" (*FL* 84). Tas, as she is called by her friends, is the central female character in the play, who fights against ossified Asian traditions and being controlled by her extremely strict father, who always threatens to forcefully send her back to her native country India, which she has never been to herself and which is completely foreign to her except for the language that is spoken there. Instead, it is England, her diasporic environment, which she calls "home" (*FL* 27). As has already been argued in connection with Naomi, the mixed race girl in *Sugar Mummies*, the second generation migrants' place of origin is often considerably less familiar to them than the diasporic realities in which they have been raised (Griffin, *Contemporary Black and Asian Women Playwrights* 32). When Tas's father takes the ultimate step of locking his daughter up in her bedroom, she can only wonder: "Why are the rules different for women? Why should we be imprisoned like this?" (*FL* 44). Hassan, whose mother has been killed by the Taliban for teaching girls (*FL* 59), can only sadly agree with his girlfriend, but does not have an answer either. Tasleema's story is additionally complicated by the complete lack of female

attachment figures in her life: her sister Nasreen eloped with a white man, which caused her ultimate exclusion from their family as well as their diasporic and cultural community, and her mother resides in a psychiatric hospital and does not even recognise her any more. In the end, however, Tas narrowly escapes her father's plans of private deportation and a forced reverse diasporic travel when she decides to live with her ostracised sister. Being outcast from one's community is still a better solution than leading a heteronomous life in their home country, in which women's rights are neglected and gender equality cannot even be mentioned. Again, female, and in this case sisterly loyalty provides an antidote to male domination.

However cheeky and direct, female support and comfort is provided to Tas throughout the play by her best friend Lux, who is a 17-year-old Asian young woman and classmate. Similarly to Tas, Lux does not mince matters, but instead challenges Asian conventions and traditions. Despite her friends' criticism of their relationship, she is in love with the white Fidel, whose outspokenly left-wing and multiculturalism-approving parents called him after the famous Cuban communist revolutionary and for the same reasons of teaching him cultural awareness sent him to a school where pupils from diverse backgrounds are studying. When another boy, Omar, talks about him as "[w]hite trash" (*FL* 13), he alludes to the fact that only lower class English parents would send their children to a school with such a diverse body of pupils that is known for violence, careless teachers and little state funding. Lux, however, convinces him of the opposite when she tells him that Fidel's "[f]ather's a lawyer and mother's an artist" (*FL* 13). Also Tasleema finds it strange that a white boy from two English parents is studying with them. Lux explains the situation in the following way: "They're left wing or something weird" (*FL* 12), whereas Tasleema interprets the same facts differently: "You mean they've got principles" (*FL* 13). A very interesting train of thought is introduced here by Gupta, namely that being white in a school in central London is not 'normal' any more, and certainly not 'cool', but actually the reason for racism from ethnic minorities against the hegemonic white population that in environments such as the described school yard loses its centuries-old supremacy. This idea of whiteness losing its dominant position in an eclectic group of teenagers from various different backgrounds is further elaborated on and put in the focus in the play *White Boy*, which will be discussed after *Fragile Land*. In addition to being with Fidel despite his whiteness, and his non-Asian/non-Hindu background, i.e. despite being from "completely opposite worlds" (*FL* 69), Lux is presented as a modern woman that, on the one hand, does not allow others to reduce her to her Asianness, but that, on the other hand, is also very critical of the stereotypes that others attribute to members of

her cultural community. When Lux tells Fidel about the relationship she has with her parents, which is characterised by lying to them on a daily basis, because their traditional idea of life as a young British Asian woman does not at all go together with what she has in mind, Fidel is surprised. He cannot believe that Lux's parents still think that she is "a paragon of virtue" (*FL* 42). Lux very honestly tells him how she views the situation: "'Course they do. And as long as they think that – I'm safe. Limited freedom is better than none at all" (*FL* 42). When Fidel replies with the stereotype-loaded answer that "Asian girls" are "not exactly the shy retiring types" (*FL* 42), Lux shows that she is very much aware of heteronomous ascriptions that she is not willing to accept. Instead of ignoring that her boyfriend calls her "dishonest" (*FL* 42), she self-confidently explains: "Yeah well. Some of us don't have a choice" (*FL* 42). Both of the central female characters in *Fragile Land*, Tasleema and Lux, are clear indicators of the fact that the British Asian diasporic community cannot be talked about in generalising terms and that it is very important to distinguish between the two sexes and the respective generations. That young British Asian women have a much more flexible, performative and situational understanding of their culture than their parent generation, who more and more move towards cultural ossification, is a central argument that permeates Gupta's work.

To complete and complicate an already multi-layered picture, Gupta adds the two young male characters of Omar and Quasim to the play. The former, Omar, is a 16-year-old Asian youth that lives above his uncle's sweet shop, whereas the latter, Quasim, is his 14-year-old best friend. Both are continuously after the beautiful girls, but distinguished by their age. Whereas Quasim is still very naïve, Omar is already an adolescent teenager that is trying to find out who he wants to be in a multicultural, diasporic context. In addition to their varying age and despite their shared Muslim faith, there is another difference between the two friends: the young Quasim has an English mother, who only converted at some point to Islam, but who was not raised in a Muslim milieu, which makes him "half and half" (*FL* 49), both as far as race and religion are concerned. That this fact troubles him a lot, becomes apparent in a surreal dream sequence, in which Indian sweets, which suddenly come to life, accuse him of being "a dilution of the original, a pale copy" (*FL* 49). His worst fears are verbalised in his dream by a samosa that tells him: "No one really wants you. The English think you look weird and the Muslims think you're a fake" (*FL* 50). Defiantly and very tellingly, he replies: "I ain't a fake. I'm the new blood. The future belongs to people like me – mixed races, dual identity, double heritage …" (*FL* 50). Quasim realises that the society needs to evolve beyond the time-honoured 'us' vs. 'them' terminology and to acknowledge his hybridity. He does not want to be reduced to either of the discourses that define him, because, in fact, he is part of

both cultures, races and traditions. His statement is arguably the play's strongest call for more acceptance of cultural hybridity within the UK. The dream sequences just mentioned above are characteristic of the play and used to enforce the main themes that have already been addressed before in the various conversations between the young people. Unsurprisingly, Hassan's dream lets him re-live his mother's death (*FL* 65ff.), which hopefully helps him to face and process the trauma he must be suffering from. Similarly, also Tasleema's dream is about her worst fear: deportation to India (*FL* 26f.), whereas Omar seemingly copes with feelings of uselessness and having no aims in life. In his dream (74ff.), he is repeatedly called a loser and accused of not having taken the chance he has been given by being allowed to live in Britain, whereby a popular and widely distributed prejudice among the hegemonic population is discussed that revolves around the social and economic needlessness of immigrants and asylum seekers.

In addition to the topics just mentioned in his dream what troubles Omar is the fact that he cannot openly perform his religious identity. As research carried out by Shannahan (253) suggests, religion is still an important marker of identity within the young British Asian Muslim community. However, just like the young generation does not understand the cultural traditions in the same way that their parents have understood them, also religion and Islam mean something different to them. Far from being extremists, a need for religious belonging seems to be wide-spread, although the young believers "do not 'belong' in the same way as their parents or grandparents" (Shannahan 253). At one point, Omar not only states that he feels left alone by his family that have sent him to the UK to get educated but that cannot provide him with emotional support, because they went back to Bangladesh (*FL* 30), but he also mentions that he feels like a religious outcast in Britain: "Don't you ever get fed up of this country, Hass? I mean man, it's getting worse you know – with this war. They hate Muslims. The other day some little shit caled [sic!] my auntie a 'Muslim Cunt'. They've even started picking on our women" (*FL* 33). Thus, living in the West can be a great chance for a young person from a developing country, but the racism and hostile attitudes the young immigrants experience every day are certainly not easy to live with. Because of his insecurity about his own identity, he even suggests to his friend Hassan to be "fighting for Saddam" (*FL* 34), because "[l]east [they]'d know where [they] were" (*FL* 34). Thus, the missing support structures for young immigrants in the West are implicitly cited as reasons for their violent actions, which not only include religious fanaticism, but also youthful knife crimes in the schoolyard – a topic that already foreshadows the central thematic trajectory of *White Boy*. However, Hassan immediately states that "[war] is not the solution" (*FL* 34) and rejects

Omar's belief in the "holy war" (*FL* 34) that George W. Bush was waging against Afghanistan and the whole Middle East. At the end of the scene, the morally upright Hassan states in a quite overly didactic way: "At the end of the day, you and I must make the best of things" (*FL* 34) – a message that is certainly very relevant not only for teenagers with a migratory background, but also for teenagers who are part of the hegemonic discourse, and, more generally, human beings of all ages.

Although it is impossible here to dwell on every thematic aspect that the play discusses, its most important thematic strands were analysed. *Fragile Land* does not only present a youthful take on the topic of migration and diaspora, but in addition to that it also includes a discussion of the often mentioned tradition consciousness and alleged cultural ossification within the British Asian community. Additionally, feminist values of self-determination and freedom from the social roles of the housewife and mother are treated. Equally important are the dreams and ambitions of the young people described and how they manage to perform their cultural, religious and sexual identities in the diasporic space of modern London. Whereas *Fragile Land* is a highly critical, but mostly violence-free take on the topic of adolescence in a multicultural society, *White Boy*, which will be discussed in the following subsection, foregrounds the dramatic consequences of emotional outbursts in a youthful milieu in which parental or otherwise authorial support from an older generation is not present at all and in which the teenagers are left alone to make their own, partly life-threatening, decisions.

4.3.4. White Boy (2008)

The play *White Boy* (henceforth in quotes: *WB*) that will be analysed in this chapter involves the complexities of being a teenager in Britain's multiethnic capital. Gupta's work can be considered a contribution to the public discussion about the increase in knife crimes in British schools (Sierz, *Introduction* 13) and it can thereby also be seen as a very explicit criticism of all too positive interpretations of the terms and concepts of multiculturalism and hybridity. Although Gupta does not suggest that a peaceful co-existence and interchange of different cultures in a diasporic space is impossible, she does not euphemise either: in her play, which draws on the tradition of social realism, she presents a seemingly realistic, complex picture of the racial and ethnic relations and power hierarchies in British schoolyards, in which the topic of violence unfortunately cannot be ignored.

White Boy was first performed on 10 August 2007 at the Soho Theatre in a National Youth Theatre production and then re-staged on 16 January 2008 at the same space (*WB* 104). The

play was, generally speaking, received with outstandingly positive criticism. Billington (*White Boy*, 40) in his review for *The Guardian* remarks that Gupta "pins down very precisely the intellectual and emotional confusion of young white males, which echoes that of their elders." In addition to the celebrated script, Billington also praises the production and the acting skills of the cast. Although Edwardes (*White Boy*) for the *Time Out* magazine calls Gupta's plot "a bit pat" (123), she cannot find anything "contrived about the emotions [the dramatist] arouses" (123). Similarly, Sierz (*Introduction*, 14) calls it "one of the most empathetic plays in the canon." The only critic that could not be fully convinced by the play's answer to Paul Roseby's question[35] of "what it means to be young and British today" (*WB* 101) is the always extremely critical Nicholas de Jongh (*Race and rivalry* 36), who nonetheless has to concede that "[t]he middleaged Gupta certainly has a retentive ear for juvenile lingo of more than one culture" (36). That language can be much more than a means of communication, namely for example a marker of identity and group belonging will be shown below.

Roberts (37) in an interview for the *London Evening Standard* quotes Gupta's feelings about the stabbing of the 16-year-old, promising black footballer Kiyan Prince outside his school in Edgware that might have served as an inspiration for the play. Gupta in this interview not only draws attention to the problem that carrying a knife for protection can incidentally lead to serious injuries or even fatal wounds, but also talks about the fact that she "find[s] it lovely" that, as far as the black street slang of the youngsters is concerned, there is "no distinction between black and white". It seems of utmost importance to her to transport a visual picture of multicultural understanding by presenting the strong friendship of the black Victor and the white Ricky on stage, because following her repeated refusals of categorisation, she states that Britain still does not have enough plays with mixed casts, but only "Asian plays, or black plays, or white plays" (Gupta in Roberts 37). That the play's ending could be too tragic for some is of no interest to its author, who states: "If the audience comes out and they're weeping, or they're freaked or shocked, then I've done my job" (Gupta in Roberts 37). Also Sierz (*Introduction* 14) refers to the play's socio-critical potential, when he states that "[a]s political theatre, the play was, and remains, an incitement to make change happen."

The cast of the play consists of mostly 15-year-old teenagers from different places of origin, reflecting "the rainbow nation familiar to an inner-city dweller" (Sierz, *Introduction* 13). Among the youngsters is the white boy Ricky, who decides to take up a Caribbean street accent in imitation of his best friend, Victor, who is not only characterised by being black, but also by his good looks, his outstanding football talent and his positive attitude, which makes

[35] He was the National Youth Theatre's artistic director at the time of the production of *White Boy*.

him quite similar to Hassan from *Fragile Land*. Moreover, there is the Asian Kabir, who is in a relationship with the hijab-wearing Shaz, whose best friend, Zara, a black teenaged girl, has madly fallen in love with the "school heart-throb" (*WB* 103) Victor. The already diverse cast is completed by two deeply troubled characters: the stammering Sudanese youth Sorted, who witnessed the abuse and killing of his female relatives in his home country, and Flips, the white school bully. Interestingly, the teenagers' stories are accentuated by a chorus that reminds the viewers/readers of classical Greek drama. In *White Boy*, the chorus fulfils roughly the same functions as in the ancient works: it comments on the action and powerfully re-enforces the play's message that violence can never be an appropriate solution.

Identity conflicts and questions of national or cultural belonging are omnipresent issues in the play. It is especially 'the white boy' Ricky who finds it difficult to perform a version of himself that he is comfortable with, which Sierz (*Introduction* 13) explains by pointing to the difficult position of the white working class within the UK. He writes: "Under the New Labour governments of the 2000s, there was a widespread feeling among people in this class that they had been betrayed by multicultural policies and excluded from council housing and local authority jobs" (Sierz, *Introduction* 13), which often lead to racism or xenophobia. In *White Boy*, the school bully Flips is representative of this kind of hostile behaviour towards people with a non-English/non-white background. What he struggles with are not brutal experiences of migration and loss, but the fact that being white is not cool any more or enough to be successful in life. Instead of fighting against one's social environment, education, self-motivation and individual dedication are needed to reach one's goals, as Gupta's play promotes. According to Sierz (*Introduction* 13), "[i]t's a play that asks urgent questions about how much we are formed by the cultures of our parents", which probably becomes most apparent in Kabir's and Shaz's youthful relationship. The play seems to cry out for a re-evaluation of the importance of traditions in the British Asian community. Just because Shaz is a young, hijab-wearing Muslim woman she does not have to be fixated on traditionality and old religious rites. Similar to Shannahan's findings about young Muslim identities, Shaz's interpretation of what it means to be a modern female Muslim is different from what her parents' generation might have in mind. Her resistance to cultural and religious heteronomy and her contemporary conception of religion is comparable to Anita's understanding of Hinduism in *Meet the Mukherjees*. When Shaz and her boyfriend are "*snogging away furiously*" (*WB* 106) Ricky reminds the two young Asians that they "should be careful" (*WB* 110), because their breaking with traditions might, according to him, lead to the following scenario: "One day, you're gonna get caught red handed. Someone's gonna see

you, grass on you and that's it Shaz. One-way ticket to Malaysia – married off to a man with a tash and a huge belly" (*WB* 110). Zara adds: "Lipsin' is definitely against your religion" (*WB* 110), whereas Ricky clarifies why they find their friends' behaviour inappropriate: "Look at you, all hijab and trousers – bit fucking hypocritical innit?" (*WB* 110). Shaz defends herself by pointing to Ricky's outsider position: "What the fuck would you know – white boy?" (*WB* 110). Again, race and the politics of colour are used to exclude others from one's cultural community, but in this case the white character is the outcast. Powerfully, Shaz terminates the discussion by stating that "[i]t ain't against [their] religion to love" (*WB* 110).

However, not only religion plays a central role in *White Boy*, but, more generally, the question in how far one's cultural background is important for the formation of one's identity is posed. Especially the troubled character of Ricky seems to feel inadequate for being 'only' white, which he states in a 'man-to-man talk' with his "Bredda" (*WB* 120) Victor: "Look around you man – so many kids in our class got history, countries, stories and different languages. […] So, mek me feel … dunno … I only speak English. […] Mi yard is mi yard. Know what I mean? But sometimes, it's all so fucking dull. Ain't cool to be white nomore" (*WB* 121). Because of his insecurity about who he wants to be, he tries to perform a similar role as Victor. His habit of speaking in the black street accent temporarily allows him to find attachment figures he can look up to and it also provides him with a feeling of group belonging that he has been missing before. However, it soon turns out in a heated discussion between Ricky and his best friend Victor about the future that language is not the only decisive marker of identity in the life of a British teenager with a migratory background. Ricky feels that he "got no future" (*WB* 146), because of being a white working-class child and because he is not as successful as Victor when it comes to playing football. In a fit of jealousy, he accuses his black immigrant friend and his family of getting "the whole world laid out on a silver plate" (*WB* 146), who reminds him of the cleaning jobs his mother was doing for years, in which she was "treated like shit by them white people" (*WB* 146). Very upset, he adds that he "don't take nuthin' for granted and nuthin' was handed to them on a plate" (*WB* 146). Once and for all, he wants to make clear how different their histories are: "Just 'cos you learn the lingo, don't mean you're one of us" (*WB* 146). Apparently, adopting a diasporic identity is impossible for Ricky, who has lived his whole life in the UK and who does not know how it feels to move to a foreign country, where one's relatives are racialised, insulted, excluded and made fun of.

However, the tragic final showdown of the play shows that despite their different backgrounds, which do not have to be negated, but can be accepted for what they are,

intercultural and interracial friendships are possible. When Flips is about to beat up the traumatised Sorted for money he owes him from dealing with grass, all of Sorted's friends try to protect him and keep the bully from carrying out his violent plan. The girls are pushed aside easily by Flips, but Ricky does not move. His loyal friend Victor steps in between and instead of the protective white boy, the promising football player receives the fatal blow. Sorted is beside himself with grief and surprise, which is why he panics and decides to use the knife Zara had been hiding with him to stab Flips, who also dies. In the end, the CCTV-surveyed, prison-like schoolyard and its enormous gates that symbolise the complete absence of adult intervention and the entrance into a space dominated by the adolescent characters are turned into a shrine for the dead football star. The play ends with an unbelievably dense talk between Ricky and Sorted, which culminates in the white boy's statement that he is not to blame for Sorted's tragic history and that his multiple traumas and broken dreams of a better life in Britain do not justify the murder. Ricky desperately exclaims: "Is it my fault your kin murdering each other? So you come here and mek me feel shame of what I am. Is it the white boy's fault?" (*WB* 156). There is no answer to his question and an explanation of Victor's premature death cannot be given, but the play as a whole can be considered a highly emotional means of drawing attention to the tragic increase in knife crimes that might cause social change by altering the perspectives of the audience on topics like carrying knives for protection. One way of how change could be achieved and of how a more inclusive, tolerant society could be created is hinted at during the play (*WB* 136), when Gupta prominently discusses the complete exclusion of young people from the hegemonic "oldee woldee lingo" (*WB* 135). Young British teenagers, be they white or black, Christian or Muslim, immigrants or 'natives', understandably enough, do not want to be demonised and reduced to negative attributions, but included and treated with respect. They aim at being seen as a functioning part of the hybrid, diasporic community that Britain is today.

In conclusion, *White Boy* is a powerful play about British schools today in which teenagers face complex issues such as cultural belonging and violence on a daily basis. Providing a platform for young voices to be heard, the play exemplarily illustrates the issues that are omnipresent in the lives of teenagers: sexuality, growing up, education and the kids' plans for the future. In this case, however, we are not presented with a simple, straight-forward story of a group of teens growing up, but with a much more complex tale of first- or second-generation immigrants struggling with the role of their parents' cultures and religions in their lives. Outstandingly, though, just like in *Inside Out*, Gupta does not forget to mention the problems children like Ricky have with being white and hopeless in 21st-century Britain,

which does not provide them with enough support in one of the probably most difficult times in a person's life.

4.4. The Political Plays – RACE and VIOLENCE

4.4.1. Introduction

The plays *Sanctuary* (2002) and *Gladiator Games* (2005) are closely related to *White Boy* as far as their message is concerned. They point to social problems with dramatic force and use the medium theatre to raise awareness about problematic issues such as racial violence and genocide. They are political in the sense that they portray topics relevant to Britain's society in the 21st century and that they, to put it idealistically, try to make the country they talk about a better place. This section not only consists of the plays most critical of all too optimistic notions of hybridity, multiculturalism and diaspora, but additionally it also comes closest to Sierz's definition of new writing that revolves around challenging audiences and rewriting the "image of the nation […] through provocation" (Sierz, *Rewriting the Nation* 65). Elsewhere, Sierz speaks of Gupta's ability to deconstruct "both poles of the personal and political divide" (*Introduction* 9), a line of argumentation that has already been presented in connection with the youth as well as the family plays: when it comes to Gupta's plays, the personal is political and vice versa.

The significant increase in political plays about religious topics, the Muslim faith and terrorism is quite obviously due to the bombings of 9/11 and 7/7 – two dates, after which xenophobia, racism and exclusion of 'Muslim-looking' people became a sad commonplace. These phenomena were accompanied by a prevailing atmosphere of fear that is also mirrored in the plays of the last decade (Sierz, *Rewriting the Nation* 71f.). How Gupta presents the topics of migration, national identity and the (im)possibility of leaving behind one's personal and national past in *Sanctuary* and the British criminal justice system in *Gladiator Games* will be presented in the following analyses.

4.4.2. Sanctuary (2002)

Sanctuary (henceforth in quotes: *SC*), being one of Gupta's earlier plays, already foreshadowed the direction her writing would take in the future: a relevant, critical and contemporary one. According to Sierz (*Introduction*, 10), *Sanctuary* is about "that most political of issues, national identity" and, as one could add, about what it takes to uphold this identity with regard to an ever-increasing number of asylum seekers that challenges the belief in a homogenous British nation. Starck (350) considers the play "a biting comment on the British government's reception of refugees as well as a challenge to the construction of global

racial hierarchies which underlie much of Western politics." Already at this early stage in her career, Gupta proved why being called an "Asian playwright" is not appropriate for her. The play only features one Asian character and it does not only ask questions about Asian national and cultural belonging, but goes far beyond these constraints to consider what it means to be British in a globalised, connected world characterised by war, persecution and consequent efforts to escape and find a sanctuary somewhere far from home. Again, also Brah's theory of the diaspora space nicely fits the realties described in the play.

The play that is so (too?) full of political and socio-critical potential premiered on 29 July 2002 at the Loft Theatre, London, in the Lyttelton Transformation project of the National Theatre (*SC* 160) and received rather mixed reviews. Whereas Mountford (*Stories buried in a graveyard* 45) virtually tears the "insignificant" piece to shreds that she sarcastically subtitles "Six Issues in Search of a Setting" and Spencer (17) even becomes offensive when he states that "neither [Gupta's] imagination, nor her intelligence, are equal to the demands of her challenging subject matter", Woddis (*Theatre Sanctuary* 14) speaks very approvingly of the play, remarking that "English insularity was never more powerfully contextualised." However, a generally pervasive criticism seems to be that the play is just too full of problematic issues[36]. Also Gross (8) mentions that "[i]f major themes were enough to make a major play, Sanctuary would be a masterpiece", but, according to him, "neither the writing nor the construction of the piece are up to its subject matter." Despite its thematic overload, Billington (*Sanctuary*) "admire[s] Gupta for using the stage to rub our noses in global reality." He states that "Gupta's play […] touches a nerve when it suggests that, in our snug little island, we are either ignorant of or indifferent to the world's suffering" (Billington, *Sanctuary*). Similarly, Starck mentions how effectively Gupta criticises the world's ignorance of the Rwandan civil war and similar genocides and atrocities. She calls *Sanctuary* "a new form of postcolonial drama" (Starck 353), in which the question is asked "whether anything has actually changed in our perception of a postcolonial world", in which the "[d]ivisions between centre and margin are evidently still very much in place" (Starck 353).

As a reaction to the criticism cited above, especially Mountford's opinion, who surprisingly called the play "insignificant" (*Stories buried in a graveyard* 45), shall be discussed. After having read the script several times I would rather support Billington's point of view, as the play is heavily loaded with difficult topics like the Rwandan civil war, the fight about the Indian region Kashmir and the role of the media in war reporting, all of which are subjects

[36] See the reviews of Taylor (*The Serpent in the Garden* 15), Stratton (147) and Grimley (*From adversity comes strength* 16) for more dissenting opinions about the play.

that are all too easily forgotten and not present in the hegemonic Western discourse. No judgement can be passed on the production here, which might have rendered the play as thematically overloaded, but it seems evident that Gupta forces her audience to look beyond their privileged horizons and to re-consider their hegemonic position within the safe haven of diasporic Britain. Although one might consider the play contrived, it certainly is not "insignificant", but courageous and daring, because staging such topics is what contemporary theatre is all about: not to forget about the rest of the world, to break down the barrier of 'us' vs. 'them' that Said and Spivak so heavily criticised and to reflect on the histories asylum seekers might have lived through before seeking sanctuary on the British isles.

The characters in the play are all representative of one of the topics mentioned above and together they make up a complex net of power relations and diasporic life realities. The play, generally speaking, is set in a beautifully kept graveyard that Gupta in the beginning introduces as "*Eden-like*" (*SC* 163). It is Kabir, a middle-aged Asian man from Kashmir, who works as a gardener in the cemetery that he cares for devotedly and that he considers his safe, new diasporic home. He is often visited by his friend Michael from Rwanda, who seemingly also found peace in the "*luscious green*" (*SC* 163) surroundings that are, however, already in decline, because "[a] few bits of rubbish" (*SC* 163) can be found, which foreshadow the evil that will be presented in the play. By introducing the Asian and the African man as friends, Gupta, just like in *Meet the Mukherjees*, thematises the idea "that Asians and Africans don't get on", as Sierz (*Introduction* 10) puts it. Interestingly enough for Gupta, who tends to dramatise stories from a female point of view, also the third protagonist, Sebastian, is a man, who has been earning his money as a war photographer, which has turned him into a deeply troubled man that is haunted by excruciatingly brutal memories[37]. The cast of the play is however not yet complete with the three men whose biographies are all defined by war, the consequent flight from the homeland and starting a new life in the diaspora space of contemporary London. There is also Jenny, the church's thirty-year-old vicar, and her outspokenly racist and conservative grandmother Margaret, who despite her hostile feelings towards immigrants feels so lonely that she repeatedly joins the multicultural group. Again, the way the older generation – be they intolerant and prejudiced as they may – is treated in Western countries like Britain is subtly criticised, only to be put centre stage in the play *Mind Walking* that was already discussed above. The last remaining character is Ayesha, a fifteen-year-old mixed-race girl, who is preparing for her GCSE exams in the peaceful quiet of the

[37] Also Griffin (*Contemporary Black and Asian Women Playwrights* 226) finds it surprising that more and more female playwrights centre their plays on the experiences of male refugee or asylum seekers.

garden to become "an air hostess" (*SC* 200) and world traveller. In contrast to the others mentioned above, it is her character that adds hope and an optimistic outlook on the future to the play.

The work centres on the war experiences of the three men introduced above and additionally on the question what justice is and whether there are crimes that cannot be forgiven. Interestingly, the play is not just set in a non-defined, neutral timeless zone, but in the diasporic space of 21st century Britain. Gupta powerfully stages how much immigrants are defined by their own – often brutal – experiences, when they apply for asylum in a country that has not seen such atrocities: while Kabir was trying to protect his baby child from the invaders in his home country Kashmir, his wife was gang-raped and killed (*SC* 214), which left him deeply traumatised and filled with never-ending guilt. He does not have any goals in life except for the garden he has been taking care of, but when his beloved surroundings are about to be turned into a fitness club – from the temple of god to a temple of the body – he loses everything and exclaims: "I should have been saving my wife, I should have been giving my life for her. I can never be returning to my birth place, never facing my daughter because of the shame. What sort of a terrible man am I being?" (*SC* 215). For him, the journey to Great Britain was a forced one, but going back to India is also impossible. Again, Gupta makes it very clear that multiculturalism, hybridity and diasporic realities cannot only be seen as positively connoted – on the contrary, sometimes the immigrants' lives are characterised by utmost violence, cruelty and a desire to leave the diasporic community/to go back home, which cannot be fulfilled. Although Kabir is an Asian immigrant he is not presented as ossifying his culture, upholding old rituals and telling his female relatives what to do (like the caricatural Raj in *Meet the Mukherjees*), but as deeply traumatised by war experiences. Gupta once again challenges the stereotypical image of the culturally-minded Asian on stage and presents a personal story of political and global importance.

In comparison to Kabir's story, the war crimes the Rwandan Michael committed are even more horrendous. Additionally, "Michael is able to live with his past in ways that Kabir cannot. Where Michael uses ideological position, his racist prejudices, to exculpate himself from his deeds, Kabir is haunted by his failure to help his wife as she was raped and murdered" (Griffin, *Contemporary Black and Asian Women Playwrights* 229). From the beginning, it is clear that Michael was somehow involved in the unbelievable events of the civil war that was caused by ethnic clashes between the populations of the Hutu and the Tutsi. However, only late in the play – which is dramatically effective as one could argue – the

audience is presented with the truth. Michael, a Hutu and priest, is not only, as he professed (*SC* 217), the heroic saviour who offered a hiding place to a Tutsi family that he then was ordered to kill by the military regime to save his own relatives, which were nonetheless brutally murdered. However nightmarish this scenario sounds, the truth presented in the play is even more appalling: Because Michael's son survived the first attack on his family, the militia could use him to leverage the father and priest. Tragically, Michael offered his church as a sanctuary to three thousand Tutsi people, which, when the Hutu regime found out about it, he was ordered to kill, which he did. His version of the story is both extremely repulsive and tragically understandable:

> I had no choice. Truly. The militia wanted me to help them. Every day, they came to my house, they threatened me. They had already slaughtered my wife. They kept saying that if I did not help them, they would do the same to me and Charles [i.e. his son]. I was afraid. I had to live on my wits – to save my son's life. Violence feeds on violence, like a fire. People went mad and killed and killed and killed. (*SC* 238)

Gupta's play is full of probing, fundamental ethical questions: what would a father do to save his son's and his own life? How are his deeds consistent with his profession, in which he is supposed to spread the word of God and do good? Can it ever be justified to kill hundreds of others to survive? What does the church say to events like the Rwandan civil war and, as theodicy asks, how can a good god allow such carnage? In the scene following the quote, the script becomes even more horrendous, but the war crimes that he committed and that Gupta graphically describes do not have to be recounted here. What is interesting, however, is that Michael is not just a victim, but presented as a very radical racist. He did not just carry out orders, but also rape and kill women – as a priest! – because he is, as it turns out, deeply convinced by the Tutsis' ethnic and racial subalternity. It was his duty to get rid of them: "We had to be seen to show no mercy. The Tutsi women were part of the problem – they had used their feminine wiles to dilute our Bantu blood. They had to be dealt with, punished, humiliated" (*SC* 241). He states that "in war, gang rape is more effective than any military weapon" (*SC* 241). In this unbelievably harsh statement, Michael not only makes it clear that women play a very passive role in war, in which they are more than the men characterised as victims, because they are denied access to weapons and the possibility to get active in self-defence themselves, but also that the Rwandan society must have been a misogynist net of male hierarchies, in which the women are reduced to bearing and raising children. If these children were mixed-race, the women were "punished" as Michael says, for being impregnated by men that are not held responsible. Also Griffin (*Contemporary Black and Asian Women Playwrights* 226) talks about the "gendered specificities of war" in connection to more plays than just *Sanctuary* and finds that "in political conflict and war males are

constructed as agents and women and children become part of the battleground on which those conflicts are carried out." However, no complex feminist or post-colonial theory is needed here to point out that Michael's kind of argumentation and the commission of gender-targeted crimes is extremely inhumane. Because Kabir is of the opinion that some crimes, like the mutilation of women's reproductive organs to stop them from procreating (in the 'wrong' ethnic community) and the killing of females and children, cannot be forgiven, he resorts to vigilantism and brutally slashes his friend Michael to death, who had killed the Tutsis the same way.

One of the strongest thematic strands in the play is, arguably, the reaction of Kabir's friends to his act of murdering and then burning the remains of Michael, which brings us back to Sebastian, who not only is a war photographer, but also on the lookout for Michael, whom he has been trying to catch for years in his personal retaliation campaign to bring him to justice for his war crimes that he knew about all along. Unbelievably, it is again the priest, in this case the vicar Jenny, who pronounces a very radical opinion: "Justice has been done" (*SC* 245). The hypocritical Sebastian is shocked ("What about the survivors? The families of his victims?" [*SC* 245]), but not because he objects to lynching, but because he would have liked to see his own career furthered by the case, as Jenny points out: "This isn't about them, it's about you. Thought you'd get a bestselling book out of it did you?" (*SC* 245). His counter-argument that "[p]eople deserve to know the truth" is not very credible either. Margaret, for the first and probably the last time, is on her granddaughter Jenny's side and finds that Kabir has been punished enough in his life by what he experienced in Kashmir and it is also the old lady, who reminds the others that it is high time to get rid of the Rwandan's remains before the fire department arrives to inspect the reasons for the fire. They decide to cover up the murder and give Kabir a second or actually a third chance in life. Again, he has to leave a place he felt at home, but this time he does not go as a victim, but as a perpetrator.

What is still missing in this analysis is the female side of the picture, which is, however, clearly underrepresented in this play. Especially the character of the vicar Jenny, who "[d]iscovered God after a terrible shock – love on the rebound – fiancé jilted her at the altar and ran away with her best friend" (*SC* 202), as her grandmother explains, is not round enough. This fact not only becomes obvious when examining the script, but also when looking through the above-cited reviews again that often point to the blandness of the central

character[38]. Nonetheless, she represents the weakening role of the church in 21st-century Britain in the play, which becomes obvious when considering the fact that the centuries-old institution is selling their buildings to secular businesses for the sake of earning money. Once again, spirituality is ruled out by monetarism. However, also the character of Margaret represents values that are not topical any more – her husband got rich in the colonial industry, which is why they could travel the world. Moreover, it is her fixed idea for her granddaughter that being a priest is not the right decision – only marriage and children can make a woman happy, which she indicates repeatedly. Quite polemically, she states that Jenny has "wasted [her] life marrying [herself] to a dying institution [i.e. the church]" (*SC* 176), but soon it becomes clear that she does not say this for the sake of Jenny, but her own: "I wanted some great-grandchildren" (*SC* 176). However conservative and racist she might be, as has already been stated, she does not seem to have anybody else in the world, which is why she always returns to the diverse group's meetings, in which she – two-faced as she is – enjoys to be complimented by the Asian Kabir (*SC* 178). When Kabir, who only a few moments later is offended by her, accuses her of racism, which for him is clearly rooted in her Christian religion that has a brutal history of crusades and evangelisation, she is honest enough to state that certainly this is not the case: "Hey listen, darling, I'm no Christian. I'm simply a bigot" (*SC* 180). Moreover, her ambivalent attitude towards coloured people becomes even more obvious when she confesses that having sex with black men while being married is not against her principles (*SC* 198). However, as Billington in his review rightly states, it would be too simplifying to blame the church for all the racism and hostility in the Western world, which can only be changed by showing plays like *Sanctuary*, which might make them reconsider their value systems.

The last aspect that shall be discussed in connection with *Sanctuary* is the character of Ayesha, because she adds the theme of hybridity to the play that is so typical for Gupta. Moreover, also a generational conflict between the English Margaret and the girl is shown. The girl's upbringing in addition to issues like migration and multiculturalism adds topicality to the play: She lives in a modern patchwork family with her mother and her new lover/stepdad-to-be. Her father has died five year ago, which is why the girl visits the graveyard regularly. However, the most interesting scene involving Ayesha in *Sanctuary* is the conversation of the young, open-minded girl and the colonial relict Margaret about the

[38] See Mountford (*Stories buried in a graveyard* 45), Spencer (17) and Taylor (*The Serpent in the Garden* 15) for criticism about the character of Jenny.

former's place of origin, because the two women are distinguished not only by their class, age and origins, but also by their varying attitudes towards life:

> MARGARET. I've been meaning to ask you, Ayesha, where exactly are you from?
> AYESHA. Just down the road – Stanley Road. You know it?
> MARGARET. No, I mean originally?
> AYESHA. I was born in Battersea.
> MARGARET. (*Seeing as she's getting nowhere*.) And before that?
> AYESHA. Before my birth?
> MARGARET. Your parents dear – where are they from?
> AYESHA. Dad was English and Mum's from Turkey – a little town outside Istanbul. Actually, Dad wasn't really English. His das was Scottish – that's my grandfather and my grandmother's half Irish and a quarter Norwegian and a quarter something else …
> MARGARET. Quite a mix and match in your family then. (*SC* 200)

Especially Ayesha's clarifying question "Before my birth?" points to the absurdity of Margaret's persistent inquiries about her place of origin. Ayesha is the prototypical young inhabitant of the diasporic space that Britain is today. Her life is so much characterised by hybridity that she cannot recount all the original home countries of her relatives, but that does not pose a problem to her: her self-conception is one of a multicultural and hybrid young women who is full of hope and optimism, because she can still decide where her life is going to lead her. As has already been mentioned above, she is not only the opposite of the old, conservative and sometimes even hostile Britain that Margaret represents, but also part of a second generation of immigrants, who do not feel as outsiders any more, but who are rooted in the culture and the country their parents migrated to. Griffin (*Contemporary Black and Asian Women Playwrights* 231) makes this point even clearer when she states that "Ayesha represents a new generation of migrant figures for whom diaspora is a permanently lived reality, for whom travel is an option rather than a necessity."

In conclusion to *Sanctuary* it is worth mentioning that the largely negative criticism does not seem to be fully justified. Although the play is heavily loaded with complex topics, it is – as far as its script is concerned – effective in presenting the hybrid life realities of the asylum seekers portrayed. Whether this impression could also be created on stage or whether the presentation of the topics seemed incoherent and illogical, cannot be analysed here. Griffin (*Contemporary Black and Asian Women Playwrights* 228) explicates:

> *Sanctuary* creates a diasporic space in the graveyard and church grounds which act as the site for multi-cultural encounter, simultaneously exploding any idea that the experience of war and violation is specific to one nation, one site, one history, and suggesting that the displacements generated by political conflict create new and fragile micro-communities which remain haunted by their diverse pasts.

The topic of racism and competing as well as conflictual diasporic realities is, however, not only part of *Sanctuary*, but also of the highly political verbatim play *Gladiator Games*, which will be discussed in the following chapter.

4.4.3. Gladiator Games (2005)

The second outspokenly political play is *Gladiator Games* (henceforth in quotes: *GG*), which, however, is different from *Sanctuary* in that it presents real-life events in a documentary style that closely follows its sources. The play stages the racially motivated killing of the young Asian Zahid Mubarek by his racist, right-wing cellmate Robert Stewart, who was, despite his well-known mental problems and overtly hostile attitude towards foreigners, put in the same cell as the Asian teenager, whose crime of "stealing £6's worth of razor blades and interfering with a car" (Gardner, *Review Gladiator Games* 38) caused him to be sentenced to 90 days in the now infamous Feltham Young Offender's Institute. What distinguishes the play from all the other works Gupta has written so far is not only the strong dramatic force with which it demands justice for the victim of the brutal crime, but also the fact that it is part of the "'transcript' theatre" scene, as Billingham (13) calls it. It is a verbatim drama that mostly consists of literal quotes from letters and interviews that are presented in it. According to Hammond and Steward (9), in verbatim plays

> [t]he words of real people are recorded or transcribed by a dramatist during an interview or research process, or are appropriated from existing records such as the transcripts of an official enquiry. They are then edited, arranged or recontextualised to form a dramatic presentation, in which actors take on the character of the real individuals whose words are being used.

It is exactly this "technique" (Hammond and Steward 9) described above, in which "theatre and journalism overlap" (Hammond and Steward 10) that Gupta used in her play, which might be part of the answer why it received such an incredible amount of media attention. In addition, its original aim of exposing the British justice system's "catalogue of failures", as the victim's enthusiastic uncle Imtiaz Amin puts it in a *Guardian* article (22), and its devotion to the Mubarek family, who were fighting for being granted an individual inquiry into the reasons of Zahid's death, must also be considered when analysing why the play caused such an uproar.

Gladiator Games had its World Premiere at the Crucible Studio from 20-29 October 2005; then it was performed at the Theatre Royal Stratford East from 2-12 November 2005, only to be restaged at the latter theatre from 2-25 February 2006 (*GG* 24). In a foreword, Gupta states how much the racially motivated killing of Zahid reminded her of the experiences she had

made in the writing workshops with the female inmates that led to her play *Inside Out*. The complete lack of recreational or educational activities inside the prison shocked Gupta most besides the fact that mostly "black, mixed-race or foreign nationals" (*GG* 18) were imprisoned and that "[s]ome of them were serving disproportionately long sentences for seemingly minor offences" (*GG* 18). Although the practice of playing *Gladiator Games*, which involves prison officers confining racially, culturally or religiously different inmates with each other and betting on the outcome of their likely fights, could never be proved or disconfirmed, what becomes very obvious when reading the shocking play is that institutional racism is an omnipresent or at least widely-spread phenomenon in the British justice system. Gupta (37) in an interview for the *London Evening Standard* talks about her choice of title for the play: "My title, Gladiator Games, refers to both the family's long struggle for justice against the British Government – David to the Government's Goliath – and to a sickening game allegedly played by prison officers", which has been explained above. What Gupta sharply criticises is the fact that young people with a migratory background are being sent to prisons for minor offences that white youths would not be imprisoned for and, more importantly, that the young inmates are locked up "without giving them the means to change, to educate themselves, to rehabilitate" (*GG* 19). What makes Gupta's play even more compelling is the fact that she not only talks about the horrendous murder and the victim's family, but that she also considers Zahid's murderer Robert Stewart a victim that has "been failed by society" (*GG* 19), because nobody took notice of his severe mental problems, for which he would have needed special treatment. Although she is aware of the fact that the inclusion of this idea might be considered "liberal posturing" (*GG* 19), it seems important to raise awareness about the fact that taking care of people like Stewart must be part of the functioning justice system of a nation. Nonetheless, the severity of his gruesome deed is not glossed over in the play and especially the inclusion of his "chillingly racist letters that […] went unnoticed and unmonitored by the Prison Service" (*GG* 20) make watching or reading the play a very memorable, touching experience.

As can easily be imagined, Gupta's highly personal and emotional presentation of the verbatim quotes in the play was enthusiastically praised in the newspapers and considered "intelligent, hard-hitting theatre" by the victim's uncle Imtiaz Amin (22). Gardner (*Review Gladiator Games* 38) likes *Gladiator Games* for "put[ting] the victims centre stage." It is Gupta's occasional departure from the sources and her partially invented dialogue that, in Gardner's opinion, even enforces the play's message instead of straining the truth. There are, however, also critics (like John), who are not satisfied with Gupta's deviation from the

original sources. As Gardner (*Review Gladiator Games* 38) makes clear, it was "an uncomfortable, soul-searching evening and its greatest triumph is that you leave the theatre feeling you've met and known Zahid Mubarek." Walker in her review states that the personalised and slightly fictionalised play is a "better memorial to Mubarek than a whole forest of trees" (Walker 57), which is a sarcastic side remark to the suggestion of Martin Narey, Director General of HM Prisons, to plant a tree in Zahid's memory (Gardner, *Review Gladiator Games* 38). The play's social function of causing awareness about the death of the young Asian man is also stressed by Peter (26) in a *Sunday Times* review, in which he considers *Gladiator Games* "a necessary play about an unnecessary murder."

The most interesting aspect of this play is clearly the question how Gupta arranged the sheer endless amount of source material[39]. Generally speaking, *Gladiator Games* is a two-act play, whereby in the first act the most important characters and the hard facts of the case are introduced by Zahid's unlce Imtiaz (*GG* 29). In a kind of foreshadowing, one is immediately presented with the heavily injured Zahid, who is hospitalised, and his extremely worried family. Among them are the already mentioned uncle, Amin, the father, and Sajida, the mother, who barely speaks English and is mostly seen crying on stage, which contributes substantially to the emotionality of the play. Already in the first act, the horrific systematic failures are made apparent and the notion of being 'safe behind bars' is questioned (*GG* 33). Horribly enough, a witness is quoted who confirms that the Mubarek family were told to "take some money and forget about it" (*GG* 36). Imtiaz "outright refused" (*GG* 36) an "out-of-court settlement" (*GG* 36) that he was offered in the beginning and quickly realised that "it was bigger than Robert Stewart" (*GG* 37). What the family was fighting for from this moment onwards with the uncle as their leading figure concerned the whole country, in which a storm of indignation broke out. Meticulously indicated quotes in the script as the ones just mentioned, which can quickly be allocated because of an easily accessible key that Gupta provides at the beginning of the play (*GG* 27f.), are combined with invented parts of dialogue in the play, which, as I would also argue, make it even more compelling and also more easily read- or watchable. Sierz (*Rewriting the Nation* 58) is of the same opinion when he states that "factual theatre moves closer to the individually imagined worlds that new writing is so good at showing."

What is extremely shocking is how much terrifying information the psychologists and prison officers already had about Robert Stewart before the murder. Professor Gunn from the

[39] In Billingham (222ff.) Gupta comments on the writing process of the play and the moving experiences she has made while working with the victim's family.

Institute of Psychology at London's Kings College was asked to research the case and his conclusion is as clear as it is scandalous: "Mr Stewart is a psychopath" (*GG* 40), whose catalogue of mental disturbances and aggressive, suspect behaviour (deliberately flooding his cell, smearing excrement on the cell walls, covering himself in margarine, etc. [*GG* 41f.]) is seemingly endless. It was obvious for one of the prison officers that "this inmate will do harm if removed from strict conditions" (*GG* 41). However, his condition seems to have been a quickly changing one, which is why a medical officer in one of the official protocols considered him "normal" (*GG* 42). Tellingly enough, Robert's best friend in prison was a murderer and racist, too. Together, they allegedly planned a murder, which was, however, only carried out by the friend, Maurice Travis, who was sentenced for the deed, but Robert successfully denied any involvement in the case. In an interrogation, the murderer remarks about his fellow prisoner: "I knew it wouldn't be too long before he killed someone" (*GG* 44). Professor Gun quoted another protocol in his official appearance in court, in which it says that Stewart "cannot be trusted for even a minute" (*GG* 45). All of this material was not produced by people who testified in court, but it already existed while Robert Stewart and Zahid Mubarek were confined in the same prison cell – and it went unnoticed. Without any remorse, Stewart exculpates himself in retrospect by stating that it was all the prison warders' fault: "they shouldn't have put me there in the first place. […] Somebody should have thought I was a time bomb ready to explode" (*GG* 55). Indeed, somebody should have noticed, but nobody did, which is what Gupta's play powerfully demonstrates.

In addition to outlining Stewart's troubled personality, act one also introduces shocking statistics that are also alluded to in *Meet the Mukerjees* by Aaron and that make it very clear what it means to live in the hybrid diaspora space of 21st-century Britain: harmony and all too positive interpretations of the concept of multiculturalism are illusions – racism and discrimination are omnipresent. Colin Moses, Chair of the Prison Officers' Association, who defended the prison officers in court, despite his difficult position was very much aware of the realities inside British prisons:

> If you look at the mirror of society – you'll see that we send more young black men to prison than we do to university. We also send more Asian men to prison than ever before – the fastest growing group in prison, religious group that is, are from the Islamic faith. Same with those of mixed heritage and or foreign nationals, and all of this goes unreported.
> Conversely, we have prisons which have virtually no black or Asian stuff. (*GG* 48)

In addition to making the audience aware of the immanent racism, Moses also draws attention to the fact that not only the prison service can be blamed, but that one also has to keep in mind

the Magistrate's Courts which decide that people like Zahid "are being put away for stealing razor blades" (*GG* 49). These unnecessary imprisonments are considered a lucrative business by him. He states: "There are barristers out there making a lot of money out the system. It's a business. Every night in this country we lock up a small town" (*GG* 49). What is more, the play also points to the Feltham youth prison's underfunding: the institution "with [a] lack of investment and lack of staff" (*GG* 49) is called "badly resourced" (*GG* 49). A female officer from Feltham cites "[y]early budget cuts, high population, shortage of staff and constant Senior Management turnover" as possible reasons for the deadly negligence. Morse, another prison officer, is quoted as saying that "the unit was usually very full so often there was very little choice as to where the prisoners would be allocated" (*GG* 61), which means, to put it bluntly, that probably, if Zahid had been put in another cell, another racist maniac might have been waiting for him. Although Gupta presents the situation of the prison officers as a very difficult one and although she considers their point of view, in the interview with Billingham (223) it quickly becomes obvious that the dramatist herself is very much moved by the tragic story and that she ultimately does not accept any excuses: "In the end, somebody put those two boys together in the same cell and they're trying to hide behind the cloak of the bureaucratic cock-up, but I feel that there is a far more menacing story underneath that is frankly very scary."

Act two is considerably shorter than the first one, but it includes the court investigation of the rumours around the practice of playing gladiator games (*GG* 63f.) and at its core includes the actual murder scene, in which Stewart batters Zahid's head in with a broken off table leg (*GG* 87). Interwoven are excerpts of deeply moving invented scenes of dialogue with the family, who visit their imprisoned son (79f.), who was, as Imtiaz put it in an interview with Gupta "very much loved – despite his problems" (*GG* 95) that he was trying to overcome. What is more, in act two Gupta also includes the preliminary results of the independent inquiry, in which Giffin, a barrister at the Inquiry, lists fifteen occasions "when individual prison staff […] might have influenced the course of events" (*GG* 81). In addition to the horrendous placing of the antagonistic inmates in the same cell, also Zahid's treatment after the attack is not without flaws (*GG* 87). Although the audience knows beforehand that the victim will die and that the play was only written because of his tragic murder, the play is outstandingly dramatic. It ends, as it has begun, in a quote – in this case by Zahid himself, whose letter is cited, in which he states his love for his family, his wish to be a good role model for his siblings and that he wants to change. Although *Gladiator Games* is never sentimental, but rather factual, sharp and critical it is exactly the play's endnote of

emotionality that makes it so memorable and powerful, because one gets the impression of both having lost a likeable Asian young man that is repentant and willing to improve and that the whole complex prison system needs to be reformed in many areas: a personal story is used to arrive at extrapolated, convincing conclusions about institutional racism.

A conclusion can in this case almost be omitted, because it is the great advantage of verbatim plays that they speak for themselves and in this case almost cry out their message: *Gladiator Games* is a cleverly constructed documentary drama that is well-researched and emotionally moving in that it presents the tragic story of Zahid Mubarek that unnecessarily died at a young age, for which the play requires justice and for whose sake it tries to point out the systemic flaws, which must be improved so that such murders can in the future be prevented. Billingham (244), who went to see the play himself and who encountered an audience of predominantly young people from different racial cultural and ethnic backgrounds when watching *Gladiator Games*, cites the play as evidence for "a socially relevant theatre [scene that] was alive and kicking" (245).

4.5. Back to the ROOTS – INDIA, BRITAIN and COLONIAL INTERRELATIONS

4.5.1. Introduction

This final section of the thesis tries to round up Gupta's oeuvre by presenting her first and her most recently published stage play. Whereas *Skeleton* (1997) is set in India and still strongly connected with Gupta's roots, *The Empress* (2013) can be considered a theatrical attempt of making British audiences aware that also in colonial times the distinction between 'us' and 'them' was not so clear-cut as one is made believe by the history books. The empress mentioned in the title is Queen Victoria, who reigned from 1837 to 1901. What Gupta elaborates on in her play is the fact that the leading figure of the colonial enterprise had a very intimate relationship with an Indian servant, Abdul Karim, who was sent to her as an extraordinary present for her Golden Jubilee in 1887 and who later was promoted to be her personal teacher of Hindi and the Indian culture. Even in the beginning of her career, Gupta had in mind more than describing her place of origin. While *Skeleton* mostly revolves around the myths and traditions of her homeland, the hybridity of her works becomes probably most apparent in her last play that recovers a part of British history which deconstructs all too clear colonial boundaries to present a picture of (critical) multiculturalism in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Additionally, in both plays the topic of migration and diasporic life realities is present. Whereas in *Skeleton* the protagonist moves to Calcutta, a city far away from his

village and socially very different, in *The Empress* the teacher, Abdul Karim, leaves behind his Indian place of origin to serve his open-minded Queen in the mostly hostile, racist environment of historical London. Both men's journeys, be they within the borders of India or far away from home, have a lasting effect on their personal development, as will be shown in the respective last subchapters. Throughout Gupta's dramatic career, journeys and migration are leitmotifs that are featured in almost every play. In addition to the interesting impact they have on the travellers, the many journeys in her plays also point to the fact that she cannot be pinned down as an Asian playwright. Her characters that are travelling round the world make her plays very contemporary and globally connected; Britain, Asia and many other countries are presented as driving forces in the plays that all need to be considered, as Brah and Griffin suggest. Thus, reductionist forms of thinking are not appropriate when it comes to analyse and categorise Gupta's writing that even in the historically inspired plays, which will be discussed in the following chapter, are highly contemporary and relevant.

4.5.2. Skeleton (1997)

As has already been mentioned in the introduction, the play *Skeleton* (henceforth in quotes: *SK*) was Gupta's first big stage play. It premiered at the Soho Theatre on 29 May 1997 and "had a lukewarm critical reception" as Aston (*Feminist Views on the English Stage* 169) puts it. Her claim is proved by Billington's restrained opinion of the play (*Skeleton* 14). His rather negative criticism is countered by Taylor's review for *The Independent*, in which he calls *Skeleton* a "touchingly comic and humane drama" (23) with some "irritating loose ends" (23), which are, however, outshone by the "beguiling production" of the play (23).

As Gupta states in an introductory foreword, the play was inspired by a short story by the Nobel Prize winning Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore, whom Gupta knows very well from her childhood, in which she was introduced to the writer's works by her artistically minded parents (Starck 355). The play is interesting, because, on the one hand, it works with Gupta's parents' place of origin, which makes it an attempt of recovering her family's roots, and on the other hand, because it "draws on two myths widely present in a range of cultures, and much explored in the nineteenth century" (Griffin, *Gupta* 226). These myths that Griffin alludes to are, first, a figure coming back to life to haunt the living and, second, a tale about the archetypically narcissistic "beautiful figure so infatuated with her or his own beauty that they will go to any length, including death, to preserve it" (Griffin, *Gupta* 226). What makes *Skeleton* relevant for the present thesis is not only that Gupta tries to promote her national writer's heritage within Britain, which could be considered a postcolonial strategy, but also

that it really includes what the critics stereotypically often connect with her work: magical realism, ghosts, spirituality, Hindu rites and culture as well as a tragic love story against the backdrop of a rural Indian village. However, already in this early play the contemporary topics of diaspora and the rights of women that permeate her work until the present day are included.

The play presents the fate of a small Indian family, which consists of Prasad, the widowed father, and his son Gopal, the village's "star pupil" (*SK* 9), who is studying in the metropolis of Calcutta to become a doctor. In his holidays he returns to his home village to visit family, friends (Biju and his sister Mishti) and his fiancée (Anju), but soon it becomes obvious that the father's and the village's pride has changed and become estranged to his place of origin. His friend Biju states: "Sounds to me like the city's turned your head" (*SK* 13). Contrary to the often cited feelings of loss and longing for one's home that are present in many of the other plays as well as in Brah's theories and contrary to the the idea that Asian communities tend to ossify their culture in a diasporic context, Gopal seems to feel the need to reject his roots to be able to perform a more rational urban identity in contrast to his younger, rural alter ego. The break with his family and his origins is not only cultural, but also communicational: Gopal did not find it necessary to write to his loved ones for a whole year. He comes back feeling confident and superior, which surprises and hurts his old acquaintances that have been looking forward to his visit, which for him is obligatory rather than pleasant.

One of the reasons for his preference of the city is his new sweetheart Mukti, the well-educated, elegant daughter of a professor, to whom he has proposed in a letter before leaving for the countryside. Because he is expecting her answer every day, his former friends and also his fiancée are quickly forgotten and the old engagement needs to be broken off, which does not really trouble him, because "[a] man's allowed to change his mind isn't he?" (*SK* 25). He is convinced that his former fiancée, Anju, the simple village girl, will understand, because that is what a devoted, submissive woman would do. In a very demeaning manner, he states that next to his new love "Anju is just the dust on her feet" (*SK* 20). Mukti, as described by Gopal, is representative of the new life he is leading now, in which the women are "more …. refined; more dignified" (*SK* 11), as he tells his friend Biju: "I'm not talking about common rough village girls whose only aim in life is to please their husband, breed and get fat. They're special" (*SK* 11). Biju cannot follow Gopal's newly found logic and states: "So they're not real flesh and blood" (*SK* 11). A world in which women are not conceptualised as mothers

and wives is not "real" for him, indeed not even imaginable. How deeply Gopal is impressed by his new surroundings becomes evident from his description of the city:

> Biju – it's so … so … vibrant. Everywhere there are people – hundreds – busy people. At night there are lights on the street, trams, Sahibs in horse and carriages and palanquins hiding beautiful women. And such huge houses almost palaces on wide straight tree-lined roads with – avenues they call them. (*SK* 11)

Clearly, Gopal is not just fascinated by the beautiful women that are hidden inside of houses and carriages, but also by the allure of abundance of the upper class that he wants to be part of. Just like Brah's immigrants are looking for a better life in another country, Gopal lists social advancement and prosperity as his ultimate goals. Thus, what complicates this country vs. city and uneducated vs. educated dichotomy is the discourse of class. Gopal is convinced that he can become the professor's daughter's equal by educating himself. He does not only want to leave behind his rural roots, but also his humble and poor origins (*SK* 25).

Although, in this case, the woman has the higher social rank, the role females play in society is a very subordinate, domestic and conservative one. When Gopal tells Anju that he wants to break off the engagement, she is not heart-broken, but feels "liberated" (*SK* 73), both from a man who never felt passion for her, and also from a bond that only caused her sorrow and painful waiting for her fiancé, who is "bewitched by urban life and his emerging status as a doctor, and hence dismissive of rural life" (Griffin, *Gupta* 226). Anju is not sure what to expect from life, but she is sure that waiting for a man that does not care for her cannot be the right decision: "I thought that by now I'd be married and that would free me. Free me from this village, my father and his endless demands, from having to be quiet and contained all the time" (*SK* 53). She adds: "Until a woman marries – she is not respected – she is not whole – she is incomplete, she can't have an opinion, she …" (*SK* 53). Anju seems to be deeply influenced by a very traditional, conservative upbringing in which marriage is "God's will" (*SK* 6), but at the same time she also expresses the wish to make her own decisions instead of being ordered around by a man. Biju is presented as sympathetic of Anju's situation, as she is the woman he has secretly loved for so long. He seems to be critical of relationships in which women are reduced to decorative objects, which probably is the foundation of their future happiness. Towards the end of the play, both Anju and Biju are ready to confess their love for each other (*SK* 76) and marriage – between seemingly equal partners – leads to contentment and happiness.

The most direct criticism of the fact that women are considered the possession of either their fathers, brothers or husbands becomes evident in the play via the character of the eponymous skeleton that Gopal is given by his father as a coming-home present which is supposed to

support him during his studies. Magically, however, the female skeleton comes alive at night and what the student, whose rationality is put to a hard test, can see is not only a pile of old bones, but an unbelievably beautiful woman called Nayani, whose story is slowly revealed over the course of time, each morning ending with a cliff-hanger – only to be continued the next night. As Starck (357) points out, the skeleton cleverly lures Gopal into admiring her by telling him a more exciting story every night, just like Scheherazade has done. By alluding to the collection of oriental stories which are combined in *The Book of One Thousand and One Nights*, a discourse of exoticisation is evoked that fascinates the young student just like the Orient has fascinated while researchers in the 18th and 19th centuries. Again, just like Said has pointed out, the other is female, seductive, beautiful, rationally not explicable and foreign. However, Nayani is not passive and enduring of her oppressed situation, as it might be expected, but she takes action to bring about change. When she is married the first time, she realises that becoming pregnant might ruin her beauty, which is why she secretly poisons her husband to avoid any damage to her appearance, as it turns out in the end. Tragically, however, as a 'widowed' woman there is no other option for her than returning to the household of her dominant, misogynist brother again. When the servants also turn against her because of her excessive vanity, she goes on disguised nightly excursions to fight her boredom. Her beauty, however, cannot be concealed and she meets her second husband, with whom she elopes. When the topic of bearing children is opened up again, she takes the same fatal step and kills him. For maintaining her beauty, Nayani is prepared to do anything, which is why she not only murders others, but also commits suicide, when she realises that she is pregnant already. What she wants is to be put in a glass casket after her death and admired forever (*SK* 23). It is her ultimate goal to spellbind Gopal, whom she wants to be her eternal companion after taking his own life. Aston (*Feminist Views on the English Stage* 169) rightly states: "In a reversal of the Sheherazade tale, it is Gopal, the object of Nayani's 'fatal attraction' who struggles to stay alive." However, although Gopal is tempted to do as the beautiful ghostly creature orders, her appearance serves as a wake-up call for him and at the end of the play he is re-united with his father and his old best friend. The audience is left with the feeling that through the traumatic experience of being enchanted by the man-eating, dangerously beautiful Nayani, Gopal has realised that keeping in touch with one's roots is not naïve, but essential to be able to perform a contemporary, urban identity. This ending is similar to Brah's conception of the diaspora space, which both includes the migrant's place of origin as well as an adaption to and an acceptance of the new surroundings.

This story of social and geographical (un)belonging, migration and female seduction, as embodied by the skeleton, and traditional femininity, as represented by Anju, is enriched by the inclusion of Indian religious rites, which, as has already been argued above, constitutes a challenge to the social realist tradition of British drama (Griffin, *Contemporary Black and Asian Women Playwrights* 21). The skeleton of the seductive Nayani, "is brought back to life at the time of Durga Puja (the time of the mighty ten armed Goddess Durga, equipped with a 'weapon in each hand')", as Aston (*Feminist Views on the English Stage* 169) points out, whereby she draws on the information about the religious rituals provided by Gupta in the Faber & Faber edition of the play (*SK* 91f.). Throughout the play the audience is presented with interludes, in which a craftsman is working on a statue of the mighty female goddess Durga (*SK* 32, 57), which the women then decorate with flower garlands. In *Skeleton*, the picture of the religious rites that is presented is never contrived, exoticised or foreign, as it is for the family members in *The Waiting Room*, but here it is the lived, authentic reality of the villagers that Gopal cannot associate with any more.

In conclusion to Gupta's first big stage production, it can be said that, considering the year of the play's premiere, which is 1997, the inclusion of so many aspects of traditional Indian rural life in a British stage play is really astonishing, as at the end of the last century the plays of dramatists with an Asian background were seen only very rarely on British stages. Aston (172) in her book *Feminist Views on the English Stage. Women Playwrights, 1990-2000* from 2003 cites Gupta as one of the playwrights related to a beginning diversification in England's mainstream theatre scene. Looking back at the situation before the turn of the millennium and comparing it to Britain's contemporary theatre landscape today, one can certainly say that a lot has changed – probably also with the help of leading figures like Gupta – and that the plays performed on London's main stages are written by authors – be they male or female – with more diverse backgrounds and, as Aston predicted, Gupta truly turned out to be one of the *Alternatives within the Mainstream* (Godiwala).

4.5.3. The Empress (2013)

The last play that will be dealt with in this thesis is *The Empress* (henceforth in quotes: *TE*), which rewrites Britain's colonial history from a new perspective, namely from that of the Queen's personal Indian servant and teacher Abdul Karim. Already at the time of Queen Victoria's golden jubilee in 1887 London was a diasporic space, in which people from different cultures met and thereby learnt to reconsider their own attitudes and perspectives against the background of colonialism, British hegemony and Indian discrimination. As will

be shown in the following analysis, what makes the play interesting is the presentation and constant juxtaposition of two very different classes and life realities in the late 19th century. On the one hand, the reader/viewer is presented with a personalised story about the complex character of Queen Victoria, who as queen and empress is at the top of society. On the other hand, the diametrically opposed end of the social stratum is also introduced with the help of ayahs, who were "Indian nannies who looked after English children" (*TE* 15), and underpaid lascars, who were "[s]ailors […] used by [the] British Empire for ships trading throughout the Indian Empire [which were] [o]ften termed as 'the black poor'" (*TE* 15). As personifications of the lower class there are Rani, a young ayah, who after the voyage from India to Britain is deserted by the family she has been serving for years, and Hari, a poor lascar. Weaved in between are the stories of the real-life politicians Mahatma Ghandi and Dadabhai Naoroji. As Gupta explains in an afterword, Dadabhai not only inspired the world-famous Ghandi, he also "was the first Indian MP to be elected to the constituency of Finsbury Central in 1892" (*TE* 135). Although he seemingly was never afraid to utter criticism, in the beginning he believed in the idea that the British political system could be reformed so far as to represent the Indian subcontinent in a just way. However, soon he was bitterly disappointed, returned to India and decided that only Indian separatism could be the solution to break free from British colonial oppression. Later, he put this plan into action and became the founder of the Indian national congress (*TE* 14). How these three different worlds collide in the two-act play will be analysed hereinafter.

The play was first performed by the Royal Shakespeare Company in the Swan Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon, on 11 April 2013 (*TE* 10). It was, however, not universally well received. Whereas Parsons stresses the play's "joyous naivety", Vonledebur (30) remarks that "[t]he dialogue is brilliantly observed and very funny. Performances are excellent all-round". Goulden, however, finds the drama "more educational than dramatic" and Billington (*Queen Vic upstaged* 44) quite synonymously calls the play "informative rather than relevatory." Cavendish (*The Empress*) talks about the thematic potential of the play, which he considers "commercial gold", but mentions that "Gupta strives too hard to give an epic savour of much else that was going on in the period too." Still, he has to concede that "it's hard not to be cheered at this neglected aspect of our colonial past coming to the fore and there's much passing delight in the performances." Outstandingly negatively, Taylor (*The Empress*) remarks that the play "fatally lacks a truly historical imagination", which is why it is "[a] largely wasted opportunity". Considering the play's production history, it might also be interesting to note here that Gupta worked with Emma Rice when preparing *The Empress* for

the Swan Theatre, who also directed her musical *Wah! Wah! Girls*. Unsurprisingly, also in this production the two women used songs and music to emotionally engage their audience. Especially the maltreated lascars' work songs (*TE* 17, 78), but also the other festive chants that are included in the play (*TE* 43, 111, 117f., 128) already in the text create a very lively atmosphere that, as the reviews suggest, was also successfully transferred to the stage.

First, I want to draw attention to the plot elements and thematic trajectories that are connected to the lower class characters Rani and Hari. The play starts out with the description of the voyage from India to Britain, in which Rani, a 16-year old Bengali ayah, takes care of the children of a rich English family, for which she is supposed to work in the future to be able to send back money to her family in India for her brother's education (*TE* 38). Already at the end of the 19th century, the world was a connected place, in which global financial exchanges took place. However, not only Rani's job is introduced, but also that she meets and falls in love with the uneducated lascar Hari, whom she tries to teach how to read and write properly (*TE* 27). Surprisingly for the time the play is set in, Rani herself was allowed by her father to become educated (*TE* 72). The discourse of racism and colonial hostility is introduced en passant, when the two discuss what Britain looks like, because the inexperienced Rani has never been there before. Hari cautions that "the people are very strange" (*TE* 21) and that "[t]hey look down at us [i.e. the Indians] from a great height. Sometimes they can't even see us" (*TE* 21), although he does not fully grasp which racist ideologies stand behind the British people's hostility. Also Abdul Karim, the queen's future teacher, is introduced as an elegantly dressed, young Indian gentleman while the cast is still aboard the ship sailing towards England. Hari knowingly remarks: "Might be all dressed up like a fancy peacock but he is still a lackee to the white man" (*TE* 24). To complete the presentation of the play's characters, Gupta also lets Dadabhai take a walk by the railing, who already in his first appearance is introduced as a clever politician. Despite being told that he will not make it as "a 'Black man'" (*TE* 25) in England, he is prepared to do anything for the sake of his nation. This racist term of address here is not used to describe Dadabhai as being from India, but, more generally, it points to his exclusion from the hegemonic, white discourse, in which he will not be accepted because of his subalternity that goes far beyond the subject matter of his skin colour.

The topic of racism is also revived when the exhausted travellers arrive in London. Rani, so full of youthful hopes and dreams of a better life in a diasporic context, is brutally fired by her employers, because they prefer an English governess for their children and an Indian one is not good enough anymore in London, which is the geographical heart of British colonialism,

but in the wild, yet untamed country of India they certainly were useful as submissive servants. When the colonial subjects undergo global travels to be part of the economically thriving nation, they are not accepted, but treated like scum. Rani's cold-hearted English employer despite her loyal servant's heart-warming pleadings plainly states: "As for feeling … you are merely my servant's offspring. Now take your filthy hands off my dress" (*TE* 36) before leaving. The lascar Hari finds her a rather dubious place to stay for the night in a boarding house, which is run by a rough landlady, whom everyone calls lascar Sally and who, as it turns out, is only tough on the outside but soft at heart. At night, however, when he comes to the room completely drunk, he tries to talk Rani into having sex with him, which she refuses, and is thereby the cause that she runs away in the morning.

The two are from that moment onwards not to see each other for more than ten years. Rani, however, learns to stand on her own feet and finds a job with a family whose housekeeper is urgently looking for a new ayah, because the old one "got herself in the family way" (*TE* 64). Gupta clearly uses foreshadowing here, because, as it turns out, Lord Oakham is very willing to pay Rani the money she needs to send to her family, if the young woman is willing to perform more than the task of cooking curries for him (*TE* 74), which she accepts, because she is so devoted to her relatives in India. The bond between Rani, who is now part of the diaspora space of 18th-century London, and her home country is, in contrast to Gopal in *The Skeleton*, still a very strong one, indeed it is so important to her to support her family that she does not hesitate to prostitute herself. Like in *Sugar Mummies*, sexploitation of people that are disadvantaged by the politics of gender, colour and location also plays a prominent role in *The Empress*. As one can easily imagine, Rani gets pregnant and the head of the household does not take any responsibility for her situation, but instead throws her out – heavily pregnant, penniless and without protection. Again, a member of the superior colonial race is presented as completely devoid of feeling. Lord Oakham's closing statement is a poignant reminder of the all-pervasive hatred and racism in Britain's colonial capital: "Rani, I don't care. I have no interest in knowing what becomes of you and your bastard child. Put her in the workhouse when she is born. Leave her on the steps. She can join the ranks of other bastard children all over the city. Or better still, drown her" (*TE* 83). Mixed-race children are not accepted in the upper-class world of the Lord, who enjoys the allure of the exotic, but is as afraid of miscegenation as the white slave owners in the US were. While Rani is suffering, also Hari is exploited at sea, but he has learned how to write and at the end of Rani's scenes, the audience sees Hari composing love letters to his sweetheart far away.

When Rani is already at the point of abandoning the baby behind at the docks, the seemingly rough lascar Sally and another Indian ayah, Firoza, keep her from making an irreversible mistake. Rani finds a place to live with her child in a social institution called "Home for Ayahs" that was founded by two Englishwomen, who not only try to gain social reputation by doing charity, but also to spread Christian values among the troubled women from the far-away parts of the Empire (*TE* 93f.). However, in the opening ceremony of this institution, Rani meets Dadabhai again, who at this point is in the race for being the first Indian member of the British parliament, which he then achieves in the course of the play. Because he realises that she has read a lot and educated herself properly, he employs her as a personal secretary (*TE* 97ff.). When her professional life seems settled, Sally shows Rani with a bundle of letters by Hari, which deeply move her. However, only three years later, when Dadabhai has already decided on going back to India, because of the carelessness of the British government for India, does Hari turn up again. He has set up his own business and become a successful carpenter, which means that at least for him the multicultural space of historic London was more welcoming than life on sea, and despite a slightly negative first reaction when seeing him again after thirteen long years the two are re-united (*TE* 126). In the last scene, not only the aged Dadabhai leaves for India, but also the queen's munshi, Abdul Karim, is sent home. After Queen Victoria's death the court has no use for his services anymore and, without being given time to mourn the passing of his famous employer, he is deported, yet not desperate, but also happy to see his home country again. Thus, the play ends on a very harmonious, closed note. All the characters meet again, are reconciled and, as is quite typical of Gupta's plays, the last scene presents a hopeful outlook on the future by zooming in on the recovered love of a young couple. How the fate of Abdul Karim turned out during his years in England will be discussed now.

From scene three of the first act onwards, the plot strands of the life realities of the lower class characters and the queen's surroundings are presented alternately, which is very interesting as far as the dramatic tension on stage is concerned, but for the sake of this analysis the two different worlds are presented separately. When the queen, who in the beginning of the play is in her late sixties, gets to know that she has been given a special surprise present by a governor in India for her golden jubilee, she only states "We do not care for surprises" (*TE* 32), whereby her constantly used majestic plural contributes a lot to the play's humour. Also the first meeting of the queen with her new servant, Abdul Karim, is highly entertaining, because the sovereign immediately takes a liking to the human present, whereas Lady Sarah, her extremely racist lady-in-waiting, from the first moment onwards despises her new

colleague. In her prejudiced world view, it is clear to her that "[h]e probably doesn't even speak English" (*TE* 39). Abdul coquettishly counters: "English is one of several languages I am fluent in" (*TE* 40) and despite Lady Sarah's palpable hostility, the queen has already decided to keep the "noble gentleman" (*TE* 40). Indeed, Abdul is a much more likeable and well-educated human being than the English people present in the play and in addition to his good manners he is not even afraid to utter criticism in front of the queen. When he gets a cold because of the "drafty" (*TE* 55) sleeping quarters that he has been accorded, Lady Sarah expertly contributes to the discussion by stating that "Indian blood is thinner than the English" (*TE* 55), which is why he gets sick more easily. Queen Victoria is presented as liberal, unprejudiced and well-educated, when she remarks: "Is that a biological fact Lady Sarah? Surely we all have the same corpuscles and blood cells. We share all the same human physiology do we not?" (*TE* 55). Because she has never been to India, she enjoys the stories he can tell her about his home country and she does not scold or punish him for criticising the colonial rulers that are robbing the land of its treasures (*TE* 58). Rather, she is surprised to hear what it means to be physically involved in the colonial enterprise and shocked to hear what her subjects are doing to the formerly so beautiful and rich country of India.

Over the course of time, however, Queen Victoria is getting older and weaker, but at the same time her environment is exerting more and more pressure on her, because her intimate relationship with her servant is not deemed appropriate and because he is said to have "connections with Indian agitators" (*TE* 76). The discourse of Indian nationalism is always present as a subtext to the complex relationship of the queen with her colonial subject. Because she does not officially announce him as her munshi, i.e. Hindi teacher, he feels like "an exotic pet" at court that everyone makes fun of. Although their relationship is presented as a very harmonious one, Victoria does seem to enjoy to exercise power over her servant. She lets him plead and plead to be officially announced as her teacher, only to reveal at the end of the conversation that she has already complied with his wish (*TE* 77). In an emotional scene at the end of act one, Victoria asks Abdul in the Hindi lesson how one says 'I love you' in Hindi, which she repeats to him with feeling. Gupta uses the device of splitting up the final scene of act one to create an even stronger effect by presenting important information simultaneously: while Victoria declares love to her munshi, Rani is on the brink of abandoning her baby and the audience is left to believe that she does so, only to be convinced of the contrary in the second act.

Although the second part of the play mostly deals with the re-union of Hari and Rani, another very important aspect is added to the queen's character. It becomes obvious that she is not only the nice old lady that is so receptive to learning about new cultures, but also the head of the colonial enterprise that has the power to decide matters of life and death. What Lady Sarah calls "progress in Uganda" is heavily criticised by the daring Abdul, who points out to Victoria that theoretically feeling for one's subjects is not the same as experiencing pain and loss in times of war (*TE* 102). He is presented as strong and incorruptible, when raising the question of how "monarchs are able to remain human whilst their subjects suffer such great hardships" (*TE* 102). Victoria is so stunned at his courage that she remains silent, whereas Lady Sarah brings forward the argument of the civilising mission of Britain and that it is "[h]er Majesty's duty to bring light into darkness" (*TE* 102). Victoria then adds that she tries to avoid every form of human suffering, which leads Abdul to concede that if the queen's agents were as "high-minded" (*TE* 103) as she is "the world would be a happier place" (*TE* 103). Soon after this scene, in which power hierarchies as well as the broader global context of colonialism and the exploitation of the countries concerned are discussed, the allegations of the court about the fact that the queen is keeping contact with a renegade get increasingly pressing up to the point that the royal household is prepared to declare the queen insane if she does not comply with their wish to treat her munshi like a servant and not like a close friend. The presentation of one of Victoria's glorious golden jubilee celebrations that naturally is free of any criticism of the colonial enterprise is cleverly interwoven with Dadabhai's first highly critical speech in Parliament (*TE* 118ff.). At the same time Abdul Karim, after all a colonial Indian subject, is shown to be deeply devoted to his queen, for whom he organises Indian performances (*TE* 128) to make her last months on earth as beautiful as possible, which additionally complicates the picture of colonial interrelations that the play conceptualises. When Victoria dies in 1901, Abdul Karim is presented with strict orders to leave the country as fast as possible and to burn all the letters that he might have from her majesty to deny any evidence that they ever were in close contact (*TE* 129).

In conclusion to *The Empress*, it can be stated that the London that is presented in the play is not a harmonious hybrid space, where Indians and English people live side by side, but, on the contrary, the play presents a picture of the historical place that is highly critical of the discourse of multiculturalism. Ultimately, the foreign immigrant – be it a highly educated teacher or a simple nanny – is unwelcome. The former is even deported and on an abstracted level the world that is created in the play is not very different from the one drafted in the contemporary piece *Sanctuary*. Gupta's oeuvre is connected throughout by using personalised

stories as a trigger to discuss topics of greater importance. Her most recent play *The Empress* is just one among her fifteen plays in which she has the finger on the pulse of time and points to social, gender or class inequalities among groups that for some reason are excluded from the hegemonic discourse, which makes her works interesting both in a contemporary as well as a historical context.

5. Conclusion

Tanika Gupta is arguably one of Britain's leading contemporary playwrights. This fact is worth mentioning, because she has more than once been forced to refuse the heteronomous label "Asian playwright". Although Gupta was born and raised in the UK, it nonetheless happens frequently that critics only talk about her Bengali roots without even considering the content of her plays. Gupta more than once stated that her parent's place of origin with its culture and language is still very important to her, but that she does not want to be reduced to her Asianness, which "corners" (Gupta in Billingham 207) her as a writer. As her versatile plays powerfully demonstrate, Gupta was successful in fending off reductionist forms of labelling: her works do not only revolve around the stereotypically Asian topics of arranged marriages and strict, traditionally-minded fathers, but go far beyond that to also consider the thematic trajectories of race, youth culture, gender roles, social hierarchies, immigration, multiculturalism and hybridity.

Gupta, as an insider of both the British and Asian culture, presents emotional, moving personal stories in her plays that thematise the above-mentioned topics. Most importantly, most of her plays are centred on the notion of the "diaspora space" that Brah describes in her influential theoretical work *Cartographies of Diaspora*, which not only concerns people that have experienced some sort of displacement or migration themselves, but also the 'indigenous', 'native' people to whose country the former have migrated. More pointedly, according to Brah (209), "[t]he diaspora space is the site where *the native is as much a diasporian as the diasporian is a native*" (Brah 209). This notion of a hybrid space in which diasporic travellers meet the people constructed as natives is central to Gupta's oeuvre, in which Britons as well as Asians, Africans, Jamaicans or Americans are brought to reconsider their idea of their national, social and gender identity when encountering the respective 'Other'. What makes her works so interesting is that they challenge the traditional canon in two ways: first, they bring aspects of Asian culture to the main British stages and, second, Gupta's plays go beyond these constraints, which allows the flexible author to write texts like

Sugar Mummies that do not include one single Asian character, but, more broadly, address contemporary topics of global importance.

Although Gupta's plays are not outstanding as far as their form is concerned, because they mostly feature a traditional two-act structure with closed ends, they are extremely relevant regarding their seemingly endless thematic variety, which is why this thesis was structured according to the plays' central topics. The first subchapter that discusses the topic of conflicts in the family in 21st-century Britain not only comments on complicated parent-child relationships, but also on the discourse of traditionality within the British Asian community. Asians who are living in diasporic spaces far away from Asia have often been accused of ossifying their culture and of being reluctant to welcome change. As Gupta shows in *The Waiting Room*, *Meet the Mukherjees*, *Wah! Wah! Girls* and *Mind Walking*, this only holds partially true. According to the picture she presents in her works, only the older generation can be held responsible for this cliché. However, the vast majority of the teenagers described in her plays is receptive to change and ready to adapt to the British life realities around them. They are neither hostile towards the English, nor towards other cultural communities. This is most prominently shown in *Meet the Mukherjees*, where even an interethnic love relationship between a young Asian woman and an African man is possible, which is, however, not artificially harmonious, but characterised by lively discussions about racial and cultural stereotypes. Still, Gupta does not forget about the aforementioned older generation, which is put centre stage in *Mind Walking*, in which an old man's cultural identity is getting less and less clear, while his mind starts to unravel because of the Alzheimer's disease he is suffering from. Again, the playwright gives people – in this case the elderly – a chance to speak up that are normally excluded from the hegemonic discourse. Gupta never idealises the discourses of multiculturalism and hybridity, but presents them as part of social spaces with conflictual potential, which becomes most evident in *Sugar Mummies*, in which the delicate topic of female sex tourism is addressed. How versatile the screenwriter and playwright really is has been shown by *Wah! Wah! Girls*, a multicultural musical, in which Britain meets Bollywood and the characters discuss serious matters of cultural belonging and sexual identities, while dancing about the stage.

The second subchapter could as a whole be considered Gupta's attempt to fight against the ongoing demonization of teenagers, who are not only by the media, but also by extended parts of society blamed for all the ills of the nation. In her plays *Inside Out*, *Fragile Land* and *White Boy*, young people are given the chance to voice their own opinions, even if they might not be easily digestible or politically correct. Gupta, herself a mother of three, seems to promote the

message that investing in the future of the next generations is the only way to reform society. Neglecting their pressing problems is at the same time neglecting the state's future, which depends on the youngsters' wellbeing. Because GCSE exams, first sexual encounters, problems with one's conservative parents and fears for the future are not yet enough, Gupta includes the same complexities in her play that real-life London teenagers face on a daily basis: racism, different cultural and ethnic roots, religious prejudices and (school yard/domestic) violence. Still, her plays are never distressing and sad or mere enumerations of contemporary issues, they always present personal, dramatically credible stories with a humorous twist, which make her socially relevant message more easily accessible for diverse audiences. Especially in the audience of *White Boy*, in which the aspiring black protagonist Victor is fatally stabbed because of trying to defend one of his (white!) friends, no central London teenager could have remained unmoved. The same holds true for the powerful demonstration of domestic violence and female criminality in *Inside Out* as well as for the dramatically staged fear of deportation in *Fragile Land*, in which a diverse group of youths feels excluded from and treated with hostility by the British hegemonic society.

The third subchapter presents Gupta's outspokenly political plays *Sanctuary* and *Gladiator Games*, in which the topics of institutional racism and immigration are dealt with. Whereas the former play introduces advantaged – and largely unknowing – British audiences to the horrendous realities of the Rwandan civil war and the ethnic clashes in Kashmir against the backdrop of the diasporic space of a British graveyard, the latter play, which was praised beyond comparison by the critics, is exceptional both as far as its thematic core and its form are concerned. In a shocking documentary drama that uses original sources, which are then re-arranged into a two-act play, Gupta unveils the tragic story of Zahid Mubarek, a young Asian man who was put into prison for stealing razor blades, where he was brutally beaten to death by his racist cellmate Robert Stewart. Because the family of the victim was not even granted an independent inquiry into the case, Gupta's play is of outstanding social relevance. Apart from its political intention it is, and always will be, a poignant reminder of the failures of the British justice system.

The last chapter rounds up the analysis by presenting Gupta's first and her most recent stage play. That the two works, which are temporally separated by more than 15 years, are thematically quite similar points to the continuity in the contemporary writer's works. Both of the plays in some way deal with coming to terms with one's roots. Whereas *Skeleton* can be considered a re-visiting and re-appreciation of Gupta's Bengali origins, *The Empress* goes one

step further to show the colonial interrelations between India and Britain. The last of the plays discussed clearly points in the direction of reconsidering the seemingly all too clear boundaries between the colonial Empire and its Indian subjects. By telling the story of the queen's personal servant and teacher Abdul Karim it becomes obvious that London already in the late 18th and early 19th centuries was the diasporic space it is today. That diaspora, hybridity and multiculturalism do not mean harmony is once again made very clear by presenting the difficulties in the lives of Hari and Rani, lower class Indian migrants, who try to make a living in the racist capital of the colonial enterprise.

In conclusion to Gupta's diversified works it should be mentioned that Godiwala rightly considers the playwright one of Britain's most important *Alternatives within the Mainstream* in her book of the same title. Because of the thematic variety she works with in her plays, she cannot be pinned down to being an "Asian playwright", but, on the contrary, her oeuvre should be seen as an extension and enrichment of the traditional canon. Her plays are not only special because they are written by a female author with Asian roots, whose "work is inflected by her heritage, but not bound by it" (Sierz, *Introduction* 15), but because they address topics of global importance from a contemporary British perspective that can both be Asian, English, Scottish, African, female or male, young or old, rich or poor, powerful or powerless. Gupta's conception of present-day hybridity is a very realistic one – neither is it too harmonious nor only pessimistic and violent. Her take on gender inequalities, racial discrimination and xenophobia as well as more personal topics such as the death of loved ones, homosexuality and parent-child-relationships make her plays relevant for British audiences of all ages, classes and origins, who can at the same time be entertained and educated by Gupta's presentation of "realities with a twist" (Griffin, *Gupta* 236). Sierz (*Introduction*, 16) rightly and to the point states that "her brand of political theatre not only uses new gestures that go well beyond the traditional ones of British theatre, it also challenges audiences to see behind the story and to think about the political choices being posited on stage. That is what great theatre is all about."

No matter how diverse her works are, they are united by one all-pervasive trajectory – the inclusion of complicated topics from the point of view of the disadvantaged and excluded. Gupta does not pass judgement on her characters, but lets them speak for themselves and by presenting the above-mentioned topics from a new angle she opens up the possibility of raising awareness among her audience about injustice and discrimination, which might make them reconsider their own prejudices and in turn lead to more tolerance, equality and understanding in Britain's multicultural and hybrid society of the new millennium.

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7. Index

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8. Appendix

8.1. English Abstract

The present MA-thesis presents the works of the British dramatist Tanika Gupta from a post-colonial, or better migratory point of view. Gupta, who has been born in the UK as the daughter of two Bengali artists, is not only a playwright, but also a screenwriter for TV. Interestingly and importantly for the approach of this project, she has, as it is discussed in the first chapter, repeatedly refused to be called an "Asian playwright", which is why she is not only considered a *British* playwright in the present thesis, but also, and more importantly, part of the recently diversifying British mainstream theatre scene. Authorial intention is, however, not the only reason for according her a place in the Western theatre tradition: Her plays, which draw on the social realist tradition of British drama and not on the rites and dance performances of the Indian subcontinent, speak a very clear language themselves. Her works often – but not exclusively – revolve around the lived realities of Asian migrants in Britain and analyse the discourses that influence Britain's multicultural society today. By introducing Asian, multicultural and hybrid themes to the main British stages, Gupta enriches the theatrical canon and becomes, as Godiwala puts it in her eponymous book, one of the *Alternatives within the Mainstream*. As Avtar Brah explains in her monograph *Cartographies of Diaspora*, not only the migrants themselves are concerned by leaving behind their place of origin and by adapting to new surroundings, but also the people that are constructed as 'natives' in the countries that the migrants go to are faced with social and cultural changes, which are brought about by the arrival of ethnically and culturally different people. The emerging performative, hybrid spaces, where multicultural and interethnic encounters are made possible, are called "diaspora space" by Brah, whose concept is introduced in this thesis, because such diasporic spaces play an important role in many of Gupta's works.

The twelve plays that are discussed in the present thesis, present the interested reader with an overview of Gupta's oeuvre. However, Gupta's numerous adaptations of English theatre classics, which without any doubt constitute a very interesting attempt of updating the canon, had to be disregarded, because their discussion would go beyond the scope of this project. The selected plays were according to their themes assigned a place in one of the subchapters, in which the works are discussed in chronological order. Whereas the first subchapter revolves around the topic of the family and, more generally, relationships, which includes the plays *The Waiting Room*, *Sugar Mummies*, *Meet the Mukherjees*, *Wah! Wah! Girls* and *Mind Walking*, the second chapter, which consists of the plays *Inside Out*, *Fragile Land* and *White*

Boy, analyses Gupta's much-noticed talent to describe the worlds and lifestyle of multicultural and inter-racial as well as inter-ethnic groups of teenagers. The penultimate chapter deals with Gupta's outspokenly political plays *Sanctuary* and *Gladiator Games*, whereas the last thematic block examines the colonial interrelations between Britain and India (*The Empress*) and at the same time recovers Gupta's family's roots in Bengali (*Skeleton*).

Thus, in a conclusive remark to Gupta's oeuvre it can be stated that the playwright rightly refuses to be called an "Asian playwright" and that she arguably is part of the British theatrical canon. She does not only treat Asian migratory experiences in her play, but also sheds light on rising criminality rates among London's teenagers (*Inside Out, White Boy*) and dwells on the discourse of race in her plays, in which she describes how important one's skin colour is up to this day. Gupta neither euphemises an all too positively connoted conception of multiculturalism and hybridity, nor does she demonise youths, migrants or the socially deprived. In a very authentic and often tragicomic way she thematises topics such as gender identities, sex and social roles of women, as well as domestic violence (*Fragile Land*) and institutional racism (*Gladiator Games*). The overageing of Western societies (*Mind Walking*) finds entrance into her works as well as sex tourism (*Sugar Mummies*) and discourses revolving around the family (*The Waiting Room*, *Meet the Mukherjees*). Apart from her serious works or her tragi-comedies, the renowned playwright does not shy away from writing comedies or even musicals (*Wah! Wah! Girls*), which might be a risk to her good reputation, because she is of the opinion that also humourous pieces can poignantly express her ideas about living together in a diversified, multicultural society. Although her works are not characterised by outstanding formal criteria, I would argue that Gupta can be seen as one of the most important multicultural writers in Britain's changing theatre landscape, because her plays that are defined by a seemingly endless pool of diverse topics enrich the well-established, old traditions by presenting a new angle. What unites all of Gupta's plays is the fact that they always present a socially disadvantaged group's perspective, which is why I consider her plays socially relevant and full of potential to create a more equal and tolerant society.

8.2. German Abstract

Die vorliegende Masterarbeit befasst sich mit der britischen Dramatikerin Tanika Gupta, deren Werk unter einem post-kolonialen, oder besser migratorischen Gesichtspunkt vorgestellt und analysiert wird. Bei Gupta handelt es sich um eine im Vereinigten Königreich geborene Drehbuchautorin für Film, Fernsehen und das Theater, deren Eltern aus dem indischen Bengalen stammen und die sich, wie aus dem Eingangskapitel hervorgeht, wiederholt dagegen weigert als „Asian author" klassifiziert zu werden, weswegen sie in dieser Arbeit auch als zum britischen Theaterkanon gehörig betrachtet wird. Ihre Selbsteinschätzung ist jedoch nicht der einzige Grund für die Einordnung in die westliche Theatertradition: Ihre Stücke behandeln oft – aber keineswegs ausschließlich – die Realität von asiatischen MigrantInnen in Großbritannien und gehen darauf ein, welche Diskurse eine multikulturelle Gesellschaft wie die britische beeinflussen. Dabei bezieht sie sich aber nicht auf die rituellen Tanz- und Performanzformen des indischen Subkontinents, sondern auf die in Großbritannien weitverbreitete Tradition des sozialen Realismus. Durch asiatische Einsprengsel jedoch, erweitert sie diesen Kanon, fügt ihm neue Noten hinzu und kann, wie Godiwala es in ihrem Buch formuliert, als eine der *Alternatives within the Mainstream* gesehen werden. Wie Avtar Brah in ihrem Werk *Cartographies of Diaspora* ausführt, sind jedoch nicht nur die MigrantInnen selbst vom Zurücklassen der Heimat und dem Eingewöhnen an eine neue Umgebung betroffen, sondern auch die Gesellschaft im Zielland der Reisenden, deren soziales Umfeld sich durch die Ankunft der als fremd und anders Konstruierten ändert. Diesen performativen, hybriden Orten der multikulturellen und interethnischen Begegnung nennt Brah „diaspora space" und es sind genau solche Orte, die in vielen von Guptas Werken eine Rolle spielen.

Die zwölf in der Arbeit behandelten Stücke verschaffen dem/der interessierten LeserIn einen guten Einblick in das Schaffen Guptas. Außer Acht gelassen wurden Guptas Adaptionen, die zwar zweifelsohne einen interessanten Beitrag zur Erneuerung des britischen Theaterkanons darstellen, aber durch ihre Vielzahl den Rahmen dieser Arbeit sprengen würden. Die ausgewählten Stücke wurden anhand der in ihnen behandelten Inhalte Themenblöcken zugeordnet, innerhalb derer sie wiederum chronologisch angeordnet wurden. Im ersten Analyseblock, der sich um Beziehungen und das Thema der Familie dreht, finden sich *The Waiting Room*, *Sugar Mummies*, *Meet the Mukherjees*, *Wah! Wah! Girls* und *Mind Walking*. Im darauffolgenden, zweiten Kapitel geht es um Guptas vielbeachtetes Talent, jugendliche Subkulturen darzustellen. Die Stücke dazu sind *Inside Out*, *Fragile Land* und *White Boy*. Das

vorletzte Kapitel beschäftigt sich mit den offenkundig politischen Arbeiten *Sanctuary* und *Gladiator Games*, wohingegen der letzte Themenblock Guptas kontemporären Umgang mit Geschichte und ihrer Heimat beleuchtet. Mit der Diskussion von *Skeleton*, Guptas erstem großen Bühnenstück, und *The Empress*, ihrem neuesten Werk, wird die Arbeit abgeschlossen.

In einem abschließenden, zusammenfassenden Kommentar zu Guptas vielschichtigem Werk kann festgehalten werden, dass die Autorin zu Recht von sich behauptet, Teil des britischen Kanons zu sein. Sie behandelt nicht nur die asiatische Migrationserfahrung in ihrem Werk, sondern beleuchtet auch die steigenden Kriminalitätszahlen unter Londons großstädtischen Jugendlichen (*Inside Out*, *White Boy*), geht auf den Rassediskurs ein und beschreibt, welche Rolle Hautfarbe auch im einundzwanzigsten Jahrhundert noch spielt. Sie beschönigt weder eine allzu positiv konnotierte Konzeption von hybriden Multikulti-Gesellschaften, noch dämonisiert sie Jugendliche, Migranten oder sozial Schwache. In sehr authentisch erscheinender und oft tragikomischer Weise thematisiert sie Themen wie Geschlechteridentitäten, Sex und soziale Rollenbilder der Frau, sowie häusliche Gewalt (*Fragile Land*) und institutionellen Rassismus (*Gladiator Games*). Auch die Überalterung der westlichen Gesellschaften (*Mind Walking*), sowie Sextourismus (*Sugar Mummies*) und familiäre Diskurse (*The Waiting Room*, *Meet the Mukherjees*) finden Eingang in ihr Werk. Neben seriösen Werken oder Tragikomödien, schreckt die renommierte Autorin auch vor Komödien und sogar Musicals (*Wah! Wah! Girls*) nicht zurück, um ihren Ideen über Zusammenleben in einer diversifizierten Gesellschaft Ausdruck zu verleihen. Obwohl ihre Werke sich nicht durch formale Besonderheiten auszeichnen, können sie doch als fixer Bestandteil der gegenwärtigen britischen Theaterlandschaft bezeichnet werden, den sie durch ihre unglaubliche thematische Vielfalt um einige neue Blickwinkel bereichern und vielleicht durch das Aufzeigen von Diskursen rund um wenig beachtete, diskriminierte Bevölkerungsgruppen sozialen Wandel und mehr Toleranz herbeiführen.

8.3. Curriculum Vitae

Persönliche Daten

Name	Elisabeth Lechner, BA BA
Geburtsdatum	22. Dezember 1989
Geburtsort	Mödling bei Wien
Staatsbürgerschaft	Österreich

Schulbildung und universitäre Laufbahn

ab WS 2011	**MA-Studium: Anglophone Literatures and Cultures** **MA-Studium: Russisch**
2008 – Sommer 2011	Studium der **Anglistik und Slawistik (Russisch)** an der Universität Wien, Abschluss beider Studien mit Bachelor (BA BA) in Mindestzeit. Mehrmaliger Erhalt verschiedener **Leistungsstipendien**.
2000 – 2008	**Gymnasium** „Kollegium Kalksburg", 1230 Wien Neusprachlicher Zweig: Englisch, Französisch, Latein ▪ 1. – 12. Schulstufe mit „Ausgezeichnetem Erfolg" abgeschlossen ▪ Matura mit „Ausgezeichnetem Erfolg"
1996 – 2000	Volksschule, 2393 Sittendorf im Wienerwald

Berufliche Tätigkeiten, Fortbildungen und Auslandsaufenthalte

1.9. – 15.10. 2013	**DAF-UNTERRICHT** und **SPRACHAUFENTHALT** in Sumy (Ukraine) bei MultiKulti UA
12. April 2013	**Vortrag** über die russische Popband Fabrika auf der **Konferenz Polnische Popkultur/Slawische Popkultur**
WS 2012 und SS 2013	**TUTORIN** für Erstsemestrige an der **UNIVERSITÄT WIEN** im Fach **„Grundlagen der Slawistik"**
September 2012	**SPRACHAUFENTHALT** in St. Petersburg
ab April 2012	**LEHRERIN FÜR DEUTSCH ALS FREMDSPRACHE (DAF)** beim Alpha Sprachinstitut (1010 Wien) mit Erwachsenen
5.-17. Februar 2012	**INTENSIVSEMINAR FÜR RUSSISCH** in der Gruppe für sehr Fortgeschrittene mit ausgezeichnetem Erfolg abgeschlossen
April 2011 – Februar 2012	Arbeit beim **NACHHILFEINSTITUT SCHÜLERHILFE** in den Sprachen **Deutsch und Englisch (alle Niveaus)**
Sommer 2009	Teilnahme an der **TANDEM-SOMMERSCHULE: RUSSISCH-DEUTSCH in Nižnij Novgorod** (Russland) mit deutschlernenden russischen PartnerInnen

Sprachkenntnisse

Deutsch	Muttersprache
Englisch	fließend in Wort und Schrift
Russisch	fortgeschritten
Französisch	Grundkenntnisse