



Immigrants as ‘Others’ of 21st Century Britain: Ethnicity, Culturo-Religious Identity and Critical Race Theory in Rachel De-lahay’s Social Realist-Political Theatre*

21. Yüzyıl Britanya’sının ‘Ötekileri’ olarak Göçmenler: Rachel De-lahay’ın Toplumsal Gerçekçi-Politik Tiyatrosunda Etnik Köken, Kültürel Kimlik ve Eleştirel Irk Kuramı

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ABSTRACT

This article addresses Rachel De-lahay and her plays *The Westbridge* (2011), *Routes* (2013), and *Circles* (2014) aiming, in a broad sense, to observe De-lahay’s theatre in terms of the contradictory nature of identities inexorably fluctuating among multi-cultures, and the representation of reality as represented within the milieu of dramaturgical fundamentals. To what extent the characters’ language is used as a theatrical armament in the making of identity, as well as the playwright’s strategy in using dramatic basics to represent the conflicting identities are subjected to this exploration. As well as this, to what extent the cultural and identity conflicts are evolved into the dramatic conflict will be illuminated through the playwright’s oeuvre. The religious and traditional views regarding culturo-religious behaviourism that partly constitutes cultural structure and identity will also be associated. These will be blended with the playwright’s socio-political and socio-realist point of view; relevant analyses will be conducted and De-lahay’s approach to the concept of ‘other’ will also be considered. In addition to all these, the recent signs of race and racism—with a keen interest in non-white portrayals—and their direct influence on the immigrants in Britain—as represented in the plays—will be included in this exploration in relation to race theory.

Keywords: Rachel De-lahay, contemporary British theatre, critical race theory, political theatre, social realist theatre

ÖZ

Bu makale, Rachel De-lahay’in *The Westbridge* (2011), *Routes* (2013) ve *Circles* (2014) oyunlarını merkeze alarak yazarın tiyatrosunu, çoklu kültürler arasında zorunlu olarak bocalayan kimliklerin çelişkili doğası ve dramaturjik prensipler temelinde ifade edilen gerçekliğin temsili açısından incelemeyi amaçlar. Karakterlerin dili kimlik inşasında bir teatral donanım olarak ne ölçüde kullandıkları ve oyun yazarının çatışan kimlikleri temsil etmek için dramatik temelleri kullanma stratejisi bu



araştırmaya tabi tutulur. Bunun yanı sıra, kültürel ve kimlik çatışmalarının dramatik çatışmaya ne ölçüde evrimleştiği oyun yazarının yapıtları aracılığıyla aydınlatılır. Kısım kltrel yapı ve kimlięi oluřturan kltr-dinsel davranıřçılıęa iliřkin dini ve geleneksel grřler de oyunlarla ve yazarın dřnceleriyle iliřkilendirilir. Bunlar yazarın sosyo-politik ve sosyo-realist bakıř aırsıyla harmanlanarak, ilgili analizler yapılır ve De-lahay'ın 'teki' kavramına dair yaklařımı da gz nne alınır. Tm bunlara ek olarak, Britanya'da son dnemlerde fark edilir lde beliren ırksal sorunlar ve ırkçılık ve bunların Britanya'daki gmenler zerindeki doęrudan etkileri, kritik ırk kuramına iliřkin olarak oyunlardaki beyaz olmayan karakterler aracılıęıyla bu arařtırmaya dahil edilir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Rachel De-lahay, aędař İngiliz tiyatrosu, eleřtirel ırk kuramı, politik tiyatro, toplumsal gereki tiyatro

Introduction

Though sporadic, modern theatrical works featuring immigrants who are mostly people of colour and Muslim background recently fill a gap. Among these plays are multi-ethnic and multicultural stratagems reflecting the ethnic and cultural change of Britain along with plot structures that deal with certain cultural and identity distinctions. These recent plays are not only productions that address the multi-ethnic and multicultural aspect of Britain in more historically and culturally specific ways, but they also address the problems of ethnic identities along with the politics behind the making of the new world order. Until recently, plays about the life of immigrant Muslims, Orientals or the non-white were those either imitating the British Asians who do not speak the Urdu language, as in David Edgar's *Our Own People* (1991), or ones such as David Farr's adaptation of Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* (2005), depicting an 'unchanged' perception of them. But in the changing new world order, the new form of Britain has also brought in the plays of the 2000s. Eastern and Muslim characterization, which is clearly evident in pejorative visions in the Elizabethan world, once again holds a prominent place in twenty-first century British theatre. David Greig's *Damascus* (2006), Simon Stephens's *Motortown* (2006), Richard Bean's *England People Very Nice* (2009) and Alia Bano's *Shades* (2009) are some of these works, among others. In spite of this recent fluctuation in the portrayals of those 'excluded', the lack of Muslim and non-white experience in British theatre is proportional to the lack of Muslim and non-white playwrights. Perhaps with that in mind, in 2008, The Royal Court Theatre in London launched a new playwriting agenda, under the title of 'Unheard Voices,' for British Muslim and Black citizens to support young individuals to use theatre for discovering their sphere and the things which indeed *matter to them*. The program continued after the pilot implementation in 2008 and has been active in its presence onwards with the participation of new names. Rachel De-lahay, one of the participants of this programme, wrote her debut play *The Westbridge* (previously *SW11*), which was first performed at the Bussey Building on 3 November 2011 as part of the Theatre Local Season, but later transferred to the Royal Court Jerwood Theatre Upstairs, London, opening on 25 November 2011.

Given the content set out above, the necessity of this article to address Rachel De-lahay and her plays *The Westbridge* (2011), *Routes* (2013), and *Circles* (2014) is parallel to what I have described above. The aim of this article, in a broad sense, is to observe De-lahay's theatre in terms of the contradictory nature of identities inexorably fluctuating

among multi-cultures, and the representation of reality as represented within the milieu of dramaturgical fundamentals. With this in mind, to what extent the characters' language is used as a theatrical armament in the making of identity, as well as the playwright's strategy in using dramatic basics to represent the conflicting identities, are subjected to this exploration. As well as this, to what extent the cultural and identity conflicts are evolved into the dramatic conflict will be illuminated through the playwright's oeuvres. The religious and traditional views regarding culturo-religious behaviourism that partly constitutes cultural structure and identity will also be associated. In addition to all these, the recent signs of race and racism—with a keen interest in non-white portrayals—and their direct influence on the immigrants in Britain—as represented in the plays—will be included in this exploration in relation to race theory.

To make it more understandable, it is necessary to provide a brief overview of the plays at the outset. *The Westbridge* probes into the strains wrought on an estate when the news about an Asian girl at a young age harassed by a gang of black boys is soon spread through social media. Tension rises in the neighbourhood, and this pressure launches a bunch of questions in Soriya's (mixed race White-Pakistani) mind which sets off a separation alarm for her relationship with Marcus (mixed race White-Afro-Caribbean). In the meantime, sixteen-year-old Andre (Black British) is driven out of the house by his mother by the thought that he has harassed the Asian girl. Around this event, cultural, racial and identity conflicts begin. In *Routes*, De-lahay points out the breakdown of the concepts of immigration and 'other' in multicultural Britain bringing the reader/audience face to face with the desperate lives of immigrants. Bashir, an eighteen years old Somalian, is forced to be sent to his native Somalia, where he has no relationship. Olufemi wants to return to Britain, where he had taken refuge years ago. Anka, empathetic to immigrants who works as an officer at the immigration unit, is experiencing an emotional collapse. Lisa, exposing a xenophobic orientation, doesn't care about immigrants. However, each tries to protect their 'home'. *Circles*, on the other hand, deals with the phenomenon of intergenerational violence that encircles society. Even if the subject theme is different from De-lahay's two plays, the selected characters are people of colour living in Birmingham who are far from the impression of Englishness. Debi, a fifteen-year old British Asian girl, meets Malachi on the bus. The interesting dialogues between the two and their unfolded secrets depict typical reflection of British youth. Angela, on the other hand, Debi's mother, experiences a feeling of disheartened life, and recalls her past seeing her own life once again through her mother, Phyllis.

Social Realist or Political?

De-lahay's imagination is powerful enough to bring us to ask questions, and her authority to shape the dramatic structure is key to concentrating our attention on the performance. De-lahay, whether purposefully or not, brings differing enquiries onto the stage as reflections of those in the real world, and forces us to ask 'who is more normal?' since for her, playwriting is a dais where she aspires to change the way people see others, and that is why she says "I wish my friends, and even members of family, would stop thinking they were normal and everyone else other." This is the core point in her plays - that is to say, each character has a strong feeling of seeing himself as normal while seeing the others as *other*. Is this normality or is it socio-cultural or racial tendentiousness to be parted? Or is it exactly the inevitable result of the collective consciousness that Emile Durkheim proposes? These are the questions which De-lahay puts into our minds and forces us to find the proper answers to. De-lahay's plays offer us the options, and we are left to choose one of these options. These choices evoke the preferences in real life as well as making us take the side of a character on the stage. Therefore, we are now part of the politics that De-lahay produces. Patterson, in the introduction to *The Strategies of Political Theatre*, associates this process with "empathetic playing of realism" and "social emphases of Brechtian theatre" claiming the process to be "an inherently political act, for the origin of political thought is in the willingness to identify with others, to share their problems, to experience transcendence" (3). De-lahay's 'empathetic playing of realism' comes from her brownish colour which, to her, is political in itself, and this contemplation appears at the moment when we are familiarized with her black and brownish characters. Empathizing with others is one of the rudiments that divulges De-lahay's vision, which she articulates in one of her interviews "I like seeing people who look like me on stage," (qtd in Kellaway, 2017) and this impression triumphs not only in *The Westbridge* (2011), but in her succeeding plays, *Routes* (2013), and *Circles* (2014). De-lahay, therefore, purposes a strategy of dramatic characterization that turns around 'coloured' appearances 'to experience transcendence', as she believes that "[i]t's a tiny bit harder being a person of colour in this world" (qtd in Kellaway, 2017). Within this strategy, the characters are made to speak in line with their skin colour and their personalities are released as colour-indexed; for instance, while George is extrovert in terms of publicizing her whiteness, Marcus is withdrawn in propagating his blackness in *The Westbridge*.

One of the observable actualities of De-lahay's playwriting is the 'naturalness' which is submerged within not only the street jargon used by the characters, but also the performed body language that goes beyond the actual words written in her script. The focus of her plays is on what is happening around Rachel De-lahay's real world. De-lahay transmits the reality to the stage, and this is the undertaking of her theatre. The speeches should reflect the naturality and the language is, therefore, natural. What De-lahay does is to turn the reality into art, as Brecht says. In doing so, of course, De-lahay uses the dramatic figures of theatre; first of all, she formulates a conflict, which is as real and natural as it is dramatic. The subject matters in her three plays are both the conflicts and the realities that are true to life. Constructing such dramatic structures is in fact quite political, too. That is, the conflicts, –which Brecht characterizes as “clash of forces” (70) - whether external or internal, produce some other conflicts in the play and the feeling of the rising tension causes an intellectual illumination in the spectators or readers—a view Michael Kirby addresses in his essay “On Political Theatre” by way of ‘literary theatre’ in which “[p]olitical meaning is ‘read’ by the spectator” (1975, p. 130). The tension – analogous to the ‘rising action’ theatrically – is supplied through the stage directions by the playwright through the specific sounds of banging on the door or the sounds of the sirens outside, screams, sounds on the street, phone calls and etc. creating an amalgam of theatricality and reality. Both conflict and tension prompt the spectator/reader to focus on how to solve the problem in question, and we happen to come to the real complication of “different people” (p. 361) represented in the play – a reality in contradiction of what is thought. Kirby's consideration of political theatre as literary theatre is, thus, strengthened through De-lahay's aptitude for playwriting in which “all production elements are subservient to, support, and reinforce the symbolic meanings” (Kirby, 1975, p. 130).

De-lahay is in pursuit of everyone, and says, “I'd want it to be heard by everyone, from old to young, middle-class to working-class” (qtd in Barnett, 2014), a recent approach which Barz Kershaw stresses through “theatre's relationship with the wider social order” (1992, p. 2) as against “community-oriented theatre” (p. 5). So, in De-lahay's characterizations, there are those who come from any part of Britain - socially, economically, culturally and politically. In the background of shaping a heterogeneous *dramatis personae* is probably the aim not only of attracting heterogeneous audiences, but also of building a heterogeneous community that aspires to “question everything about what it means to fight for other people,” (qtd in Kellaway, 2017) and that is why De-lahay heatedly proclaims “I'm going to organise the audience with brown, disabled

and queer people to the front. I want white able-bodied men right at the back". Perhaps this is in contrast to the idea of De-lahay's liberal theatre (in terms of her having anger against 'white privilege'), and this is not good in terms of proper audiences, either. However, creating an atmosphere for an audience who 'does already agree' can spring "emotional and intellectual support"; giving "them the feeling that they are not alone in their beliefs, that others are actively involved and pursuing the same goals" (Kirby, 1975, p. 135) – an idea which, as Kirby suggests, stimulates change under the agenda of political theatre.

On the other hand, De-lahay's insistence on 'coloured' characterization and 'coloured' urban life—the latter is a mark recently used by the *Independent* to label De-lahay as "the new queen of urban drama" (Anon., 2012)—is a probable proclivity of social realist theatre in terms of the tensions between a domineering, hegemonic power and the sufferers. This is a strategy employed by the playwright regarding 'how' she tackles the subject matter, and this is the apparent consequence of her being a performer which, as stated by her, "helps with dialogue" (qtd in Kellaway, 2017). De-lahay locates the power hierarchy by way of the societal realities and builds a dramatic picture of social stratification in which there are Asians vs. Jamaicans, Whites vs. Blacks, Soriyas vs. Marcuses, Bashir vs. Lisas, or Demi vs. Malachis. The 'tension' as an analytical side of real life, and the 'conflict' as an indicative sign of the dramatic element that I have referred to above are the products of De-lahay's social realist, political and modernist practices. For this reason, she tries to expose urban life as the centre of communal happenings within all the outlooks of the observed realities, since she believes that "[p]eople have their own opinion of what urban means, but to me it just speaks of the world where I'm from. Not ghetto or ethnic but inner city, with all its brilliance and beauty" (qtd in Love, 2014).

De-lahay observes the typical characteristics of the real environment; that is to say, she portrays the unsystematic picture of any given fact in which we see some random boys like Andre and Ibi in *The Westbridge*, random families like Anka's and Olufemi's in *Routes*, random affairs like the one between Demi and Malachi in *Circles*, though all of which are methodically chosen by the playwright with intense curiosity for the plot. De-lahay's exceptional method of construction of the plot – both real, dramatic and methodical – thus turns into a self-reflexive point of interpretation. The 'random' all of a sudden gains a specialized drive, and the attention of the audience/reader is suddenly drawn to the recently-visible facts. The old woman's avowals in *The Westbridge*, such

as “I would turn a blind eye, too” (De-lahay, 2015, p. 375) or Bashir words in *Routes*, “That’s an awful lot of freedom you’re talking about” (De-lahay, 2013, p. 62) are strong implications of ignorance of the truth, which later causes a distraction in characters’ enlightenment. De-lahay wants to create the same awareness in the audience and the audience is illuminated in a changed way in which dramatic realities trigger a social awareness and the audience is encouraged to undertake this awareness. As Kelleher proposes, “[t]his is not unlike the ways we encounter things in the theatre (or the ways we come across accounts of the theatre sometimes in theatre studies writing), where the scene does not just happen of its own accord but is put together in a particular way for our benefit, which means also put together to ‘work’ on us in particular ways” (2009, p. 8) - emphasizing the inevitable skill of any playwright who employs the ‘hows’ of bringing the events to the stage. De-lahay’s victory in bringing the social conflicts to the stage and generating a kind of illumination in the audience is practically what Raymond Williams refers to by the phrase “realistic intention” (Williams, 1977, p. 64) in one of his lectures. However, De-lahay does not propose a didactic aim in its projections, but - for the sake of the naturalness – she wishes to startle us – a kind of Brechtian point of view (Brecht, 2014, p. 71). For that reason, De-lahay, as a contemporary dramatist, challenges the mirror theory of ‘just showing the real as it is’; instead, she induces readers or viewers to accomplish a series of analyses by creating intense questionings and conflicts. In her plays, the playwright provokes us to look at differing aspects of analysis that illuminates us through more accompanied questionings on the subject matter of the represented reality. De-lahay’s playwriting, along with the Brechtian effect which constructs “an awakening of critical consciousness” (Boal, 2008, p. 98) in the audience rather than the Aristotelian catharsis, produces a plot and characterization that lead the audience to “assume[...] the protagonic role, change[...] the dramatic action, try[...] out solutions, discuss[...] plans for change – in short, train[...] himself for real action”, which is what Augusto Boal proposes to be a “rehearsal for revolution” (p. 98). The represented reality of De-lahay’s play is true to her undertaking the issues; that is, she not only provokes an awakening of critical consciousness, but builds a ground on which the audience feels the necessity to train himself for the real action. Bringing conflicting cultural identities to the stage, the playwright does not attempt to shock the audience; nonetheless she perceives the communal reality through a complete ‘social realist’ frame with political undertones. The social reality in question is not about the feminist idealism, economic emancipation, gender equality or moral degeneration; nor is it about the social-economic representation of kitchen-sink realism. It is more about the social reality of the ‘undermined’ voices of the unheard people in

any part of Britain; the *kala* boys, *bruvs*, *Asian freshies*, half-white hybrids, *terrorists* of undefined colours, and *bredrins*, among many others.

Culture, Identity and Language

De-lahay's revelation of such a heterogeneous Britain is, of course, the result of a status quo created by the new world order – in this unity, Britain has accommodated a majority of immigrants since the Second World War, especially with an enormous number between the 1950s and 60s. Homi Bhabha's discussions on the phrases "in-between" and "past-present" and their fluency in leading to the cultural newness (1994, p. 7) are common features of the plays De-lahay formulates. As an example, not only in *The Westbridge* but in *Routes*, the past appears as an important complement of cultural transformation – which Raymond Williams proclaims in *The Long Revolution* as the last revolution that British society has moved through following the two revolutions - industrialization and democratization- respectively (1965, p. 10). In the two plays, culture and identity emerge as the main factors of conflict, and the conflicts expose the necessity of re-interrogation of these two entities. Characters, from the youngest to the oldest, are in a struggle, and this struggle is, on the one hand, the result of a concrete disagreement of the characters with one another, while it is the result of a culture and identity crisis on the other. De-lahay embodies the disintegration of what Stuart Hall refers to as the "*settled* character of culture" (2003, p. 4) (*italics stressed*), and she portrays the progression of converted cultural identity within "the process of globalisation" which, to Hall, is "coterminous with modernity" (p. 4). In *The Westbridge*, Ibi, as one of the 'in-between' characters in the play, turns back to "the shared meanings" (Hall, 2003, p. 2) of his ancestors' cultural community in which 'Asian boys should be for Asian girls'. In this regard, Ibi is, on occasion, portrayed as a Pakistani Muslim who is suppressed under the "cultural domination" (Sardar, 1999, p. 26) of Englishness; while on some occasions, he is shown as a Pakistani who still shares the same "cultural codes" (Hall, 2003, p. 2) with his father; he is supposed to make an 'arranged' marriage, and believes that married men should be away from women, so he tells his ex-girlfriend, George, "I just don't think we should be as close as we were. It's inappropriate" (p. 367).

Then again, struggle for their cultural identity and belonging is metaphorically underlined through the characterizations of Bashir and Kola in *Routes*– they are portrayed as two friends who epitomise contradictory ethno-cultural assignments. This point of view is not only the dramatic reality that De-lahay uses for her theatricality to prototype

the common troubles of the immigrants within the revelations of 'collective consciousness', but it is also the generalization of the cultural 'meanings' that Hall terms as the "circuit of culture," (p. 3). De-lahay presents Kola in the cultural spheres of Englishness, while Bashir is a perplexed boy who is 'in-between' Britishness and Africanness. Thus, the conflicts centre around the cultural fragmentation of the community members, which reveals a social fragmentation on a larger scale. De-lahay, whether intentionally or not, covers the necessity of this 'circuit of culture' resulting from an interethnic and intracultural gap as well as the requirements resulting from *post*-colonialism, which is underlined by Kola's anger: "They don't respect this land. They'd rah shoot someone and just fly back to their country. Like, gone" (De-lahay, 2013, p. 9). The interethnic and intracultural gap is conceived to be a part of the chaos aroused in the neighbourhood, where the aged people seem to be unresponsive, too. This brings some conflicts with it, yet, in the formation of these conflicts, there is also the feeling of not being culturally identifiable and not belonging to a place. Anka, who is unresponsive to her past, is a prominent character that exemplifies cultural calamity. Pretending empathetic to what Bashir experiences, she exhibits a representation of Western superiority to Eastern personalities, and goes into stereotyping the non-Western immigrants expressing, "I don't negotiate with terrorists," (p. 11) revealing her Polish background by a word of anger "Wkurzyć!" (p. 11) The playwright's use of the word 'Wkurzyć!' is somewhat attributable to her metaphorical pen to demonstrate the shared crisis that people experience when ethnically distanced.

As a "process of displacement and disjunction" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 8), contemporary culture is presented within the differing words meaning 'unbelonging', as Marcus reveals "It's not me and I get that" (De-lahay, 2015, p. 384), and Soriya says "I'm not cool with who I am," (p. 423) while Bashir insists "I want to go home" (De-lahay, 2013, p. 70) Bashir's desire to have a 'home' comes from the fear of 'unbelongingness', or the anxiety to be 'unmapped' to keep pace with the changes in his life.

While the playwright makes a miniature of the multi-cultural world in the plays, the language used by the characters creates separate identities and these multi-voices recall Bakhtin's dialogism. This point of view corresponds to De-lahay's liberal and all-inclusive theatre where language and identity are identified through the consciousnesses of the 'the others'. Fiona Mountford, in her interview with De-lahay in the *Independent*, writes that De-lahay "speaks in the same sparky, urban-inflected way as her characters". This appears part of De-lahay's naturalness, while on the other hand, it is a significant

sign of the 'local colourism' that she would like to express. In not only *The Westbridge*, and *Routes*, but also in *Circles*, the realities of the characters, as well as their lifestyles, are in the language they use, as much as they are in their socio-economic and cultural reality. The fragmented language of the characters goes well with the fragmented cultural identities, which expose the clatters of post-colonial individualities. Saghir, who struggles with his split linguistic and cultural identity, is the prototype of such a characterization. The Urdu words he utters, such as *kala*, *pani*, *roti*, are some kind of linguistic images of his sympathy for his homeland, Pakistan. However, as an old man who seems to have been in England for a long time, "This is my home [Britain] and I'm not going anywhere!" (De-lahay, 2015, p. 439). On the other hand, in the play, the fragmentation of the language gives some other metaphorical impressions. Language appears as an instructor of human relations; the affinity between Ibi and his wife Umra is strongly connected with their sympathy for the language they use. As Ibi expresses, "there's still a slight language barrier but my Punjabi's getting much better and her English is so much stronger and I think that's the reason for not feeling as close as we should" (p. 438).

Language, in De-lahay's plays, is thoroughly, as connoted by Hall, a "system of representation" (2003, p. 4) which discloses its particular meaning in itself. Here I put the emphasis on a representation system designed through the represented culture. Physical movements, speeches, metaphors, clothing styles, gestures, sensitivities, facial expressions, messages and many others are all demonstrations of language as a system of representation that is reshaped through De-lahay's verbal connotations. In this respect, De-lahay treats language as a Saussurian cultural phenomenon in which every sign has its special meaning (2003, p. 31). In particular, during the family dinner in *The Westbridge*, during the talks between Kola and his mother, Lisa, about Bashir in *Routes*, and during the dialogues between Demi and Malachi on the bus in *Circles*, language - both the language spoken by the characters and the dramatic language used by De-lahay - creates its own identity, so that each individual language is reproduced through its own cultural codes with its "cultural or linguistic *relativism*" (Hall, 2003, p. 22). The meaning is twisted by some linguistic particulars along with the language comprehended through gestures and mimics. Language, thus, covers the "poetics" (p. 6) of the 'represented reality' in which each group shares their own secrets: Saghir speaks his own language, sometimes manipulating the language without replying to any questions; Lisa uses her own language; her reactions are both dramatic and realistic, as well as cultural. While characters' own cultural 'uniqueness' emerges as an example of what

Judith Butler terms as 'cultural solipsism' (Kuo, 2003, p. 223), the playwright highlights Butler's signification phenomenon by bringing the characters who view identity and culture through personal and subjective perspectives in a multicultural geography. Language, thus, becomes an important factor in this interpretation process. The employment of language is in a similar direction in Angela and Phyllis, too. However, De-lahay interprets language in a certainly clever manner in which language preserves its identity while sabotaging the characters' identity. For instance, in the words below,

Bashir: We could do it low key – I mean, I ain't got anyone that would need to be there. Not even Kola. I could do it if it was just you. And then when we have kids – more of your beautiful kids. Oh my days, can you imagine another little baby girl with your face? The most beautiful little girl in the world, and a boy of course, that would have my strong face and hopefully your hair and – and ... well then. Then I'd have to be able to stay. And – an' – and everything would be, could be ... perfect. Don't you think? Anka? Huh? (De-lahay, 2013, p. 69)

When Bashir cries out his imagination of baby girls and boys who will physically resemble Anka upon their marriage, he actually refers to the cultural reality he is in, and the language he speaks represents the precise natural position of his social identity. However, the nature of the language is observed in a different way in Bashir's character – a character which really wishes to metamorphose and adapt to 'white' culture - and that is why his 'imaginary marriage' might be regarded, as he puts it, as the only way "to stay" (p. 69). Such language disclosures along with social and cultural affinities divulge, in some ways, a Foucaultian approach in which "knowledge is discursively constituted through social practices suffused by relations of power and ideology" (Evans, 2015, p. 5). With a differing undertaking, the Foucaultian approach is, on a broader scale, embodied within the idealization of the English language that turns into a power struggle between Ibi and Soriya. English – represented as a language of social, cultural and political power – is emphasized through the 'family dinner' in which Umra is not included, and the reason for this is metaphorically given by way of Umra's unfamiliarity with English. The emphasis on the familiarity with the English language during the family dinner – the family dinner hints at the representative Commonwealth - is a hegemonic representation of the power struggle that the language processes. The representation of power takes on a different dimension at certain points of *The Westbridge*, and the hegemony of the language, as it is represented in the play, is attempted to be framed within cultural identity and then interpreted by dint of the

racial connexions. The discussion by Marcus and Soriya on cooking is one of the most obvious examples of this. Marcus's complexed words, such as "my mum is white" and "[t]he house I grew up in was as white as George's" and for this reason she could cook "English stuff. Roasts, spaghetti..." (De-lahay, 2015, p. 383) are the psychological echoes of hegemonic identity in which Marcus localizes power. Soriya's perplexed reply, "Spaghetti? Very English" (p. 383) is not only the expression of the 'underestimation', but also the challenge against the power missioned within the supremacy of Englishness.

On the other hand, words reflect the underestimated visions of socio-economic belonging as well as an identity which elucidates De-lahay's usage of urban London and Birmingham patois. For this reason, De-lahay's employment of language reflects the essence as much as possible. De-lahay typifies Andre in *The Westbridge* and Malachi in *Circles* to illustrate the socio-economic and cultural affinities. Andre's and Malachi's frequently-uttered word *bredrin*—used mostly by black Jamaicans—refers to the word brother, alleged to derive from the Rastafarian subdialect used for the word brethren (Anon, 'Urban Dictionary'). With unusual religious connotations, this word is frequently used by the enthusiasts of a cultural and religious movement, Rastafarianism—a religion that appeared in Jamaica in the 1930s as "a direct result of, and response to slavery" (Chawana, 2014, p. 92). The usage of the word *bredrin* is exactly essential to be used as a sign for black Jamaican people, since Rastafarians have faith in the idea that Haile Selassie is God, and that he will reappear to the African black community who are living in exile as the result of colonisation and the slave trade (p. 92).

Race Theory

"Skin colour" (Loomba & Burton, 2007, p. 2) has been acknowledged as one aspect within the localities of the term 'race', along with "family, class or lineage" and "religion" (p. 2) by some experts. Within this characterization, the representation of 'coloured' people other than the White is a problematic issue in British social circles, where the practice of it is one of the most visible ones via the theatre; with a parallel concern, the presence of race as a challenging issue is not a recent phenomenon in British theatre history, though the receipt of different races onto British stages is something recent. Marginalisation has been partly due to what De-lahay simply puts into words as "[i]t is hard to talk about race in this country" (qtd in Kellaway, 2017)—a different perception of disenfranchisement within the making of the borders of Britain excluding 'others'. In this understanding, the representation of 'other' – a term that has been interlinked

with various differing methodologies on the perception of 'Self', 'Us' and the 'same', as against 'Them' and the 'different' – has appeared in a number of illustrations as "Muslims [...as] the Other of Christian" (Shah, 2014, p. 2) and Blacks as the Other of Whites in some works of English Renaissance playwrights, and more recently in the works of modern and contemporary British playwrights.

De-lahay challenges the problem of *othering* of non-whites on the stage, and accordingly she might in a way reproach the xenophobic words of Janet Suzman that "theatre is a white invention," (qtd in Alberge and Brown, 2014) holding the idea that the problem is not with the invention of theatre but with the exclusion of non-whites. Perhaps, as a provocation of this degradation, she cries out "I would have cast black actors just because black actors do not have enough parts." She does not expose a utopic underestimation of race in Britain, as she points out, "Every non-white person I know admits the world seems easier if you're white, but no one would pick a different skin colour" – a practical exposé which she accentuates in one of her conversations that coincides with the first proposition made by Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic in *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*, broadcasting the idea "that racism is ordinary, not aberrational—'normal science,' the usual way society does business, the common, everyday experience of most people of colour," (2001, p. 7) yet the geography in Delgado's mention is America rather than Britain. In her three plays, *The Westbridge*, *Routes* and *Circles*, respectively, De-lahay introduces the cast of the characters with an emblematic deliberation, publicising them "in order of appearance", by which she points out the reality of the colour question in the social showgrounds in Britain. But what is interesting in this play is that the concept of colour is not only about the 'white – black' conflict, but about some other clashing colours or identities, as well. Accordingly, skin colour, in all three plays of De-lahay written so far, is reflected as an identifier of another set of situations in addition to being placed in an identity category; nevertheless, the 'coloured' characters give the impression of having some similar feelings towards the supremacy of 'whiteness' which corresponds with "the notion of a unique voice of colour" (p. 9).

De-lahay produces a decidedly multifaceted pictogram of race issue; we are first acquainted with the characters compliant with their coloured appearance, and then the characters are shown within the spatial reality of the 'ghetto' which Ambalavaner Sivanandan terms as "the decaying areas of the inner city" (1976, p. 349), where the first immigrants to the UK under the title of Commonwealth "became ghetto-ized and

locked into" (p. 349). By dint of this rendering, De-lahay reminds us of the supremacy of the ethnocentrism over the ideal of geographical location – that is to say, the non-European immigrants are placed in various 'decayed' areas according to their ethnicity, colour and religion, which make them 'outsiders' – a way of political exclusion to locate them as secluded from the common socialites. That is why Sivanandan quotes Ceri Peach's definition of the term ghetto which, to him, "is the geographical expression of complete social rejection" (p. 349). The concept of ghetto is well criticized by the playwright through some dialogues between Soriya and George in *The Westbridge*; between Demi and Malachi in *Circles*, and Femi and Abiola in *Routes*. Then again, De-lahay offers us the 'spatial psychology' of the characters, where the characters are psychologically placed in a 'space' and they struggle for a way out of it. This space is not a concrete space; it is an abstract space where the characters make an effort to fit inside. In *The Westbridge*, Ibi, for instance, feels empathetic to Umra for "giving her her space" (De-lahay, 2015, p. 419); she appears to construct a space of her own in which there is no English/ness. In *Routes*, Bashir, on the other hand, attempts to fit himself into 'white' world, while Femi strongly wishes his boys to have British citizenship, "They will British, soon" (De-lahay, 2013, p. 39).

Black as a skin colour is represented as one of the ciphers of 'the inferiority complex' in the communal understanding, as it is underscored by George in *The Westbridge*; accordingly, blackness should be concealed, degraded and may only be 'whispered' in the community – this is what Ziauddin Sardar puts into words in his Introduction to Fanon's *Black Skin Dark Masks*, "Blackness represents the diametrical opposite: in the collective unconsciousness, it stands for *ugliness, sin, darkness, immorality*. Even the dictionary definition of white means clean and pure" (2008, p. xiii). It is this psychology of 'the inferiority complex' that leads Marcus to attempt to construct a space for himself which he would like to *paint* with his idealised childhood that was "as white as George's" (De-lahay, 2015, p. 383). In *Routes*, Bashir's state is, on the other hand, a symptom of fear that is manifested through social control where he tries to construct his own space within the 'idealized' society and can be part of that society as long as he succeeds in identifying himself within the space that the society has manifested. That is why he tells Anka "You really do make it flawless. The way you've just slotted in. Looking at those pictures I would never have guessed anything. You just look like you belong here" (De-lahay, 2013, p. 68) The problem of 'spatiality' is, predictably, a true-to-life occasion which De-lahay features by its pressure on black playwrighting, and she, in response to another black writer's interpreting her plays as 'overdone', proposes:

I think there's a fear, which possibly comes from a real place, that's there's only room for one [non-white playwright], and if Rachel De-lahay has taken that spot, then that spot's taken. Laura Wade isn't going to be kicking off about me having a play on at the Royal Court, Polly Stenham isn't, because they know there's room for them. (qtd in Mountford, 2013)

The psychology of fear – not only in the reality that De-lahay observes, but also in the fictional world of Marcus in *The Westbridge* and Bashir in *Routes* – arises by the “intrusion of alien wedge” (Sivanandan, 1976, p. 358) into the spheres of a hegemonic desirable society in which the supremacy of whiteness has already been acknowledged. This point of view, as De-lahay foregrounds in both her play and in real life, is the social construction of the race issue around the world, and that is why De-lahay points out that “Inequality is in every country. Go to the east and people are still praising white over black” (qtd in Kellaway, 2017). Given that, De-lahay's judgment parallels with the scientific approach of the ‘social construction’ thesis of race theory – Frantz Fanon alludes to this as “the spirit of the group” (Fanon, 2008, p. 46) – which “holds that race and races are products of social thought and relations. Not objective, inherent, or fixed, they correspond to no biological or genetic reality; rather, races are categories that society invents, manipulates, or retires when convenient” (Delgado and Stefancic, 2001, p. 7).

Bashir exposes the realities that lie in his subconscious when he is psychologically at the margins of his constructed space. His words on having some ‘white’ children with Anka are the probable psychoanalytical manifestations of “the internalization—or, better, the epidermalization—of [his] inferiority,” (Fanon, 2008, p. 4) which corresponds to what Soriya exclaims, “[i]t's not the word it's the tone, the context!” (p. 425) Even if the stated cases in the play appear too insignificant to be serialised as ‘racist’ in the represented reality of Britain, these behaviours can be construed by the term ‘microaggression’ which, given the definition by Delgado et al., is “one of those many sudden, stunning, or dispiriting transactions” (2001, p. 2), that “[s]tunning small encounter with racism, usually unnoticed by members of the majority race” (p. 151). The image of ‘microaggression’ is strengthened through Anka's racist allegations, which she exclaims “I don't negotiate with terrorists” (De-lahay, 2013, p. 11), and Lisa stresses that “This is not your home, Femi” (p. 52). The echo of microaggression is felt within the screams of Andre as well. Andre is angry with the gossip about his being an alleged rapist, and during his talk with Soriya, he shouts “Cause if a young Asian girl gets raped by a young

black boy or worse, boys, then all Indian people round here have ammunition to say what they really think about their black neighbours!" (p. 413). These are the unnoticed points, that is to say, "[l]ike water dripping on sandstone, they can be thought of as small acts of racism, consciously or unconsciously perpetrated, welling up from the assumptions about racial matters most of us absorb from the cultural heritage [...]" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 2).

Given all the above, almost every scholar studying political theatre agrees, in a way, that all theatres are political in a sense.¹ De-lahay's play overtly contains political issues, and although she does not regard herself as a political dramatist, her play peaches on her. The politicizing of the play lies in De-lahay's presenting the racial issues to the spectator through political imagery. In this context, urban life is shown as an amalgam of colours where other small groups and races cross over the concept of 'Englishness'.

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1 See, for instance, Howard Goomey and Ewan MacColl's *Agit-prop to Theatre Workshop: Political Playscripts, 1930-50*, Joe Kelleher's *Theatre and Politics*, Michael Patterson's *Strategies of Political Theatre*, Augusto Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed*, Amelia Howe Kritzer's *Political Theatre in Post-Thatcher Britain*.

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