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## **Trapped Outside the History House: Language, History, and Belonging in three Generations of (Post-)Colonial Subjects**

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### **Abstract**

Using the example of three generations of characters in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (2009), Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* (2004), and Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* (2000), this paper will explore the connections between the effects of British colonial rule and present-day migratory processes. Special attention will be given to the role of language and the concept of history, which is itself narratively constructed, for the processes of identity formation. The ambivalent position many colonial subjects found themselves in are passed on in all three novels to their children, who are the first to move to the country of the former colonizer in the hopes of establishing a stable sense of belonging there. While some struggle with outright rejection and some face the difficult choice between assimilation and embracing their roots, for others the move can also have a liberating effect. Regardless of how first generation immigrants confront these issues, the generational clashes between themselves and their children, which come as a result of the lack of a coherent, historically grown narrative of identity, can be traced back to the colonial generation of their grandparents. In all three novels, the disturbing effects of colonial rule continue to influence even second generation immigrants in the United Kingdom, who still have to negotiate their identities in relation to a colonial past.

**Keywords:** *migrant narratives, gender, multiculturalism, colonial history, language*