

Handout 5: Multiculturalism materials

England – Half English Billy Bragg

My mother was half English
and I'm half English too
I'm a great big bundle of culture
tied up in the red, white and blue
I'm a fine example of your Essex man
I'm well familiar with the Hindustan
'Cause my neighbors are half English too

My breakfast was half English
and so am I you know
I had a plate of Marmite soldiers
washed down with a cappuccino
And I'll have a veggie curry about once a week
The next day a fry it up as "Bubble 'N' Squeak"
'Cause my appetite's half English
and I'm half English too

Dance with me
to this very English melody
From Morris Dancing to Morrissey
All that stuff came from across the sea

Britannia she's half English
She speaks Latin at home
St. George was born in the Lebanon
How he got here I don't know
And those three lions on his shirt
they never sprung from England's dirt
Them lions are half English
And I'm half English too

Le-li Umma le-li-ya, le-li Umma le-li-ya
Le-li Umma le-li-ya, le-li, bledi g'desh akh! le-li-ya

Oh my country
Oh my country
Oh my country
What a beautiful country you are

Foreigner - Anonymous

Your Christ is Jewish

Your car is Japanese

Your pizza is Italian and your couscous Algerian

Your democracy is Greek

Your coffee is Brazilian

Your watch is Swiss, your shirt is Indian

And your radio is Korean

Your holidays are Turkish, Tunisian or Moroccan

Your numbers are Arabic, your writing is Latin

And... your reproach your neighbour for being a foreigner

Black to Yellow

by Chris Lamontagne

BLACK SEMI-CRIMINAL

That's what they label my class, but I'm an individual,

Religion taught people to respect the ones that rule,

What power to use mystical Biblical subliminals

So magical I can feel it in the physical,

I feel it when I acknowledge my mum working 24/7,

Struggling for a boss that don't know her presence,

But she don't see the exploits she sees it as living

I see it as undercover slavery,

Society being affected by self-fulfilling prophecy,

Illusions – that freedom comes from a stable economy,
It's a game to them... it's Monopoly

They wonder why we're led into crime,
Why do things legit when the ones that make the law make us unwise,
Look into my eyes and my mind,
I see corruption I see the lies despite media hype.

UPPER MIDDLE-CLASS

What is class, how is it defined?
Am I seen superior because I cross the yellow line?

Stereotyped as the hooded-up boy living amongst crime,
Best sight is insight so I move blind,
Vision is blurred so I use my third eye,
Because only my mind can see past the white lies

They look at the blue but not the white collar crime,
Tax money from the poor, funding for war,
But they say it's for charity, out for the majority,
But why should I care? Because I'm a minority

They say chase two birds, you loose both,
So I make the bread to make the birds chase me,
See it through my eyes, I can reach for success,
Living is hard but I can't live with regrets.

Presents from my Aunts in Pakistan

They sent me a salwar kameez
 peacock-blue,
 and another
 glistening like an orange split open,
embossed slippers, gold and black
 points curling.
Candy-striped glass bangles
 snapped, drew blood.
Like at school, fashions changed
 in Pakistan -
the salwar bottoms were broad and stiff,
 then narrow.
My aunts chose an apple-green sari,
 silver-bordered
 for my teens.

I tried each satin-silken top -
 was alien in the sitting-room.
I could never be as lovely
 as those clothes -
 I longed
for denim and corduroy.
My costume clung to me
 and I was aflame,
I couldn't rise up out of its fire,
 half-English,
 unlike Aunt Jamila.

I wanted my parents' camel-skin lamp -
 switching it on in my bedroom,
to consider the cruelty
 and the transformation
from camel to shade,
 marvel at the colours
 like stained glass.

My mother cherished her jewellery -
 Indian gold, dangling, filigree,
 But it was stolen from our car.
The presents were radiant in my wardrobe.
My aunts requested cardigans
 from Marks and Spencers.

My salwar kameez
 didn't impress the schoolfriend
who sat on my bed, asked to see
 my weekend clothes.
But often I admired the mirror-work,
 tried to glimpse myself
 in the miniature
glass circles, recall the story
 how the three of us
 sailed to England.
Prickly heat had me screaming on the way.
 I ended up in a cot
In my English grandmother's dining-room, found myself alone,
playing with a tin-boat.

I pictured my birthplace
 from fifties' photographs.
 When I was older
there was conflict, a fractured land
 throbbing through newsprint.
Sometimes I saw Lahore -
 my aunts in shaded rooms,
screened from male visitors,
 sorting presents,
 wrapping them in tissue.

Or there were beggars, sweeper-girls
 and I was there -
 of no fixed nationality,
staring through fretwork
 at the Shalimar Gardens.

Moniza Alvi

Author

Moniza Alvi was born in Lahore in Pakistan, the daughter of a Pakistani father and an English mother. She moved to Hatfield in England when she was a few months old. She didn't revisit Pakistan until after the publication of her first book of poems - 'The Country over my Shoulder' - from which this poem comes.

- The speaker in the poem, who is of mixed race, describes the gifts of clothes and jewellery sent to her in England by her Pakistani relatives.
- She is drawn to the loveliness of these things, but feels awkward wearing them. She feels more comfortable in English clothes - denim and corduroy.
- She contrasts the beautiful clothes and jewellery of India with boring English 'cardigans/from Marks and Spencer'.
- She tries to remember what it was like for her family to travel to England.
- Her knowledge of her birthplace, which she left as a baby, comes to her only through old photographs and newspaper reports.
- She tries to imagine what that world in Pakistan might be like.

Words

Salwar kameez - Loose trousers and tunic, traditionally worn by Pakistani women

Sari - The traditional dress worn by women in many Asian countries

Lahore - The poet's birthplace

Fretwork - Decorative panelling, with cut-outs so you can partly see through it

Shalimar Gardens - An ornamental park in Lahore

Structure

- The poem is written in free verse (Poetry that has little or no rhyme scheme, regular pattern of rhythms, or line lengths)
- Alvi also arranges the words on the page according to no set order/structure (= the lines seem disjointed, mirrors way she is feeling)

Themes

- Contrast and comparison between Britain and Pakistan
- Feeling lost between 2 cultures and out of place in both (as the presents from Pakistan are out of place in an British environment)

Images

- use of colour: "Like an orange split open", "candy-striped", "Apple-green" (= exotic) "Like stained glass"
- Author feeling divided: "Admired the mirror work, tried to glimpse myself in the miniature" (= can only ever see bits of herself reflected, doesn't feel like a whole person); "Staring through fretwork at the Shalimar gardens" (= again would only be able to see bits, disjointed through the fretwork)

Material adapted from various sources, including: <http://www.tes.co.uk/teaching-resource/Multicultural-Britain-EFL-6166731/> and www.truetube.co.uk