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**Re-imagining Desire and Sexuality in the
Work of Hanif Kureishi**

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Abstract

This dissertation provides an examination of Hanif Kureishi's work, focusing on the shifting and polyvalent manifestations of desire and sexuality within the social and cultural realms during the last three decades in Britain, and the way in which these manifestations operate ideologically. With the transitional and critical period of 1980s Britain as a starting point, Kureishi's narrative representations open up spaces in the British cultural landscape to include –intentionally– the marginalised and politically disenfranchised. The dynamics of racial and sexual identity in Britain are explored, primarily drawing on postcolonial theory, with the basic contention that Kureishi's work interrogates hegemonic discourse on the formation of identities in Britain. By critically examining Kureishi's characters in literature and film, desire and sexuality are re-imagined as a means of disrupting ongoing discussions on identity and the nation, and re-inventing others on a range of questions that pertain to the South Asian diaspora in Britain. These questions gesture to the complex constitutions of diasporic identity/ies as well as to the way in which, supposedly conflicting, entities can engage in a difficult and complex, yet fruitful relationship, thus enabling them to avoid what are considered by the mainstream as “social abnormalities”. Kureishi's “queer” characters disrupt seemingly uniform spaces and subvert traditional understandings of nation and ideas of belonging in Britain, and allow affective terms, such as desire, to be used to re-imagine the nation. Kureishi's work (visual and textual) is deliberately placed alongside the author's own development as a postcolonial subject performing his racialised identity and employing his unique artistic potential in a post-imperial metropolis. Given that the circumstances of his personal life are –more often than not– tangential with all of the political, social and theoretical parameters with which his work is concerned, the interaction between Kureishi's different identities as a person and as a writer proves to be significant as he is read as an cultural instigator and hence, as an influential contributor to contemporary culture.

Περίληψη

Η παρούσα διατριβή εξετάζει το έργο του Hanif Kureishi, επικεντρώνοντας στις μεταβαλλόμενες και πολυσήμαντες έννοιες της επιθυμίας και της σεξουαλικότητας, όπως αυτές λειτουργούν μέσα στην κοινωνική και πολιτική σφαίρα της Βρετανίας των τελευταίων τριάντα ετών, καθώς και στον τρόπο με τον οποίο οι έννοιες αυτές λειτουργούν σε μια ιδεολογική διάσταση. Παίρνοντας ως σημείο έναρξης τη μεταβατική και κρίσιμη περίοδο της δεκαετίας του 1980, οι αφηγηματικές αναπαραστάσεις του Kureishi δημιουργούν χώρους στο Βρετανικό πολιτισμικό πεδίο που συνειδητά και κατ' επιλογήν περιλαμβάνουν τους πολιτικά περιθωριοποιημένους. Με βάση τη μετα-αποικιακή θεωρία, εξετάζονται οι δυναμικές της φυλετικής και σεξουαλικής ταυτότητας στη Βρετανία, με τη βασική παραδοχή να είναι ότι το έργο του Kureishi αμφισβητεί ηγεμονικές αφηγηματικές πραγματείες που αφορούν τη δημιουργία των ταυτοτήτων στη Βρετανία. Εξετάζοντας κριτικά τους χαρακτήρες του Kureishi τόσο στο γραπτό λόγο όσο και στον κινηματογράφο, βλέπουμε πως οι έννοιες της επιθυμίας και της σεξουαλικότητας αναδιατυπώνονται ως τρόποι αμφισβήτησης των κατεστημένων αντιλήψεων της ταυτότητας και του έθνους, αλλά και ως τρόπος επανεφεύρεσης άλλων τρόπων αντίληψης της θέσης της Νοτιοασιατικής διασποράς στη Βρετανία. Αυτά τα ερωτήματα συγκλίνουν προς την κατεύθυνση της αποδοχής της πολύπλοκης φύσης των διασπορικών ταυτοτήτων καθώς και προς τον τρόπο με τον οποίο υποθετικά συγκρουόμενες οντότητες μπορούν να εμπλακούν σε μια δύσκολη και πολύπλοκη μεν, αλλά και γόνιμη σχέση, κάτι που τους επιτρέπει να παρακάμψουν την ιδεολογική ετικέτα της «κοινωνικής ανωμαλίας». Οι «queer» χαρακτήρες του Kureishi διασπούν φαινομενικά ομοιόμορφους χώρους και υπονομεύουν παραδοσιακές αντιλήψεις της έννοιας του έθνους και των ιδεών που αφορούν το «ανήκειν» στη Βρετανία, επιτρέποντας σε «διαθετικούς» όρους, όπως η επιθυμία, να χρησιμοποιηθούν ούτε ώστε να επαναπροσδιοριστεί ή έννοια του έθνους. Το έργο του Kureishi (οπτικό και κειμενικό) εξετάζεται σκόπιμα παράλληλα με την εξέλιξη του συγγραφέα ως μετα-αποικιακού υποκειμένου, ερμηνεύοντας την ίδια στιγμή την φυλετική του ταυτότητα και αξιοποιώντας τις καλλιτεχνικές του προοπτικές σε μια μετα-αυτοκρατορική μητρόπολη όπως είναι το Λονδίνο. Δεδομένου ότι οι συνθήκες της προσωπικής του ζωής είναι συχνά εφραπτόμενες με όλες τις πολιτικές, κοινωνικές και θεωρητικές παραμέτρους με τις οποίες καταπιάνεται το έργο του, η αλληλεπίδραση μεταξύ του Kureishi ως ατόμου και ως συγγραφέα, αποδεικνύεται εξαιρετικά σημαντική, καθώς μπορεί να ερμηνευτεί ως υποκινητής πολιτισμικών τάσεων και ρευμάτων και, άρα, ως ένας καλλιτέχνης που όχι μόνο συνεισφέρει, αλλά και επιδρά ως καταλύτης στον σύγχρονο πολιτισμό.

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Chapter I

Situating Hanif Kureishi

The present dissertation focuses on the way desire and sexuality operate socially and ideologically in the work of Hanif Kureishi. I argue that the novels and films in this study re-imagine desire and sexuality as means of disrupting ongoing discussions about identity and the nation and re-inventing others on a range of questions that pertain to the South Asian diaspora in Britain, such as what constitutes a diasporic identity and how supposedly conflicting entities can engage in a difficult and complex, yet fruitful relationship, thus evading what are considered by the mainstream as “social abnormalities”. I specifically read desire as an unconscious power that has revolutionary qualities and, therefore, social and political potential. Jacques Derrida’s notion of desire pertains to a state of lacking (something), so when one eventually obtains that which one did not have and one had longed for, desire ceases to be a “lack” and therefore, it is not a desire anymore; by its very nature then, desire is unrealisable. It is important to note the connection between desire and society here, as desire is already invested in social formation, which is what creates that interest; in turn, that creates the sense of lacking. Insofar as I am interested in the way desire actually produces reality, and moving beyond the psychoanalytic view of desire as “lack”, for the purposes of this thesis I put forward a different view, one based on Deleuze and Guattari’s idea in *Anti-Oedipus*, that desire is not to be identified with “lack”, but rather with production, in the social field. Deleuze and Guattari analyse the relationship of desire to reality and in particular, to capitalist society, addressing questions pertaining to history, society and human psychology: for Deleuze and Guattari, desire produces reality. This idea is the basis of my examination of Hanif Kureishi’s work, as the author emerged amidst the capitalist society that the Thatcherite administration had created: that desire, in its anarchic state, enables this kind of production (*Anti-Oedipus* 4). After all, the entire socio-political field can be seen as a product of desire which is historically determined (*Anti-Oedipus* 18). To move this idea further, I attempt a coming together of the theories of Deleuze and Guattari and Brian Massumi as far as desire is concerned in that this anarchic state of desire can be explained by bringing the concept of affect into the discussion. Massumi has argued that the affect is a non-conscious experience of intensity, a moment of unformed and unstructured potential which is anarchic and therefore not limited (*Parables for the Virtual* 30). It is my belief that not

despite, but because of this anarchic state, a space of possibilities is opened up, which touches upon issues such as race, class and belonging, especially for sociopolitically marginalised groups. The present thesis will examine the way in which such a reading of desire in Hanif Kureishi's work, then, can gesture towards a challenging of established orders, both in the political and the sexual spheres. Taking a panoramic view of Kureishi's work, this thesis argues that a complex and shifting use of the concepts of affect and desire –sexual and otherwise– lies at the core of Kureishi's art, and it is crucial to his understanding of British cultural, historical and political trajectories since the 1980s.

It is true that there is a dialectical process between desire and sexuality in Hanif Kureishi, manifested throughout his work. Based on such a reading of desire, I read sexuality as not limited to the interaction of female and male roles; rather, I put forward –similarly to my reading of the concept of desire–, a sense of multiplicity that desire creates through the production of reality. Sexuality is not, by any means binary in the sense that it is limited to the sexual act between heterosexual gender-opposites. On the contrary, as Deleuze and Guattari argue, “making love is not just becoming as one, or even two, but becoming as a hundred thousand...we always made love with worlds” (*Anti-Oedipus* 296). In applying such readings of desire and sexuality to Kureishi, and as the present thesis seeks to identify their different manifestations in the author's work, contextualising the aftermath of the dialectical processes they are engaged in within historical, societal and political frames, it can be demonstrated that “there are no desiring machines that exist outside the social machines that they form on a large scale; and no social machines without the desiring machines that inhabit them on a small scale” (*Anti-Oedipus* 340). For Deleuze and Guattari, desire is a machine connected to another machine which is the object of desire; to the extent that the desiring production can be socially generated, then, I attempt to unravel the implications behind the different manifestations of desire within the social realm, as desire is transformed into a positive, productive force, especially in terms of subjectivity and belonging for members of the South Asian diasporic community in Britain and British society as a whole. This interaction between sexuality and desire in Hanif Kureishi's work gestures towards a creation of a space of possibilities which, in turn, can lead to new ways of imagining identity and subjectivity. For instance, in his early work, the sexual experimentation and liberation of Kureishi's characters enable audiences to re-imagine the idea of the nation and their place in society in an ever-changing world. In his post-1990 work, desire and sexuality are explored in a way that marks a shift from a direct focus on race to its manifestations through religion and specifically, fundamentalism, in

terms of defining “Britishness”. In that, the issue of belonging pertains to a supra-racial stand towards what constitutes “Britishness”. Desire and sexuality are, therefore, manifested in a number of ways pertaining to society and the political, embedded as they are in questions of race and identity.

Broadly speaking, the present work periodises Kureishi’s career into three distinct stages. The first includes his 1980s work and lasts until 1990, the year when *The Buddha of Suburbia* was published, where he “queers” the British South Asian community as a way of challenging the Thatcherite neoconservative consensus. The second stage includes his work in the 1990s up until the publication of *Intimacy* in 1998, where he shifts his focus from race to religion as a way of investigating the rise of religious fundamentalism in the post-cold war era. In the final stage of the study, which includes work from 1998 to date (2013), a more autobiographical turn in Kureishi’s work is taken as a signal of his re-assessment of the potential radicalism of identity politics and desire in the context of the constant possibility of their commodification in the late-capitalist world. In tracing the different explorations of desire in his work, I argue that Kureishi helps in forming a new sexual identity in Britain, evident in the series of cultural works that followed in his wake, ranging from television to film productions, which portrayed the lives of members of the South Asian diasporic community. Drawing on such a re-imagining of desire and sexuality, I suggest that Hanif Kureishi’s combination of sexual and political negotiations of diasporic subjectivities is successful in following a cultural trajectory that allows us to use desiring and affective terms to re-imagine both the nation and diasporic subjectivities. Tracing the socio-political potentials of desire and sexuality through cultural production, this thesis examines Kureishi’s literary development through the different expressions of desire and sexuality in his works from the 1980s to the present day. The present work is organised thematically as well as chronologically, and each chapter is a case study that focuses on the interplay between desire and sexuality, all the while grounding such readings to the social issues in which the novels and films intervene. As the thesis turns its attention to each piece of work, several questions are put forward: How does each text or film address its audience? What rhetorical strategies and narrative devices as well as stylistic conventions does it employ and what is the outcome? In what ways is this outcome being used to construct or trouble and disturb an established norm pertaining to how the nation and consequently, national and sexual identities are understood and experienced? The first part, which includes the first two chapters, situates Kureishi in the context in which his work will be examined. It includes the introduction where I develop

the basic theories on which the rest of the thesis will be based, as well as the setting of the milieu in which Kureishi emerged. In that part, I base my discussion on the examination of the cinematic works that were created during the same period as the author, specifically the Raj Revival genre, as Kureishi's early work directly engages with it. I argue that Kureishi's work probed the collusive, interracial and interethnic relationships of Britain's imperial past, as well as their constant re-translation into the present, through his use of sexual relationships which constitute explicit re-working of the ones in Raj films.

Having set up the context in which Kureishi emerged and the literary and cinematic conventions that he challenged in the first two chapters, the thesis moves on to the next part (chapters 3 and 4), which marks the beginning of a close examination of his earlier period as an author. His early period of works, written during the Thatcher era, is determined by a preoccupation with the politics of representation, a political sense of commitment, as well as by his dealings with issues of culture and identity, which includes scripts and novels such as *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985), *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid* (1987) and *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990). In these works, Kureishi challenges the established norms of the time by portraying same-sex postcolonial unions that elude heteronormative strictures and have, therefore, largely political implications, given the immigrants' impossible position of either being completely assimilated into the postcolonial nation of Britain or being totally disidentified from it. This early work adheres to a multiplicity of sexual codes, functioning as cultural products (both printed and visual texts) that do not privilege heteronormativity, thus challenging the social and political imbalances of the time. It is this multiplicity in the workings of desire and sexuality that my work attempts to examine. Lastly, all of these early works share a general breadth of vision as they explore the conflicts of the relationship between class, gender, sexuality, race and ethnicity, offering, at the same time, a new way of looking at politics through sexuality. The thematic context that joins these pieces of work is the one defined by Kureishi's politics of representation, political and social commitment evident in *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985) and *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid* (1987) and his preoccupation with culture and identity in *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990). Kureishi attributes queer characteristics to his characters, parodying traditional romantic conventions grounded in white, heterosexual norms, all the while embedding the discussion in questions of belonging. The early manifestations of desire and sexuality in Kureishi's work adhere to pleasure stemming from the fulfilment of desire. By definition, any symbolic order tried to regulate pleasure, and insofar as the political context of the time affected individual and

collective subjectivities alike, it is imperative to examine a new “intercourse” between affect and the political, specifically pertaining to the way postcolonial identities have been “imagined”. Even though there is no widely agreed upon definition of what is the “political”, for the purposes of this paper and since I will be examining the ways in which desire has produced reality based on Kureishi’s work starting from 1985 amidst the Thatcherite era whose effects would extend beyond the Thatcher administration which ended in 1990, when I talk about the political, I mean the multiplicity of codes and values pertaining to the neoliberal and neoconservative agenda of the time, an idea I will explain further on.

In examining the ending of *The Buddha of Suburbia*, which marks a change in Kureishi’s thematics, I explore the way in which Karim, the protagonist, and Kureishi, the author, create their own identities through artistic production, creating unsettled subjectivities that still pertain to multiplicity and heterogeneity. The close relationship between Kureishi and his protagonist reveals the moral dilemma the two are faced with by the end of the novel, torn as they are between the danger of “selling out” and the artistic choices they need to make, caught as they are between the allure of the commodity and the truth of the artist. This realisation of the impossibility of accommodating the fetishisation of commodity and their artistic obligation to deconstruct it marks a moment of self-realisation for both Karim and Hanif and points at the same time to the different direction of his later work, explored in the fifth and sixth chapters. Such a realisation, along with the ending of the symbolic order that was the Thatcher era in 1990 and the impact of the Rushdie Affair, lead Kureishi to manifest desire in a different way in his later work (examined in chapter 5), marked by the publication of *My Son the Fanatic* (1994) which was made into a film three years later, as he explores the issue of race through a focus on religious fundamentalism. Kureishi’s works in the period up to 1990 were largely preoccupied with what it meant to be British, offering his own insights and attempted answers to such a question all the while grounding such a discussion predominantly on racial politics. With the publication of *My Son the Fanatic* (1994) and *The Black Album* (1995), however, his concerns shifted. As the world (and especially Britain) changes, so does Kureishi; and this change is evident in his work, as desire and sexuality are manifested in a different way, one that was embedded in other issues of the time, such as Islamophobia; such manifestation emphasises the lack of coherence and unity to the idea of a black community (Desai 65). Thus despite the fact that the effects of the Thatcherite era continued well into the 1990s with neo-conservatism and neo-liberalism being in effect

under John Major and later Tony Blair, Kureishi's change of focus might be pinned down not only to the belief on behalf of the author that upon the stepping down of Thatcher as Prime Minister, things would change, but also to the evident rise of British Islamic fundamentalism whose causative relationship with the political establishment could not be assessed at the time. What is true is that this later, 1990s work, signifies a change in focus and direction compared to his early work. Kureishi deals with issues such as religious violence and the complex relationship between past and present. In that, these works can be situated within what McLeod has called "contemporary black writing" ("Extra Dimensions, New Routines" 45), a kind of writing that no longer pertains exclusively to race. On the contrary, the articulation of the nation in this later work is distinctly polycultural, moving beyond the affective and political concerns of black Britons, as it demands adoption by all kinds of British subjects (McLeod 51); so the concept of Britishness seems to be no longer a predominantly racial issue. This shift in focus from being directly on race to dealing with its manifestations through the examination of religious violence, in turn points to the more prominent didactic nature of such writing as opposed to an imaginative one. Thus, the fifth chapter of this thesis which deals with the novel *The Black Album* (1995) and the film *My Son the Fanatic* (1997) argues that as people sought a stable sense of identity in fundamentalism, the nature of a new struggle is underlined, as Kureishi dealt with new complexities arising. The different manifestations of sexuality in these pieces of work constitute a quest for a British identity which is supra-racial and polycultural. The chapter also addresses concerns raised by certain critics such as Mahmood Jamal and Ruvani Ranasinha who lamented the "aesthetic decline" of the author. On the contrary, I argue that even though Kureishi's later work did not have the same allure as the aesthetic levels of *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985) or *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990), the addressing of social issues such as religious violence underlines the shifting importance of religion in questions of belonging in 1990s Britain. Thus, Kureishi's later writing is a part of what has been identified as "an important contributor to a broad series of debates about the identity of the nation in an international context, one that shadows a set of concerns much wider than solipsistic and exclusivist diasporic matters about 'myself'" (McLeod 51). That does not mean, however, that Kureishi is not, still, a South Asian racialised subject living and working in post-imperial London. Although Kureishi's post-1990 work moves beyond the use of race as the main attribute for identity to a point, it does not do so completely. I discuss this in the part dealing with the reactions voiced by the author's family, as he was accused of exploiting their points of weakness,

which is what seemingly makes them different from others – this could be race, sexual dissidence, etc.

Of course, Kureishi's evident embrace of secularism in *My Son the Fanatic* (1994) and *The Black Album* (1995) and his treatment of desire in this period of his career should not be read as a belief that sexual liberalism is the cure for fundamentalism, but rather, that the examination of the coexistence of these two elements can assign the social trajectories of the novel with greater importance, as, in the end, the novel does indeed constitute an argument. Unquestionably, the interconnectedness between the aesthetic and the political is much more complex than it might initially seem. Thus, the unravelling of the nature behind such an interaction between the aesthetical and the political qualities of a novel, as well as the extent to which this interaction pertains to society at large, must be the scope of revisiting Kureishi's later work. This work embodies a "post-ethnic reality", as Sara Upstone puts it, which writers such as Monica Ali have since taken up ("A Question of Black and White"). The scope of this project, therefore, is to construct a literary portrait of Hanif Kureishi, focusing as it does on his varied manifestations of desire and sexuality, as such a reading can add to ongoing discussions not only about his importance as a writer, given that he is still active, but also to an evaluation of the shifts in the role of desire in South Asian cultural production in Britain, starting from the 1980s and continuing to the present day. Thus, besides drawing attention to the potential of desire and sexuality to intervene in relevant literary discussions, my work also contributes to a growing body of work that preoccupies itself with the interconnections and interchanges between sexuality and the political, all the while grounding such an examination into discussions pertaining to race and identity.

The third stage part of Kureishi's work under study, marked by the publication of *Intimacy* in 1998, demonstrates another shift in the author's focus as desire and sexuality are manifested differently in the social realm, pertaining as they do to personal issues such as middle-age crises, marriage and the heterosexual relationship, which reflects a more introspective Kureishi. Kureishi focuses on the exploration of the discontents of marriage, masculine sexuality and the complex nature of adult relationships. During this period, which also includes *Gabriel's Gift* (2001) and his memoir *My Ear at His Heart* (2004), Kureishi becomes focused on autobiographical writings. The actions of his protagonists reflect the choices the author made in his life as a young artist and as a person. This introspective journey leads to the publication of Kureishi's memoir, based on the discovery of his father's unpublished manuscript. Thus, the main argument in the sixth chapter,

which deals with these works by Kureishi, is that desire and sexuality are re-visited as their painful nature is unravelled, which also points to a moment of self-realisation on behalf of the author, as the stories in these works are insightful portraits of the discontents of modern-day relationships and the relationships between fathers and sons which underline a sense of “failure” of desire, as I will explain in the relevant chapter. As the links between the artist and his works become more fragile than ever, it is argued that Kureishi’s exploration of masculine sexuality and the difficulties of adult relationships in these works were influenced by his own personal circumstances, a process which will culminate in the publication of his memoir. Indeed, *My Ear at His Heart* explores Kureishi’s own past through his father’s experiences. For the first time in his work, the Indian space returns, which marks a moment of self-realisation on behalf of the author as he understands the futility of trying to escape the past. Kureishi’s memoir is an attempt to dialectically engage with his past, in a manner that will allow him to overcome the stain of racial prejudice he grew up with. In *My Ear at His Heart*, Kureishi fictionalises his own reality, inviting his audience to read him as an embodiment of his work, building on the artistic self-realisation we saw at the end of *The Buddha of Suburbia*, where the moment of self-realisation on behalf of the protagonist and the author point to the blurred boundaries between an artist and his work.

The seventh and final chapter includes the findings of this piece of research and the legacy of Hanif Kureishi. Kureishi’s literary and cultural heritage permeates his work and, at the same time, challenges the imperial tradition, which results in an important contribution to the course of British cultural production; in that sense, the writings of Kureishi can be located amidst a site of clashes and struggles between heritages, traditions and sexualities. This sort of examination can reveal cultural and sexual ambivalences both at the level of characters and at the level of the nation. In his autobiographical essay, “The Rainbow Sign”, published with the script of *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985), Kureishi states that “being British” had changed as it had become something much more complex; his work explores exactly this complexity. In adding to this convolution by introducing queer characteristics in his protagonists, Kureishi put forward the element of racialised queerness in Britain within a diasporic context. This view provides leeway into examining his legacy, as the present piece of work traces the literary development of Hanif Kureishi as well as the literary, social and cultural ramifications of his work. I specifically focus on what kind of work followed his, in an attempt to explore to what extent he may be considered groundbreaking in British South Asian cinematic cultural production. Kureishi

is pioneering in introducing the postcolonial queer element into the British novel and cinema alike, helping in their literary evolution, as well as in unravelling the complex nature of the country's cultural scene which included marginal groups, exposing the histories of colonialism haunting the present at the same time. I follow here Robert Young's ideas about cultures that are not destroyed during (literary) evolution but are layered on top of each other, preserving their differences in a collage, as a culture never repeats itself perfectly away from home but it blends in the heterogeneity of the elsewhere (*White Mythologies* 174).

It has been argued that Kureishi "belongs to a tradition of inquiry into the state of the nation and the meaning of 'Englishness'" (Moore-Gilbert 3), presenting as he does an England he himself called "Orwellian" (*The Black Album* 89). Indeed, he has done so through the challenging of the country's imperial history which, a few decades earlier, was controlling a huge part of the world. Kureishi's work promotes the reconstruction of a new kind of narrative within the genres of British Cinema and the British Novel where the South Asian diasporic community can come to terms with their host country, as they collude in a new kind of relationship that does not reject the past, nor does it let it burden the present. Kureishi's cinematic work, initiated by *My Beautiful Laundrette*, is a milestone in the depiction of queer, racialised desire, and thus, a predecessor to much of the queer South Asian diasporic cultural production which has ensued, in which desire frees up the diaspora's consciousness from the burden of the past, which was translated into histories of colonialism and racism, and which more often than not led to racial violence. Thus, his contribution led to a series of successful British South-Asian hybrid films dealing with similar issues such as Damien O'Donnell's *East is East* (1999), written by Ayub Khan-Din. This is a critically acclaimed (and financially successful) film that shares a lot of characteristics with Kureishi's work, in that it is a coming-of-age narrative that explores, among other issues, interracial gay relationships. The subsequent emergence of other films by South Asian diasporic directors and writers including Gurinder Chadha's *Bhaji on the Beach* (1993) and Meera Syal's *Anita and Me* (the novel was published in 1996 and made into a film in 2002), follow in Kureishi's wake as they are essentially self-realisation films for diasporic characters, extensively dealing with the notion of home, even though they do not explicitly deal with the homoerotic element. His influence on television can be traced to the production of Meera Syal's *Goodness Gracious Me* (1996-2001), a sketch comedy of the BBC on the lives of British South Asians. Chadha's film *Bend it Like Beckham* (2002) explores a new way of including South Asian immigrants in British life through

sport. In it, the non-heteronormative sexual element is explicitly evident in the character of Tony, while the homoerotic one is implicitly manifested in the relationship between the South Asian Jess and the British Jules.

It is equally important to note and examine the close connection of the writers, directors and actors in this cultural production process pertaining to South Asians in Britain, which was initiated by Kureishi. For instance, *East is East* was staged at the Royal Court in 1997, before being filmed; Meera Syal played the role of Rani in *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid* and wrote the script for *Goodness Gracious Me* for television before going on to cinematic production and writing the script for both *Bhaji on the Beach* and *Anita and Me*. Ayub Khan-Din starred in Kureishi's *My Beautiful Laundrette* and *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid*. This aspect of his work strengthens the view that the links between Kureishi's work and the Raj Revival genre emerge, while it should also be noted that it created a sense of association with the audience who recognised the characters on screen. In a sense then, a genealogy of sorts is created between the Raj Revival genre, Kureishi's work and the filmic cultural production by South Asian directors and writers that followed him in the 1990s and 2000s. Meera Syal has said that "although Kureishi was not a conscious influence on my work, his work to satirize the sacred cows was obviously part of my growing...He was also very hip, the first hip Asian in the arts as far as I can recall" (qtd in Ranasinha 122). Such views about Kureishi's work coming from South Asian directors is what enabled them to create work that follows on the path he traversed first. His legacy certainly marks him as one of the most important writers of his generation and, arguably, the most successful British-born South Asian writer. It is certain that Kureishi started a wave in popular cultural production ranging from television and cinema to music production, all of which make up a portrait of the South Asian experience in Britain. Claydon argues that in this new kind of cultural production the voices of the Other can be heard more powerfully than before ("SACS" 26-38). I argue that this is partly owed to Kureishi, who challenged a genre which did not allow space for the South Asian community. In doing so, he marked the rise of a voice in British literature, television, cinema and music, which transgresses stereotypical forms.

Even though the aforementioned pieces of work were enabled by Kureishi's work – in that he brought the British South Asian experience to the forefront and thus these works received popular and critical notice and appraisal– this does not mean that there are no differences between them. For instance, he was accused of not being in touch enough with his Asian side, even by the authors he influenced and enabled, writing more for his "white"

audience (Moore-Gilbert 192), or that he looked at everything from a male point of view (Jamal 21) which makes his writings sexist; these topics are discussed in the examination of his legacy. In fact, even though Gurinder Chadha's work was recognised largely because of Kureishi, she tried to distance herself from him, saying that he "used that side of him i.e., Asian, without real cultural integrity" (Moore-Gilbert 192). It should also be noted that his post-1990 work was being criticised at the same time as his importance and his political status as a writer was being challenged. Thus, by not focusing solely on Kureishi's positive influence as a writer, but also assuming a critical stance towards specific aspects of his work the present study will sketch a portrait of the author and his most important works.

As I examine Kureishi's texts and films, I unravel the implications behind their interaction with what came before and what followed in cinematic and literary terms, analysing their individual narrative and generic novelties. In this way, I map a genealogy of the genre from which Kureishi stems and the way in which he transforms it through the reading of the dialectic between desire and sexuality. During the course of this examination, what becomes apparent is the way in which Kureishi re-imagines desire and sexuality as not inbuilt or fixed, but culturally variable, which is something that unravels its complexity and potential. Simple binarisms such as Asian/British, centre/margin, and home/exile are blurred as they reveal their complex nature; Kureishi's work suggests that values have to be re-examined, not through the eradication of differences, but through their exploration and a re-negotiation of the conflicts created by desire as well as clashes that arise from sexual, cultural and religious norms or expectations rooted in "tradition". I draw here from Robert Young's idea that the imperial notions of centre and periphery are not complementary or at war, but very much dialectical (*Postcolonialism* 111), applying it to the interplay between desire, sexuality and the political. This thesis, then, is motivated by certain significant questions. What were the social, political and historical circumstances in which Kureishi thrived and how did his work interact with them? What were the prevalent cultural and theoretical approaches both in literature and in the cinematic genre prevalent at that time, and in what ways did they affect his work? More importantly, how did Kureishi and his work affect the postcolonial environment of Britain – both in a literal and a social sense – and its literary production, and to what extent does his work continue to do so today, if at all? Ultimately, what led to Kureishi and where has Kureishi led us? I will answer these questions by delving into queer theoretical perspectives, especially in the context of postcolonial studies, and by paying attention to the specific socio-historic and

cultural context that constitutes Britain. Specifically, I follow the representation of desire, sexuality and their corollaries, including the gendering of the nation-state, migration, cultural flow and their socio-political potentials pertaining to issues of belonging, in an attempt to answer questions such as how can a sense of postcolonial hermeneutics based on desire and sexuality aid our understanding of culture? Ultimately, in what way are Kureishi's concerns, sensibilities and literary tropes based on sexuality and desire applied in lived experiences?

My work attempts to bring together an array of different notions and terms whose charge derives from the shifting and transient meanings generated by the treatments of desire and sexuality in Hanif Kureishi's work. I am not merely interested in a reading of his texts (visual and verbal) but, also, in examining the author's own development as a postcolonial subject performing his racialised identity in a post-imperial metropolis. My strong interest in Kureishi's two arguably disparate identities as person and as writer stems from the circumstances of his personal life. These circumstances, more often than not, are tangential to all the political, social and theoretical parameters with which my work is concerned, as the ways in which Kureishi, lives, works, writes and imagines in post-imperial London is directly related to his artistic potential. His entire oeuvre has a strong autobiographical element even though Kureishi tried to establish distance between himself and his work. It has been argued that "writing on work that could comprise an Asian diaspora or a South Asian film category is sparse and critical engagement with these films is important. It may be that links between South Asian diasporic films and filmmakers are fragile" (Givanni 2, qtd in Desai 33). Indeed, the course and events of his personal life can be read as a manifestation of British politics regarding the South Asian diaspora in England. Of course, by saying this, I am not implying that Kureishi is the symbol for all South Asians living in the UK nor that he embodies an essentialised identity.

Kureishi affords modes of sexual expression that underline the possibility of an artistic reinvention of experience. This is evident in the strong dialectical process between sexuality and desire given their revolutionary potential as Deleuze and Guattari have put it, since they are not imaginary forces based on lack but rather real, productive forces. When they interact, then, a host of possibilities is created which can open up spaces of imagining that can move notions such as identity and subjectivity further. So the body of the author, as a racialised subject in Britain, both contextually and conceptually, fits in the analysis of his work, especially in comparison to the racialised bodies of his characters such as Johnny in *My Beautiful Laundrette*. I will examine, therefore, Kureishi's material history as well as

his works because how he lives, imagines and writes as a racial subject himself is significant. Thus, the reader will come across various notions with which my work is preoccupied, such as the issue of British South Asian diasporic identity, imperial politics, desire and sexuality, affect, pop culture, and violence. In order to bring these somewhat heterogeneous elements together, I attempt a discursive exploration of Kureishi as an individual and racialised body, with a personality that brings together these parameters, along with a series of influential theorists on sexuality.

The Thatcherite 1980s

In order to contextualise my approach to the examination of Kureishi's work, and before I proceed to other theoretical works and concepts used in this thesis, it is important to outline the historical and socio-political context within which Kureishi emerged, as Kureishi has always been a political writer. The complex relationship of politics and cultural production, nevertheless, renders the task of defining Thatcherism a convoluted one. However, the words of a politician might help set the context: Former Prime Minister Gordon Brown said that "In the 1980s, a very narrow view of Britishness was popularised by Margaret Thatcher, a Britain built on self-interested individualism, mistrust of foreigners and an unchanging constitution" (Richards). In any case, one cannot deny that the Thatcher administration, given the time in which it manifested itself, triggered shifts on every level of British life and its aftermath continued to affect British society and shape British politics well into the 1990s. Famously, when Margaret Thatcher was asked what her greatest achievement was, she replied "Tony Blair", which affirms the assertion that the Thatcherite era lasted from 1979 until 1997, when Gordon Brown became the Prime Minister. Martin Holmes argues that Thatcherism was a full-blown ideology that extended beyond the years in which Thatcher was in power, which departs radically from the post-war consensus, as it is both reactive to the failures of Keynesian political economy, but also visionary, in aiming at a different economy and society (*Thatcherism* 8). Clearly, the neo-conservative policies of the time advocated a free market economy, complemented by a return to the values of hard work and self-reliance of Victorian times, aiming at re-

establishing the financial power of Britain. In effect, this mixture of past values and present-day market ideas was what the Thatcher administration used to create a sense of what being “British” in the 1980s meant. For the Thatcher administration, the combination of the best values of the past and the entrepreneurship of the (then) present should/could have restored Britain’s position as a world leader. However, as I will argue, the fact that this new sense of identity was based on the long-lost glory of the British Empire and resulted in the automatic exclusion of certain individuals such as immigrants, served as the stepping stone for the rationalisation of the supremacy of the white British population.

It would be useful here to explain terms such as neo-liberalism and neo-conservatism, as they will be referred to in the course of this thesis, especially in dealing with the ways in which desire in Kureishi’s work produced reality within such a socio-political context. It can be argued for instance, that in *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985), the main relationship, that between Johnny and Omar happens because the latter is a successful businessman in the first place, while the character of his father is an embodiment of the failed leftist policies of the time. Given that this thesis reads desire and sexuality in their irrevocable interconnection with politics, it would be interesting to note the differences between neo-liberalism and neo-conservatism. These terms were prevalent at the time and, at the same time, largely shaped the state’s behaviour towards cinematic production, immigration legislation and the financial aspects of entrepreneurship, while being grounded in issues of belonging. To be sure, these categories are closely interconnected and mutually productive of each other, but one could argue neo-liberalism is a political philosophy which adheres to economic policies such as economic liberalisation, free trade, privatisation and a decrease in the size of the public sector. The Thatcherite neo-liberal policies of “supply-side” economics placed emphasis on the finance and service sectors, the underdevelopment of industry and manufactories, a sense of regressive taxation, “outsourcing”, etc. Neo-conservatism, on the other hand, pertains mostly to an opposition to political individualism, a critique of the welfare state and advocates the use of military force to “promote” democracy in international affairs. Both of these philosophies were at play during the Thatcherite administration which is something that affected cultural production, as will be made clear in the chapter including the discussion of the Raj Revival genre. What is certain is that both of these philosophies are integral parts of the capitalist system and, given the thesis’ interest in desire, it can be argued that the application of neo-liberalism and neo-conservatism created desires, which also touches upon the philosophical view of desire as that which is lacking. Deleuze and Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus*

quote Spinoza who asks why people stubbornly fight for their servitude as though it were their salvation (29). In other words, why do people need to invest in a social system that is repressive and, in fact, introduces this lacking into our lives? The answer seems to be painfully simple: our desires are not our own; rather, they are parts of the capitalist infrastructure which creates needs and deficiencies (*Anti-Oedipus* 30). By identifying which desires are our own, then, one can escape the limiting effects of these policies prevalent in the 1980s and 1990s and point to a sense of self-determination that is not bound or dictated by the state. This self-determination process can be thought of in affective terms, one that permits what Deleuze identifies as an enormous flow, a libidinal-unconscious flow that constitutes the delirium of this society (*Desert Islands* 263); and this is what this examination of Kureishi's work points to. Thus, by not treating desire as that which is lacking, but rather, as a producer of reality, my examination allows us to read desire in Kureishi's work as a challenging of the neoliberal and neo-conservatism ideologies prevalent at the time.

Margaret Thatcher famously crafted a populist discourse that favoured old-fashioned, Victorian values such as self-reliance and the importance of the nuclear family, values firmly and unconditionally espoused when the Empire was at its best. Being raised by a Victorian grandmother, the Prime Minister believed in Victorian ideals, so she lived her life and tried to rule the country accordingly:

I was brought up by a Victorian grandmother. We were taught...self-reliance [and to] live within our incomes. We were taught that cleanliness is next to Godliness...You were taught tremendous pride in your country. All these things are Victorian values (*The World According to Margaret Thatcher* 12).

Thatcher's advocacy of moral values included the elevation of the nuclear family as an opposing force to potentially damaging lifestyles such as the ones put forward by alternative sexualities, activism and trade unionism. Such views continued to dominate Britain until the late 1980s, and it is not by chance that some of the slogans of the Conservatives when running for re-election in 1987, included phrases such as "It's Great to be Great Again" and "Britain is Great Again. Don't Let Labour Wreck it". The Prime Minister, along with racist politicians such as Enoch Powell, incited fear into the British population by portraying the country being swamped by invading immigrants. Such nationalist discourse was transformed into laws trying to regulate immigration and,

consequently, a subsequent wave of new racism ensued from such policies. Tensions among groups and communities began to rise, which led to waves of race riots.

During the early part of the 1980s, the Thatcherite policy on immigration was described by the self-explanatory term “Fortress Britain”. Extremely strict controls of entry to the country were implemented, but actually, by the end of the decade, the number of asylum seekers (mainly from within the Commonwealth) and people with work permits increased from a few hundred to many thousands (Scarman Report). This new flow of immigrants created pressure on the state, though it claimed that the rights of ethnic minorities would be protected. However, strict control measures clashed with this stated intention. The social upheaval of the time, the great miners’ strikes and the decline in the number of jobs in the manufacturing sector which resulted in a struggling working class, sparked riots in 1981, which were largely based on racial issues, giving credit to what Brian Massumi has argued, namely that “the most immediate and violent expressions of racism have tended to emerge from working-class formations” (*Parables for the Virtual* 10). In Brixton, which had a very large Afro-Caribbean community, there were protests by youths against police brutality, while Liverpool and the Midlands saw similar riots. The official narrative of the time can be found in the Scarman Report (1982), by Lord Leslie Scarman, which stated that racial disadvantage was a fact of British life. In the following year, 1982, The Falklands War served to increase the sense of nationalism in the country and hardened the government even more. At the time, immigration policy was defined by the 1971 Immigration Act, which illustrates how state fears were voiced in official narrative:

The 1971 Act sought to bring primary immigration by heads of households down to a level which *our crowded island* could accommodate ... in the belief that there is a limit to which a society can accept large numbers of people from different cultures without unacceptable social tensions. That remains our view (*1971 Immigration Act* 15, emphasis added).

Such a nationalistic boost of ideas pertaining to issues such as unemployment created tensions, such as those manifested in the skinhead movement. These tensions led to an increase in violence towards members of immigrant communities by groups of people such as the so-called “Paki-bashers” in Brick Lane. This phenomenon included racial hostility and violence against immigrants, carried out mostly by groups of white working class men. One of the most notable incidents of the time was the murder of a Pakistani immigrant by

the name of Tausir Ali in April 1970, in the East End (Humphry and Gus, 262), who was stabbed to death by two “skinheads” on his way home.

The Falklands War in 1982 not only became the major cause of Thatcher’s re-election, but went a long way in helping the goal of forming a new national identity based on the militant, imperial past. The Falkland Islands, or the Malvinas as they are known in Argentina, are situated in Latin America and have been a British colony since 1833. The sovereignty of the islands has been, in many instances, challenged by Argentina, but the inhabitants, being of British origin, refused to accept any regime changes. On 2nd April 1982, the Argentinean army attacked and captured the islands. The fact that at the time, Argentina’s dictatorship under Jorge Rafael Videla was replaced by another junta led by Leopoldo Galtieri who ordered the invasion of the Falklands, helped Thatcher gain support within the Commonwealth and the European Community. What is more, the Argentineans presented Thatcher with a golden opportunity to reassert Britain’s global power and influence by once more using military might thousands of kilometres away from Britain. The fact that the war was fought on secluded islands also meant that the chances for huge casualties and a prolonged war there were diminished. Interestingly enough, in the ranks of the British Army that attacked and recaptured the Falklands, there was a small number of Gurkhas, a tribe from what is now Nepal, whom the British had enlisted in their military during the British Raj; these people were still fighting “for the Crown” many years after the end of British reign. So all in all, that, too, was an added golden opportunity to prove that Britannia still ruled the waves (Shailjia 63). For the British, the positive outcome of the brief war played a major role in reasserting the notion of a proud, imperial British identity. The war was also timely in that it meant that pressing domestic issues were forgotten or put on a back burner, albeit temporarily, as Britain was united against a common enemy. After Britain’s victory, in a speech in Cheltenham, Thatcher said,

The people of the Falkland Islands, like people of the United Kingdom, are an island race... They are few in number, but they have the right to live in peace, to choose their own way of life and to determine their own allegiance. Their way of life is British: their allegiance is to the crown. It is the wish of the British people and the duty of Her Majesty’s government to do everything that we can to uphold that right...We have ceased to be a nation in retreat. We have instead a new found confidence – born in the economic battles at home and tested and found true eight thousand miles away...And so, today, we can rejoice at our success in the Falklands and

take pride in the achievements of the men and women of our task force. But we do so not at some flickering of a flame which must soon be dead: no, we rejoice that Britain has rekindled that spirit which has fired her for generations past, and which today has begun to burn as brightly as before (Blake and John 64, 69).

The war for the Falklands revealed, in its entirety, Thatcher's vision for the rekindling of the glorious past into the present, by any means possible, military might included. This vision included creating a new national identity that, once again, excluded certain minority groups. At the same time, with the spirit of the times, movies such as James Ivory's *Heat and Dust* (1982) and David Lean's *A Passage to India* (1984) – which re-visited the British Raj – were released and received with great success, commodifying Britain's newfound interest in its glorious past.

As I will argue in the following chapter, it is within this milieu that Hanif Kureishi's *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985), showed a way, not to eradicate differences within the melting pot of British identity (a desire made clearly visible by the Thatcherite administration), but to explore them so as to advocate a more hopeful future for Britain. Kureishi managed to bring together a number of issues, namely the skinhead movement and racial violence as well as issues of belonging for the members of the South Asian diasporic community, queering them through the depiction of the homosexual relationship between Johnny and Omar, the protagonists of *My Beautiful Laundrette*. The newfound Britishness of the time is, I argue, what Kureishi subverted, in the sense that he comically parodied colonial paradigms touching upon issues such as sexuality, national identity and violence, which pertained to the British Empire. Kureishi did so by situating the action in the colonial metropolis that is London, and by giving marginal characters protagonistic roles, which functioned as a catalytic agent for the easing of frictions between constituent parts of culture and society, which the neo-conservatism policies had heightened. In doing so, he comically parodied the imperial conventions brought back by the Raj trend. The present thesis will focus on the examination of such issues, exploring the way in which desire and sexuality are manifested alternatively as Kureishi's work developed from 1985 to the present. What follows is a comprehensive (but not exhaustive) list of the theoretical works on which my arguments are based and an explanation of the notions, ideas, terms and their uses, within the specific context of the present thesis.

Theorising Desire and Sexuality

Desire's most important association has always been sexuality, which is an essential part of the creation of any culture regardless of the era or the circumstances in which it evolves. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick believes that it is impossible to address sexuality as a phenomenon that can be treated separately from culture as a whole. Instead, she argues, "the very system of thought engendered by the term sexuality pervades countless epistemological acts, particularly in the critical methods we use to derive knowledge about our own and other people's public image and personal lives" (*Epistemology of the Closet* 3). However, sexuality is very often mistakenly identified with sexual practice alone and, as such, it is not only biased as a term but also viewed in such a way that it misses all possibilities of dialectical process altogether as its full potentials cannot be fully explored. Undoubtedly, sexual intercourse is an important part of the realm of sexuality and an issue that has preoccupied people and cultures since the beginning of time; however, sexuality constitutes a much more complicated process and within the context it dictates, one can identify a number of practices that have affected the behaviour of human beings as well as the course of human knowledge. It has been argued that sexuality refers to culturally inscribed values, meanings and rituals that people live and experience both alone and with other people, and that there are many cultural norms for sexualities and their acculturation, historically, geographically and contemporaneously (Holmberg 23), so it can be argued that it has helped in paving the way for social change. Indeed, one important achievement of these struggles has been to point out that which goes unmarked. In other words, it is not only the so-called "dissident" sexualities that should be analysed and interrogated, but heterosexuality itself. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's work is highly relevant here, as it is not just what people do in sex, it is also how sexuality affects behaviour, even when sexuality does not seem to be on the surface or the object of direct reference. Since heterosexuality, for instance, retains its "citational privilege", as it is cited – and consequently, affirmed – indirectly, by every form of behaviour and by every individual act, however small or insignificant a behaviour or act might be (*Epistemology of the Closet* 6), it is important, then, to look into the way sexuality functions in Kureishi's work, keeping in mind the idea of desire as a producer of reality, posed by Deleuze and Guattari. As was previously mentioned, I read sexuality as following from desire in that it pertains to a sense of multiplicity for which desire is responsible for creating. Sexuality is not, then, an act

between a man and a woman “becoming one” but a trans-gender act that adheres to a multiplicity of codes, sexual, political and social alike.

Instead of looking at Kureishi’s work based largely on a single theoretical piece of work, which in my view would be too limiting, I attempt to construct a discussion based on a series of theoretical works, each corresponding to the specific topic discussed in each chapter. Kureishi’s memoir and interviews to a range of media, such as web pages, newspapers, magazines, television and radio are also examined, as they offer a first-hand account of the author’s point of view pertaining to each piece of work under examination. Moreover, Kureishi’s interviews with the media provide interesting insight as to how and why his characters were created, which, I believe, offers an exciting look into the relationship between fantasy and reality as some of the events narrated in his fictional work actually happened in his lived experiences. Thus, in exploring desire in Kureishi’s earlier work and especially the queer relationships between his characters in cinematic works such as *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985) and *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid* (1987), I attempt a coming together of the theories of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, John Hill and Gayatri Gopinath, among others, who focus on issues such as gender, race and the body in defining Britishness, linking them with the topic of sexuality. It is imperative to employ the ideas of film historian John Hill, as I try to explore the way in which Kureishi comically parodied colonial paradigms being translated into the present, especially in his early, cinematic work, linking these ideas with the different manifestations of sexuality and desire. Hill has argued that there are three different expressions of desire in colonial relationships in British literature and film, the West as male and East as female, the East as male and West as female; and both the West and the East as male. The way the colonial relationship is manifested, depends on the political situation it tries to represent (Hill 106). The most common configuration is of course the first one, with the West as male and East as female, which has been more often than not what was used in narratives of conquest; the second, with the East as male and West as female, was seen largely after the process of decolonisation had started, expressing “a shift from concern over how [a colony] will be ruled to how it will be experienced” (Hill 106). Lastly, Hill argues that the male-male configuration underlines an “ironic attitude towards imperial relations” (*British Cinema in the 1980s* 106) and it is exactly such an ironic attitude that we see in, say, *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985) and *Sammie and Rosie Get Laid* (1987) as I will explain in the relevant third chapter.

Undoubtedly, Kureishi is highly political throughout his entire oeuvre. Speaking about how his concerns came about, Kureishi explained, “I came to some sort of self and political consciousness in the 1970s [...] If you wanted to work in the theatre, as I did, it was impossible to escape the argument that culture was inevitably political” (qtd in Smith, *Hanif Kureishi*). In Kureishi’s earlier work, such as *My Beautiful Laundrette*, colonial romances are parodies, all the while transferring the background from the colonies to the colonial metropolis, which is transformed into a queer space. I examine this idea in comparison to Gayatri Gopinath’s argument that it is through the queer body that histories of the past are brought into the present, with their legacies being imaginatively contested and transformed, as the queer, racialised body becomes a historical archive for both individuals and communities (*Impossible Desires* 4). I am interested in this coexistence of desire and violence and its trajectories in Kureishi’s early work, as I follow Marco Abel here, who has argued that if we move away from traditional understandings of violence and we examine its affective forces, we can develop more ethical tools that will allow us to intervene towards a better world (*Violent Affect* 2). Indeed, insofar as affect is circumscribed by politics, one can imagine its possibilities as well as how it operates within an established dynamic of exchange. Affect is not a thought; rather, it can be better associated with sensibility and sentiment, given its lack of rationality. Based on this reading, I examine the various characters’ collusions and their actions within the context of a new relationship between affect and the political, consequently identifying the complexity of these interactions pertaining to political sub-groupings, which are read as symbolic orders, which, in this case, is the established political order in Thatcher’s Britain. Such a reading gestures towards what Deleuze and Guattari have labelled as the revolutionary potential of desire (*Anti-Oedipus* 341). Indeed, desire does not need sublimation, as Freud has argued, as this presupposes an inherent dualism between social production and desiring-machines. Such dualism limits the revolutionary potential of desire which is partly due, I argue, not despite, but because of its lack of rationality and its anarchic state, from which possibilities emerge, as I will argue in this thesis. Arguing for the close interaction between desire and the social sphere, Deleuze and Guattari point out that the desiring production is “situated at the limits of social production; the decoded flows, at the limits of the codes and the territorialities” (*Anti-Oedipus* 175-6) and, as such, the flow of desire can greatly affect the social realm. Such an idea was picked up by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri who have underlined this revolutionary potential. They argue that the political, seen through the lens of desire, is nothing if not “concrete

production [and] human collectivity in action...Empire pretends to be master of the biopolitical world because it can destroy it. What a horrible illusion! In reality we are masters of the world because our desire and labor regenerate it continuously" (*Empire* 397, 368).

Moreover, the present work's theoretical background on sexuality will be based on a series of works that effectively call attention to the power of the affective, not as a by-product of political conflicts, but as an independent element that engages with the ways in which issues such as desire and sexuality challenge and destabilise established hegemonic orders, gesturing towards the power of desire to produce and consequently change reality. Such works include Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's ideas towards a sexual liberalism which allows the individual subject to escape the ideological limits of hegemonic insights (*Touching Feeling*) and Leela Gandhi's views on the potential for new directions for desire and sexuality, which contravene a limiting political perspective of the affective. In *Tendencies* (1993), Sedgwick has argued that one of the things "queer" can refer to is the open web of possibilities, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when "the constituent elements of anyone's gender, of anyone's sexuality aren't made (or can't be made) to signify monolithically" (8). I believe that this idea can be applied in the case of Kureishi, as it is exactly this process of "queering" in Kureishi's work that opens up a host of possibilities for members of the British South Asian diaspora and for society in general. What is more, Leela Gandhi's notion of subcultural solidarity explains the complex relationship between marginal groups, while arguing that such a coming together enhances the potential for new directions for desire. In her *Affective Communities* she puts forward the anti-imperial and anti-colonial politics of certain subcultural, marginalised groups such as homosexuals and argues that this marginalisation has helped them forge close connections with colonised cultures, strengthening the bond between culture and politics at the same time. She argues that those associated with marginalised lifestyles are united against imperialism, forging homosocial bonds that were not necessarily sexual, but transnational and powerful (*Affective Communities* 23). I argue that given that "belonging" has always been problematic for immigrants, they might be inclined to be sympathetic to ethnic minorities and marginalised groups and this is more than evident in Kureishi's works such as *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1995) where all of these marginalised elements come together into an uneasy but hopeful union and are transformed in the process.

I argue that one of the most important aspects in Kureishi's work from his early period is that such views on the potential of desire and sexuality are evident through the

experimentations of his characters, especially in a time where the imperial past was being re-envisioned through the Raj Revival films and the general political context. I am not only interested in producing new criticism but also in exploring the subject of the South Asian diaspora in the imperial metropolis of London, based on the way Kureishi uses his artistic potential to go against artistic currents such as the Raj Revival and how he reinvents himself through that process. In doing so, I follow a relatively recent academic trend of rethinking the relationship between the affective and the political, especially pertaining to the way postcolonial nationhood has been "imagined". As I examine the sense of "belonging" by the South Asian diasporic community in Britain, I argue that the essentialist choices based on race, sexuality and class can be avoided, as Kureishi puts forward a quest for a supra-racial sense of Britishness and in that sense, queer theory can be reworked through postcolonial re-conceptualisations of the self. Homi Bhabha in *The Location of Culture* argues for the importance of sexual difference, saying that:

the recognition of sexual difference – as the precondition for the circulation of the chain of absence and presence in the realm of the Symbolic – is disavowed by the fixation on an object that masks that difference and restores an original presence [...] the fetish or stereotype gives access to an "identity" which is predicated as much on mastery and pleasure as it is on anxiety and defence...this conflict of pleasure/unpleasure, mastery/defence, knowledge/disavowal, absence/presence, has a fundamental significance for colonial discourse...the subject must be gendered to be engendered (*The Location of Culture* 102).

It is this recognition of sexual difference as necessary for the movement of absence and presence within the Symbolic that allows for the disavowal of the binarisms that limit subjectivity. The colonial stereotype of the immigrant as an unsuccessful, unassimilated burden to society, which Kureishi challenged through the portrayal of characters such as Omar in *My Beautiful Laundrette*, was exposed for what it was: structurally ambivalent. This ambivalence is considered to be one of the most powerful and one of the most significant discursive and physical strategies of racial and sexual discriminatory power. The notion of ambivalence is central to colonial discrimination as it provides the colonial stereotype with its power, ensuring its repeatability in changing historical and discursive conjunctures and informing its strategies of individuation and marginalisation while it "produces that effect of probabilistic truth and predictability which, for the stereotype, must always be in excess of what can be empirically proved or logically constructed" (*The*

Location of Culture 95). It is this ambivalence, however, that Kureishi transforms through his comical parodies of colonial histories, which strips the colonial imaginary of its supposed dominance over the diasporic subject, as it is uncategorisable, combining as it does phobia and fetish; it is, therefore, dangerous. Omar is desired by Johnny because the latter fears the former as a boss as much as he sexually desires him; this is what maintains the complexity and flexibility of the subject. Bhabha posits that fetishism is engaged in a kind of interplay between the archaic affirmation of similarity and the anxiety caused by a lacking and difference, especially sexually. Bhabha argues that “the scene of fetishism is...the scene of reactivation and repetition of the primal fantasy - *the subject's desire for a pure origin* that is always threatened by its division...the stereotype is the primary point of subjectification” (*The Location of Culture* 75). It is imperative, therefore, in our examination of identities, to consider the absent part of it, attending to the process of subjectification, as this “lack” threatens the fullness of the stereotype and its image as identity. Kureishi does just that, bringing the marginalised parts of British identity into the forefront. What is more, it is this desire for a pure origin that Kureishi ridicules precisely through his manifestation of desire in the ways explored in this thesis, as he channels the drives associated with desire towards not the longing for a stable sense of identity, but to the contrary, towards an anarchic, more often than not contradictory and always fluid, sense of subjectivity, reflected in, say, the conflicting and ambivalent representation of race throughout Kureishi's work.

Such ambivalences in the representation of race continue in Kureishi's later work, where serious issues such as racial violence are viewed through a sexual lens, as he seems to follow a psychoanalytic path, which argues that violent behaviour towards immigrants entails, at the same time, a covert affection for and bonding with them; the same could be said regarding homophobia. Stallybrass and White have argued that “disgust...always bears the imprint of desire” (*Politics and Poetics of Transgression* 10). This shows that the relationship between the two worlds is much more complex and fruitful than it first seems and that this world of possibilities can be accessed through the process of queering established norms. Other theorists have also contributed to this discussion. Sara Suleri has identified a type of collusion between colonial India and postcolonial Britain as her work is concerned with the sense of identity and self-recognition in the Other (*The Rhetoric of English India* 45). This is evident in *My Beautiful Laundrette* where Kureishi uses the non-heteronormative relationship between the protagonists to create an allegory of a heterogeneous, postcolonial Britain that allows the coming together, albeit in an uneasy

manner, of some very diverse elements that make up the nation: blacks and whites, racists and immigrants, middle and working classes, sexuality and violence, past and present, ultimately imbricating affect with politics.

The body of literature written in English with diasporic Indian thematics is the genre within which Kureishi thrived. It is also the literary typology which he helped evolve, with, say, the introduction of queer characteristics. When I use the term diasporic Indian-English, then, I refer to a body of authors of Indian origin writing in English, who are preoccupied with the thematics of diaspora, issues of homelessness, migration, colonialism and postcolonialism and their aftermath, as well as the tensions and the connections between India and Britain. I argue that Kureishi infuses seemingly pure and homogeneous spaces with disruptive elements and, in the process, revolutionises the literary scene by opening up and offering new possibilities, both on the level of actual experience and on an imaginative level. A decisive moment in the course of the evolution of the genre was the publication of Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* in 1981, whose publication triggered a retroactive genealogy of what was hitherto known as subcontinental/Anglo-Indian literature, which then evolved into a genre that started defying existing limitations. One could argue that Kureishi was part of this process, and assisted in its evolution into a diasporic Indian English narrative, based on the different manifestations of desire and sexuality. Indeed, Kureishi's work promotes the reconstruction of a new kind of narrative within the dominant genre of the time, namely the British Novel, which can be called "diasporic Indian-English narrative" where (colonial) India and (postcolonial) England can collude. This new trend of the British Novel is a literary typology of diasporic subjects writing in English about pertinent issues such as exile, the past and the present, homelands and traditions, where a relationship of love and hate is apparent between the two worlds. This is made evident in my examination of *Intimacy* (1999), where love is associated with the (imaginary and geographical) distance between India and Britain on all levels while, at the same time, one can also discern a sense of association. It is true that Kureishi addresses questions of minority in a majority language critiquing patriarchal fundamentalism and its regulation of gender and sexual desire, an important issue for minority cultures: "Minority artists have questioned the heterosexism that regulates traditional, joint-family based communities, making gay and lesbian relationships restrictive and repressive. Such is the tropes of movement of cultural translation, as Rushdie renames London as 'Ellowen Deeowen'" (*The Satanic Verses* 328). Indeed, the issue of London as a queer space and a sexualised metropolis will be one of the

points of interest for my thesis, as I explore the city's transformation through the shift of hitherto marginalised sexual qualities of marginalised communities to a place at the forefront of society. These two sides of London in Kureishi's work are made evident as one examines characters such as Karim in *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990) with the posh and "proper" British Eleanor, but also through references to what is happening in the city, what with race riots, anti-colonial dissent and poverty, all combined with sexual agency. London as a queer space then, uniquely frames the pleasures derived from its inhabitants' fulfilled desires or their sexual experimentations, with the tension created by families, race, and the hostile and violent climate of racist Britain. Such a framing leads to the creation of alternative identities that come into contrast with the ones created based on the traditional past.

As far as the examination of his later work is concerned, I primarily follow the ideas put forward by John McLeod and Sara Upstone regarding the interconnectedness between the aesthetic and the political, based on the manifestations of desire and sexuality which pertain to a different way of thinking on behalf of the author, a culmination of a changing society, the establishment of new symbolic orders in the wake of the Thatcherite administration such as the rise of religious fundamentalism, the author's focus on middle-aged characters, as well as his personal life circumstances. I argue that in light of terrorist attacks such as the ones in 2005, Kureishi's post-1990 preoccupation with issues such as Islamophobia and Islamic fundamentalism need to be re-visited, pointing as it does to a sense of postcolonial theory which embodies a post-ethnic reality that no longer solely pertains to race in addressing questions of belonging, which underlines the complexity and ambivalent representation of race in Kureishi's work. In her article "A Question of Black or White", Sara Upstone says that *The Black Album* is "a central text for a more socially aware, materially concerned, and politically engaged postcolonialism" (6). Such a revisiting of the aesthetic and social characteristics of literature, based on a retrospective examination of Kureishi's later work, then, can provide useful insights for the new nature of the relationship between the two, effectively increasing the importance of desire, which not only rises as a viable alternative to a hitherto largely racially defined political context, but eventually manages to point to the potential of a supra-racial stand towards the concept of Britishness. Thus, Kureishi's later work, most notably *My Son the Fanatic* (1994) and *The Black Album* (1995) is a part of what McLeod has termed as contemporary black writing ("Extra Dimensions, New Routines"), as the articulation of the nation moves beyond a direct focus on racial concerns. Indeed, in looking at race from the point of view

of religion, we are called to understand the contemporary nation as a “post-racial space of linkages, synchronicities and equivalences that far surpasses the solipsism of cultural diversity, racial difference or narrow national exclusivity” (Upstone 48).

Queering Kureishi

I do not read the concept of queerness as necessarily or inherently sexual although my examination of it in this work often touches upon the sexual connotations found in the studied works (and this because the thesis is an account of the different manifestations of desire and sexuality encountered therein). I also attempt, nevertheless, to employ queer theory as a multifaceted and a-historical approach combined with transcultural aspirations. Critics have identified its most significant underpinnings in the work of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Judith Butler, Leo Bersani and Michel Foucault. Queer theory can be said to refer to the body of writing that has sexuality as its topic and more specifically the questions raised regarding mainstream realisations of sex and sexuality and, consequently, gender and its performance. Despite the fact that it has been more often than not dismissed by certain cultures due to its unreadability and non-categorisational qualities, queerness as a field of critical theory emerged in the late 1980s and early 1990s as an offshoot of gay and lesbian studies and poststructural feminism. It started out with an agenda that had broad frames, as a form of hermeneutics that included the general inability of individuals and communities alike to be defined against universal claims of white, heterosexual, androcentric sexuality. In that sense, queer theory moved beyond the essentialist examination of sexuality as part of a Cartesian binary based on natural/unnatural as it tried to engulf any kind of so-called “perverted, non-normative or deviant” sexual behaviour that defied socially imposed limits.

It would be useful here to note the ways in which queer theory draws from poststructuralist theory, especially in terms of blurring boundaries and challenging binarisms, not only sexual but social and political as well. In its movement away and critique at the same time of structuralism, poststructuralist theory puts forward a substantially different set of meanings regarding issues such as the body, language and the self. The movement of structuralism asserted the validity of the world based on binary oppositions that maintained the fixity of culturally defined categories. Issues such as language, theory, text and the subject were, therefore, understood as results of the

dominance of a constituent part over the other in an essentialist dual relationship. Poststructuralism on the other hand, incorporating the psychoanalytic theories of Jacques Lacan and Julia Kristeva, the historical critiques of Michel Foucault and the cultural and political work of Jean-François Lyotard and Gilles Deleuze, sets out to challenge such fixed concepts (i.e., of the “self”) and, denied its singularity, coherence and linearity, put forward, at the same time, the conflicting tensions between the parts that construct this notion. Roland Barthes was the first to set the foundations of poststructuralist theory with his notions of “the death of the author” and “the birth of the reader”, marking thus the instability and incoherence of the text, celebrating at the same time the power of the reader to assign to the text, at each reading, a new and different meaning. This “destabilising” of the author was the spark for the challenging way of the poststructuralist to dispute anything claiming universal validity, engaging at the same time against totalitarian and teleological theories. Naturally, one of the most prominent of relationships that poststructuralism engaged with was the one between language and materiality, matter and signifier. Michel Foucault, Julia Kristeva and Judith Butler did so, each drawing from their own pool of thought. Foucault looked at it from a historical point of view, while Kristeva, in following and reworking Lacan, examined it from a psychoanalytic perspective while Butler followed a post-modern path, being critical of the other two. Despite putting forward different poststructuralist applications, all three agree on the invalidity of Western-derived binaries, an issue that even in the postcolonial context haunts both literary and physical subjectivity, as one of the two opposites always assumes a role of dominance over the other. Binaries such as male/female, speech/writing, rational/emotional or in the postcolonial context, coloniser/colonised, imperial/indigenous, centre/margin, or self/other (among others) imply dominance of one over the other and, consequently, a rigid and predetermined liaison. Instead, nothing should be fixed between meanings and signs, signifiers and signified; on the contrary, meaning should lie within the individual. For the structuralists, linguistic meaning was often established through this binary opposition, or the contrast of opposites. On the other hand, Emmanuel Levinas has argued that one cannot “seize by inventory all the contexts of language and all possible positions of interlocutors. Every verbal signification lies at the confluence of countless semantic rivers” (*Humanism of the Other* 11-12). It is these countless rivers of meaning that desire and sexuality, in their anarchic and ahistorical states, within the context of queer theory, pertain to and what my reading of Hanif Kureishi adheres to, especially in terms of belonging. It is also the purpose of this thesis to underline the fact that these possibilities for the self that arise from

such a reading are not only theoretical, but, just like Deleuze and Guattari's notion of desire, are invested in lived experiences and, in the end, create reality. Indeed, what mobilises desire is not an endless attempt to substitute loss but the energies that flow in and out of the multiple connections that are always invested in the social and the political, and which defy categorisation. Such a mobilisation of desire entails a sense of belonging that pertains to an inherent transgression of limits and boundaries that enables an escape from dominant ideas of subjectivity such as history and hierarchical order. Such a reading naturally contradicts the highly theoretical and historical nature of Foucault's arguments on sexual acts and identities.

Michel Foucault's *The History of Sexuality* (1976-1984) understood homosexuality as drawing on feminist notions of the challenging of the issue of gender being part of an essential self, while he also drew on the idea that sexual acts and identities were socially inscribed and dictated to each individual. Foucault's work contributed to feminist theory the ways in which power relates to identity as he believed that it is the distribution of power that is primary. Since this work is based on reading desire following Deleuze and Guattari, it should be stated here that for them, in contrast to Foucault, what is primary is the way in which desire is patterned and manifested, as their goal is to examine the ways in which this manifestation of desire creates the self and the human subject. In fact, the main difference between the work of Deleuze and Guattari and Michel Foucault, in my view, seems to be the highly theoretical nature of the latter's work which may gesture towards a kind of passivity in the face of dominant power-structures since the theory is not applicable or it is not time for that theory to be applicable. On the contrary, my reading of desire based on Deleuze and Guattari points to the ways in which reality production based on desire can identify the weak points of that dominant structure and, in fact, produce a different kind of reality that weakens the system. Hence, desire becomes much more powerful than the "power" to which Foucault referred, which also touched upon the way in which the masses were led to fascism. Deleuze and Guattari have articulated it so:

Desire can never be deceived. Interests can be be deceived, unrecognized or betrayed, but not desire. Whence Reich's cry: no, the masses were not deceived, they desired fascism, and that is what has to be explained. It happens that one desires against one's own interests: capitalism profits from this, but so does socialism, the party and the party leadership (*Anti-Oedipus* 257).

This view can be applied to Britain of the 1980s and the 1990s, as it was desire that led to the rise of neo-fascism and later to religious fundamentalism, a desire that promised a stable sense of identity based on the exclusion of communities (the immigrants in the first case, non-Muslims in the second). At the same time, desire can also be the political force that could provide an alternative to these limiting world views. Despite their different approaches, postmodernists such as Foucault and Derrida, feminists such as Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva, and, of course, Deleuze and Guattari, all had the same goal in mind: the critique and dismantling of all “grand narratives” which function as social constructions, being closely interconnected with the dominant political establishment.

It is my belief that Kureishi’s works fall within such a scope of theory, not only coinciding with feminist theories of the 1980s which were increasingly challenging the universal qualities of white/male identity, but also manifesting desire against the political order of the time. In his work, issues such as race, ethnicity, class, gender and sexuality were read as interacting with each other, resulting in a wide spectrum of identities that challenged binaries and rigid definitions. Kureishi builds on that tradition as he cites queer politics and thematises dissident sexualities in his work which functions as a new way of thinking about the politics of identity. Therefore, a queer reading of Hanif Kureishi’s work can function as a call for social change in terms of the sexual identity of the members of the postcolonial South Asian diasporic community in Britain. Despite the fact that queer theory has been accused of irrelevance within the postcolonial context as far as the issue of “belonging” is concerned (Meghani, “Dissident Citizenship”), it is my belief that its full potential remains largely undeveloped, especially within the frames of queer postcolonial subjectivities. In my estimation, Kureishi’s work moves the audience above and beyond the normative problem of choosing races, genders or homelands. My reading of Hanif Kureishi’s novels, and especially of his earlier work such as *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985) and *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990), demonstrates the ways in which his depiction of queer characters in the South Asian diaspora in 1980s Britain went against the essentialist choice of either (a) being integrated by society in a way that would eventually lead to the homogenisation and assimilation of both the individual and the collective identity, or (b) being confined in social and/or geographical ghettos. Indeed, Hanif Kureishi is first and foremost a writer of the “Zeitgeist” movement (meaning “the spirit of the times”), whose plays, films, novels and stories, have dramatised changes in society over recent decades; Kureishi’s queering processes present the development of an

alternative Britain, as his characters move between different genres as easily as he moves between cultures.

How does he achieve that, though? It is true that Kureishi's characters' sexual qualities and, more so, the non-heteronormative ones, play a very important role. They spearhead his attempt at parodying colonial traditions and narratives. So how is such an expression of sexuality read? Non-heteronormative sexuality is not radical or abnormal by definition; it needs the disapproval of others, as its power of subversiveness within an established heteronormative culture can only come from the forces that resist it. In addition, it has been argued that so-called "developed" civilisations are more vulnerable to the return of what they have excluded and repressed, which was the queer elements of postcolonial Britain, more so the ones within the diaspora. The search for an identity of the South Asian diasporic community has been partly based on that exclusion. Non-heteronormative sexuality, I argue, is at the same time both marginal and central, as it returns to haunt the very society that has obsessively denounced it. I use the term "queer", in its sexual sense at least, to denote non-heteronormative sexuality, but not exhaustively as such, as this is only one of its multiple and dynamic meanings functioning as they do on the level of the text, the individual and society in general. I use the term as a vector that cuts across genders and sexual orientation, insisting on positive implications for people who refuse to succumb to social or sexual norms, values and culture. Such people resist assimilation efforts and conformist definitions of identity and advocate fluid and complex ideas regarding the definition of sexuality and consequently, of their identity. The term "queer" is used, then, not as a theory of homosexuality alone but for its promise for a different definition of sexual belonging. I follow here the queer reading of desire put forward by Deleuze and Guattari, who argue that sexual creativity lies at the heart of its positive productive force. Rejecting repression, disavowal and prohibition, Deleuze and Guattari's sense of queer desire is fluid and connective, enabling sexuality to move beyond the constraints of male/female or active/passive, a process which will be explored in *My Beautiful Laundrette*. This positive implication of queer desire to which I refer gestures towards my examination of the issues of desire and sexuality and the multiplicity of codes they adhere to. If we move beyond the reading of desire as "a lack of", an absence of or a deficiency of the desired, namely that we want something because we do not have it, there can be a different outcome to the investment of desire to the social sphere. Our drives are assembled and directed towards our particular interest, which makes desire always positive. The true object of ethics is these drives, which entail a theory of affectivity as the

basis of any theory of ethics. Sexualities can be then considered as identities and social modes of belonging that can help individuals understand the world. So queer culture is not limited to queer sexuality, but it encompasses all cultural expressions such as arts, lifestyles, writings, politics, etc. Of course, such a treatment of queerness stems from the poststructural definition of sexualities and identities as a process. Jeffrey Weeks has argued that according to the poststructuralist context of queer theory, “no true self exists prior to its immersion in culture; the self is constructed in and through its relations with others and with systems of power” (*Sexuality and Its Discontents* 187). I put forward that Kureishi follows this poststructuralist idea as his characters show that sexuality or gender identities, are culturally specific. Hence, the queer characteristics of, say, Omar in *My Beautiful Laundrette*, set in the 1980s, are different from those of Karim in *The Buddha of Suburbia*, set in the 1970s, as each set of these characteristics reflect the culture within which they exist. Whereas Omar is in a stable relationship with Johnny, Karim engages in sexual activities with men and women alike, in the 1970s’ spirit of “everything goes”. These processes of course, have various effects on issues such as challenging political norms and looking at identity as a process.

Such a treatment of “queerness”, of course, is tangential to the issue of hybridity. Given Kureishi’s knowledge about racial identity, it is my belief that he is fascinated by characters who disrupt “pure” categories and challenge hegemonic binarisms which, to use Derrida’s words, is nothing but “a violent hierarchy”. Hybridity, on the other hand, according to Bhabha, can function as a “problematic of colonial representation...that reverses the effects of the colonial disavowal, so that other “denied” knowledges enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of its authority” (*The Location of Culture* 34), disrupting this kind of violent hierarchy. It is my belief that the examination of the different manifestations of desire in Kureishi’s work points toward such a hybridisation process of the British novel and cinema alike, underlining desire’s status as creator of reality. Sara Suleri has followed Bhabha in arguing that the destabilisation of binaries can bring about possibilities: Once binaries are destabilised, cultures can be understood to interact, transgress and transform each other in a much more complex manner. Specifically, in *The Rhetoric of English India* (1993), she tried to invert the myth of otherness as she challenged the strict separation between works by Western and non-Western writers. I believe that Kureishi also subverts essentialist myths by reversing the roles in his characters and infusing hybridity into supposedly pure and homogeneous spaces and he infuses hybridity with sexuality: Hybridity is disruptive both racially and

sexually as it is used by Kureishi in his queering of relationships, defying essential choices of sexualities. The connection between queerness and the colonial order lies in the fact that people with non-heteronormative sexualities have traditionally been marginalised and despised by conservative elements as they do not exist within the frame of acceptability. In fact, they are unreadable and potentially dangerous. Therefore, the interracial, interclass, interethnic relationship in *My Beautiful Laundrette* illustrates the postcolonial, racialised queer image of Britain, unravelling thus the dangerous implications of class, national and familial categories in Thatcher's Britain. Indeed, Kureishi does not treat queerness as a minority concern but as an apparatus through which the contradictions of history and national identity in postcolonial Britain can be examined.

Lastly, I argue that music, a constant in Kureishi's work, goes a long way towards such an identity formation. I follow Brian Massumi here who argued that "Kureishi's vision of identity is...anti-foundational: the self is always seen as mobile, fissile and plural" (*Parables for the Virtual* 251), arguing that music as a popular art has everything to do with such a definition of identity, as it constitutes a

...collective technology of vitality. Its continued reliance on personalisation and its emphasis on shareability means that it retains a connection to common sense, however stretched. However 'counter-cultural' or 'sub-cultural' it gets, popular music is still playing personally with collective 'imitation' effect' (Massumi 10).

Indeed, in Kureishi's work, pop culture is associated with fluid identity in many of his characters, modelled after famous performers of the time such as Prince and David Bowie. Essentially, the postructuralist view of queer theory followed on what punk music had already done in the 1970s, as far as this complex nature of identity is concerned.

It is very important to note that I do not treat Hanif Kureishi's work – or him – as self-consciously or predominantly queer. However, his emergence as a globally successful writer coincided with queer activism in the USA. Gay and lesbian activists moved from a minoritarian position to a queer one which was much more prominent. This is also what Kureishi did with his work as he brought the experience of the South Asian diaspora in Britain to the forefront by assigning non-normative sexual attributes to main characters, turning them at the same time into anti-heroes. In that sense, he participates in this queer cultural paradigm even before his work could be labelled as queer. Most of the focus on queer theory, as a relatively new term, was to compensate for the marginalisation of communities and/or individuals based on their sexuality. However, not many scholars have

dealt with the aftermath of queer viewpoints on works that have emerged roughly at the same time as the notion of “queer” itself in the 1980s. The present thesis’s aim is to fill a part of that gap, as the work of Hanif Kureishi embodies all of these characteristics and offers fertile ground for research on how social change in the postcolonial consciousness of Britain in the 1980s came about.

Examining the issue of intimacy in the South Asian diasporic culture of Britain and its relation to the notion of home can prove to be useful as it provides an insight into the queering process in Kureishi’s work which also pertains to the search for a new sense of identity for community members. Svetlana Boym has argued that “being at home” is a state of mind that does not depend solely on geographical terms: “the object of longing...is not really a place called home but [a] sense of intimacy with the world...Intimate means innermost...very personal, sexual....I speak about...a diasporic intimacy that is not opposed to uprootedness...but is constituted by it” (“On Diasporic Intimacy” 252). This kind of sexual intimacy to which Boym refers is evident in the relationships that Kureishi portrays, between Johnny and Omar, Karim and Charlie and others who embark on a quest to find themselves while exploring their sexualities in the process. Contrary to the utopian image of intimacy as transparency and ultimate belonging, though, Boym argues that diasporic intimacy is dystopic by definition as it is rooted in the suspicion of a single home (“On Diasporic Intimacy” 252). However, the possibilities offered when Kureishi opens up the space of postcolonial Britain by queering it, causes the diasporic intimacy to “thrive on the hope of the possibilities of human understanding and survival...This hope is not utopian” (“On Diasporic Intimacy” 252). The queer element opens up this space for possibilities as it creates a gap through difference and disagreement. Kureishi gives hope to diasporic subjects and society alike, by parodying twentieth century Anglo-Indian romantic novels with his comical and playful representation of the consummated and explicitly sexual relationship between Johnny and Omar, simultaneously underlining that the colonial romance between India and Britain had changed. At the same time, his creation of this new imagination offers countless possibilities and a new interplay of roles in the 1980s. Kureishi shows that the “romance” between Britain and India, which echoed the imperial binary of the sexual conquest of the effeminate Orient, has been reconfigured, which reminds us of Said’s view that a long tradition of false and romanticised images of Asia in Western culture had served as implicit justifications for colonial and imperial ambitions (*Orientalism* 134). At the same time, though, a new imaginary space that can be more inclusive is formed in its wake. In light of these opening thoughts, the present thesis will

focus on the way in which Kureishi's manifestations of sexuality and desire have altered the postcolonial literary scene of Britain. Moreover, one has to consider the power of the novel as the proxy of the nation, as Benedict Anderson has argued that the pages of the novel communicate "the solidity of a single community, embracing characters, authors and readers" (*Imagined Communities* 27). Thus, the novel becomes one of the most important elements for the sense of a solid community. I argue that Hanif Kureishi offered a possibility reconceptualising the postcolonial space of Britain when he changed the literary map of Britain by bringing the marginalised into mainstream culture. Kureishi's dealing with the middle class is culturally variable as his works portray not only sexual subjects, but also financially successful middle-class diasporic subjects such as Omar's uncle, Nasser, in *My Beautiful Laundrette*. This image fictively imagines the nation as the incarnation of the subject's ambitions.

Before moving on to the second chapter of my work, which examines the relationship between Kureishi's cinematic work and the Raj Revival genre, it is important to consider the existing literature on Kureishi, as well as the ways in which my work draws from, disagrees with, challenges or moves beyond each endeavour in the existing analyses of Kureishi's works. There are four major critical works on Kureishi which were published between 2001 and 2007: Bart Moore-Gilbert's *Hanif Kureishi* (2001), Ruvani Ranasinha's *Hanif Kureishi* (2002), Susie Thomas' edited volume *Hanif Kureishi* (2005) and Bradley Buchanan's *Hanif Kureishi* (2007). Buchanan's work, which is the most recent one, was published in 2007 so, to date, six years have passed since any major critical work has been published on the author. This may be attributed to the relatively small number of new works created by Kureishi over the past decade and available to study. In fact, since 2004, when Kureishi published his memoir, *My Ear at His Heart*, he has produced three works: one book, *Something to Tell You* (2008), and two screenplays, *Venus* (2006) and *Weddings and Beheadings* (2007). It seems that Kureishi's most recent writings have been neglected or undervalued in scholarly work of late. No single-author studies have been published since 2008. My work aims not only to provide a comprehensive examination of desire and sexuality in Kureishi's early work, which has been explored much more than his later work, but also to fill in the gap that exists regarding the exploration of his recent work, especially his memoir, which is the most important piece of work produced by Kureishi in the last 15 years. None of these four aforementioned major critical works deal with *My Ear at His Heart* (although Thomas wrote an article on the memoir) so the relevant section in the present thesis aims to fill that gap as well. Moreover, the present study moves in

different ways. Firstly, it attempts to examine all of Kureishi's published works with the exception of the author's theatrical works (this primarily because after much deliberation, I rendered it unfair to the author to examine such pieces, or even only some pieces, based on the scripts alone, and to the best of my knowledge, there have been no live theatrical performances of Kureishi's work for years). Starting from the most recent work on Kureishi, Bradley Buchanan's *Hanif Kureishi* provides an accessible introduction to Kureishi's most important work and specifically, *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990), *The Black Album* (1995), *Love in a Blue Time* (1997), *Intimacy* (1998), *Midnight All Day* (1999), *Gabriel's Gift* (2001) and *The Body* (2003). Buchanan's examination of Kureishi's work starts from 1990 and stops in 2003, so he does not deal with Kureishi's early, cinematic work such as *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985) and *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid* (1987). Buchanan also places his examination into historical context, providing, as he does so, timelines and key dates in the form of appendices. What is more, he includes an interview given by Kureishi to Buchanan as well as an overview of the critical reception of his works. Apart from examining Kureishi's entire oeuvre (except, as previously explained, his plays/theatrical scripts) and especially his latest work, my study also differs from Buchanan's in that it includes consideration (and relevancy to my thesis) from all available interviews given by the author throughout his career and to date.

Susie Thomas' work *Hanif Kureishi* (2005) is an edited volume (rather than a single-author piece of work). It is an exceptionally useful guide which introduces and sets into context the key issues of Kureishi's work, rather than focusing on desire. Thomas discusses his writing in relation to postcolonial theory, British identity and gender. Just like the other major pieces of work, Thomas' edited volume does not include an examination of Kureishi's latest work, although Thomas did subsequently publish an article on Kureishi's memoir. I agree with Thomas in her discussion on Kureishi's immense influence on other writers of the South Asian diaspora such as Ayub Khan Din and Meera Syal, who also defined new ways of being British. I present and question Thomas' view that Kureishi talks from the centre rather than from the margins since he was born in Britain, by arguing that his work's radical nature attempts to blur such binarisms between the centre and the margins. I also further explore Thomas' response to critical accusations raised against Kureishi, namely that Kureishi is a misogynist, which is not to "rescue" him, but rather to present both sides of that conspicuous debate.. The present thesis focuses, on the one hand, on the powerful female characters in Kureishi's work, namely Tania in *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985) and Jamila in *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990), putting forward the idea

that they are empowered characters in their own right, while at the same time exploring the foundation of these accusations in Kureishi's memoir, *My Ear at His Heart* (2004). In that, I follow Thomas in her view that Kureishi depicts new forms of masculinity in a post-feminist era, but I shift the literary background from his fictional work to his autobiography, underlining the complex workings of these new forms of masculinity based on a reading of his memoir. Indeed, in *My Ear at His Heart*, his relationship with the male and female members of his family is presented, giving us insight into the formation of his characters and consequently the basis of the critical accusations raised against him, especially regarding the manifestation of female sexuality in his work.

Ruvani Ranasinha has been one of Kureishi's harshest critics, arguing that in contrast to his early work, his more recent work represents ethnic minorities simplistically and stereotypically. What is more, as far as his later work is concerned, she accuses Kureishi of monolithically portraying Islam. I put forward the idea that Kureishi's characters cannot be considered as symbols for all South Asian diasporic subjects living in London and that he was not referring to general trends. What is more, I argue that Kureishi's later work did not have the same allure as the aesthetic levels of his early work, but still, his examination of social issues such as fundamentalism gestures towards the shifting importance of religion pertaining to questions of belonging in 1990s Britain. Lastly, by focusing on the empowered characters of Jamila and Tania, I underline the notion that, in fact, Kureishi's female characters are not mere tools for men to satisfy their desires like Ranasinha argues; rather they are sexually liberated, fully-blown characters that are not treated in a misogynistic way. One cannot argue though, and in that I concur with Ranasinha, that female sexuality is not as prominent as male sexuality in Kureishi's work. He is, undeniably, more interested in the examination of male sexuality and he offers a subversive perception of it, exploring masculinity in a subversive manner, challenging heteronormativity and the masculine ego, subverting norms and unsettling "normative" expectations about masculine desire and its sexual embodiment. Exploring these ideas will eventually lead me, in this thesis, to the examination of *My Ear at His Heart*, in which the reasoning behind Kureishi's interest in male sexuality will become clear, as he explains his relationship with his family and especially his parents, in an attempt to come to terms with his own identity through postmemory, as I will subsequently explain. This examination of Kureishi's memoir is based on the concept of postmemory as Marianne Hirsch has defined it, as the transmission of memory from one generation to another ("The Generation of Postmemory", 1). Hirsch has argued that it is the traumatic experiences of the first

generation of immigrants transmitted to the second generation in such a powerful way that the latter perceive them as memories in their own right (“The Generation of Postmemory” 1). I argue that the way in which Kureishi explores his relationship with his father and negotiates their past and identity gestures towards what Hirsch calls a transgenerational transmission of trauma, with gender serving as an idiom of remembrance (“The Generation of Postmemory” 1). This, I argue, unveils the problematic processes embedded in a search for an identity based on a renegotiation of the past and Kureishi’s attempt to come to terms with his inheritance, as it seems that Kureishi cannot “find” a ready-made identity but instead, tries to imagine and construct one through identification with a similarly imagined and constructed notion of an “other” home through postmemory. Of course, as I will argue, the unreliability of these notions reveals the complexities and the problems embedded in the author’s process of redefining his postcolonial self and his nationhood from within.

Undoubtedly, among the four major works on Kureishi, the most comprehensive critical work is Bart Moore-Gilbert’s *Hanif Kureishi* (2001). Moore-Gilbert’s book details the author’s career until 2001 and it does not include 12 years of Kureishi’s career, a time period my work does examine. Moore-Gilbert explores a number of key social issues with which Kureishi is preoccupied such as the legacy of colonialism, multiculturalism and its paradoxes as well as the shifting conceptions of gender, class and sexuality. Moore-Gilbert believes that it is the interdisciplinary nature of Kureishi’s work that has elicited widespread critical acclaim while not failing to attract a fair amount of negative criticism as well, which Moore-Gilbert addresses. The author situates Kureishi within relevant and significant social and historical contexts, but due to the time lapse between the publication of Moore-Gilbert’s critical work and today, the book can now be considered only a partial portrait of Kureishi, chronologically speaking. My work was partially motivated by the need to add to that portrait, by examining the most recent decade of Kureishi’s life and work. Moore-Gilbert’s most interesting contribution is his notion of the “third way out” which pertains to a sense of belonging for the members of the South Asian diaspora which allows them to avoid being entangled in the binarism of either being assimilated into British society or being totally disidentified from it. I argue that this escape from the position between apoliticism and militancy, as Moore-Gilbert terms it, is made possible through the different manifestations of desire and sexuality in Kureishi’s work, which offers an alternative to this otherwise seemingly impossible situation.

Chapter II

Hanif Kureishi and the Raj Revival

The English were created [sexually, psychologically, politically] racially and nationally, by their involvement in India and in empire more generally... [so] (the question was) how far “Englishness” was in fact defined by the relationship with its colonial “Other” (Robert Young, *White Mythologies* 122).

The analysis (in the first chapter of this work) of the socio-political milieu within which Hanif Kureishi emerged and the trajectories of his early work vis-a-vis ethnicity, gender and class clearly shows that the political, economic and social tensions – including, notably, the racial upheaval – of the Thatcherite period provided Kureishi with vibrant subject matter for years. This period also saw the rise of a movement in British cinema which came to be known as Raj Revival. This trend depicted the British Empire in India more often than not in its final days, usually in what might be called a nostalgic fashion. Robert Young has argued that the critical issue in the Empire was one that was never addressed: namely, to what extent the English, as Young says, were created, sexually and politically, by their involvement in India and to what extent was “Englishness” defined by the interaction with its colonial “Other” (*White Mythologies* 122)? I argue that this revisiting of the final days of the Empire had a profound effect on what constituted “national identity” at the time, an issue that the then-political agenda tried to redefine based on past imperial values; this is exactly what Kureishi parodied and challenged with his cinematic work. To Kureishi, films that re-enacted the Empire had common ideological purposes and effects, as he says in an interview commenting on, practically lamenting, the backward-looking nature of British cinema:

A lot of English ‘art’...dwells, gloats on and relives nostalgic scenarios of wealth and superiority. It’s easy therefore for Americans to see Britain as just an old country, as a kind of museum, as a factory for producing versions of lost greatness. After all, many British films do reflect this: *Chariots of Fire*, *A Room with a View*, the Raj epics, and the serials *Brideshead Revisited* and *The Jewel in the Crown* (Moore-Gilbert 72).

For Kureishi, the filmic re-enactment of the past was aimed at “selling” past glory to the Americans. Naturally, Kureishi seems to be oversimplifying the complexity of British cinema at the time, since despite the fact that the productions he mentions are set in a past time where the British Empire existed, not all of them can be universally categorised as offering an escapist function by focusing on past greatness (*Chariots of Fire* is of a completely different thematics than, say, *The Jewel in the Crown*). Within this trend, one can also discern a certain desire to deal with controversial issues in the present by placing them in this “nostalgic” and therefore distant frame¹. However, the fact that Kureishi felt so strongly about them, forces us to read his first cinematic attempt, *My Beautiful Laundrette*, as a response to all movies of the time dealing with “versions of lost greatness”. It has been argued that heritage culture was linked inextricably with conservative ideology. On the interconnection between politics and cinema, Tana Wollen commented: “The Right has had a singular project: to incorporate everyone under the same category, to render multitudes as one and the same, not as a straggled set of others. History is to be about nationhood” (“Over our shoulders” 181). On the other hand, one could argue that the popularity of Raj films can assist us in addressing their preoccupation with nostalgic memory in much more complex ways than reducing them to a tool for the conservative Government ideology or as simply an attempt to shift the attention of citizens away from the grave socio-economic problems of the time and onto a splendid, but long-lost past.

Taking into consideration Kureishi’s take on productions that were sweeping Britain at the time, and given that his first notable contribution to British cultural affairs was the script for the movie *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985), this chapter sets up the context for approaching his cinematic work (and its vision for the future of Britain) as being an intervention in the ongoing ideological struggle of the time, which inevitably affected the notion of “national identity.” In the broader cultural realm, this was the time when artists such as writers and filmmakers took a stance against Thatcherism, resulting in the emergence of punk music, cinematic works pertaining to the diaspora etc. This artistic production contributed to a battle of representation in 1980s British society, which culminated in an ideological clash between art and traditional notions. It is true that “...in every medium, including television and film, a battle of representations ensued, producing

¹ Even though it is not a Raj Revival movie, the strongly homoerotic relationship in *Brideshead Revisited* (1981) comes to mind here. Such filmic interpretations of homoerotic longing and its fulfilment were necessary to the gay movement because they provided a historical dimension to the struggle.

some of the most distinctive cultural work of the decade” (Wollen 71). In discussing Thatcherite Britain in the previous chapter, I presented the context in which cinematic works were seen and received, the political agenda and the changing notions of what it meant to be British in the 1980s. I therefore read the connotations behind the success of Raj films as a backdrop to situating Kureishi and explaining how he emerged within such a cinematic context, given that it was the media of film that first established him as one of the most successful writers of the time, and facilitated the production, circulation and reception of his later work. Indeed, Kureishi’s cinematic work can be considered as an oppositional discourse which questions the history of colonialism, which was being re-written into the national imaginary by Raj Revival films. Like Kureishi, Desai argues, many black artists were critical of the colonial nostalgia exhibited in the heritage films and sought to make films that depicted “postcolonial subjects in the metropole, rather than hot, dusty, and exotic colonies. In general, black scholars and activists challenged the racist practices and policies of the nation-state during Thatcher’s reign as prime minister” (*Beyond Bollywood* 52-53). Kureishi’s cinematic work shifted its focus from the last days of the Empire and the Indian space, bringing its action to contemporary Britain, changing the setting from India to the imperial metropolis, with his characters reflecting Britain’s contemporary racial, sexual and social realities. Despite the fact that certain Raj Revival films commodified the nation’s cultural heritage and promoted a new British identity based on the past, and even though Kureishi may have viewed them as having common ideological purposes and effects, it will be shown that these films do not constitute a unified cultural phenomenon, per se. This chapter intends to examine the differences and similarities between Kureishi’s cinematic work and the Raj Revival films, revealing the complexities of their interaction. The distinct differences between Raj films will be discussed taking into consideration factors such as production, thematics, reception and the conflicting meanings that can be derived from these cultural texts (when studied against the socio-cultural and political background of the time), juxtaposing each of them with Kureishi’s own cinematic work, focusing especially on *My Beautiful Laundrette*.

Raj Revival Productions

Kureishi believes that multiculturalism is not merely a “superficial exchange of festivals and food, but a robust and committed exchange of ideas – a conflict which is

worth enduring, rather than a war” (*The Word and the Bomb* 100) and he put forward this view in his films. Andrew Higson has argued that British national cinema was presented as giving a shared and homogenised culture (*Waving the Flag* 76). On the other hand, Kureishi’s post-national films offer ambivalent images of a contemporary Britain marked by difference and hybridity on many levels. His representation of the characters’ sexuality, his concentration on actors instead of on space and his use of different filmic techniques, position him against the prevalent trend of the era. John Hill has argued that we should not underestimate the possibility for national cinema to re-imagine Britain and also to address the specificities of a national culture in a way that does not presume a homogeneous and “pure” national identity (*British Cinema as National Cinema* 244). Indeed, it can be argued that as a significant part of cultural production and reception, the importance of visual media is not limited to functioning as a mirror of social realities or to the construction of ideological discourses. On the contrary, as a part of visual and popular culture, it has the power to affect audiences, set trends and opinions and consequently, change society.

From the many cinematic adaptations of the British Raj that appeared during this decade, some deserve special examination. The examination of their view of history can reveal implications behind social tensions both in the time of production and release, as well as in the time where the stories were set. The most prominent members of this trend include such films as *Gandhi* (directed by Richard Attenborough, 1982), *Heat and Dust* (directed by James Ivory, 1983), *A Passage to India* (directed by David Lean, 1984), as well as the made-for-television film *Kim* (directed by John Howard Davies, 1984) and the television serial *The Jewel in the Crown* (directed by Christopher Morahan and Jim O’Brien, ITV, 1982). The series *The Jewel in the Crown* was a success as far as audience ratings in Britain, averaging a total of 7 million viewers each week, while critics hailed it as the rebirth of quality drama on British television. Further afield, these productions enjoyed popularity in other parts of the western world, and especially in the U.S.A., with *Gandhi* winning eight Academy Awards and *A Passage to India*, two. Such success, which obviously translated into cash flow, was a clear result of the combination of the so-called quality standards of British filmmaking, with the capitalistic mode of commodifying cultural success. As was the case with British Raj productions, these films and series transcended frontiers as they portrayed a highly appealing and therefore marketable image of the British Raj, appealing to international audiences, especially in the U.S.A. The specific films and television series chosen for this examination offer a re-vision of the presence of the British Empire in India, while including liminal characters that could

potentially subvert the hegemonic social order of the time. These cinematic representations effectively profited from the country's imperial past, while promoting a sense of identity solely based on a seemingly stable, middle-class and white past. Lastly, the films are also typical of the troubled and conflicting implications and tensions of both a past period and – what was then– contemporary society. What is more, as Higson argues, “the theatricality of the Raj, and the epic sweep of the camera over an equally epic landscape and social class is utterly seductive, destroying all sense of critical distance and restoring the pomp of Englishness felt to be lacking in the present” (“Re-presenting the National Past” 124).

Apart from certain common characteristics, such as the setting which is “India” (fictional in its celluloid adaptation), the time of production of the works (the early 1980s), the revival and revision of the imperial past, and the implicit criticism of the British Empire, the films or television series do not, strictly speaking, belong to the same genre. They do, however, share certain generic conventions. It can be said that Raj films evolved from older films about the Empire and mixed with the characteristics of the heritage film genre, which in turn borrowed from the historical film and the costume drama genres. Nevertheless, this genre fusion notwithstanding, each and every film and television series displays a different reshuffling of generic conventions, which leads to different perspectives on the imperial past. Indeed, despite their common characteristics, Raj films were also markedly different from each other, so they should not be examined as a unified cultural phenomenon. Each one of these films explores the colonial experience in a different way and portrays distinct cultural variations, geographically, religiously or even sexually. Despite the fact that they are called Raj productions, there are distinct differences between them, which will be explained by taking into consideration their production, thematics, reception and their conflicting meanings, which mark the existence of an array of –often incompatible– interpretations.

Richard Attenborough's 1982 film, *Gandhi*, is considered the first film in the Raj trend, and it is the only one not to be adapted from a novel; rather, it is based on historical events. It attempts, then, to present “facts” and “true history”, dwelling in subjective re-enactments of the past, with the audiences experiencing what was viewed as a window to the truth of the past. The success of the film, in turn, bestowed the director with great power as his view is perceived as the absolute truth. Indeed, *Gandhi* trailers claimed that it represented “true” history, representing Gandhi, the man, as a global figure whose public actions changed the history of the world. The taglines for the movie included phrases such as “His triumph changed the world” and “The man of the century; the motion picture of a

lifetime”, stressing the importance of the figure and the movie. In narrating the Indian leader’s actions as a larger-than-life epic, the film focuses on Gandhi as the prominent figure in India’s struggle for independence, mostly disregarding any other forces and/or historical events of the time that were working in the same direction. It also assumes an almost complete uniformity of the Indian subcontinent and a far-reaching, almost absolute endorsement and acceptance of Gandhi as the *Bapu*, the father, of all Indians, Sikhs, Muslims and Hindus. What is certain is that *Gandhi* is quite different from the films subsequently produced during the Raj Revival trend especially because it is an account of historical facts and, in its examination, one cannot but take into account the various histories that exist regarding Gandhi, India and the British Empire. The other films, being adaptations of Anglo-Indian novels of the early twentieth century, share more common components that can be examined throughout all of them. Moreover, in contrast to the other films included in the Raj Revival trend, *Gandhi* is the Raj film which assumes the harshest critical stance towards the British Empire. Its memorable depiction of the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre, also known as the Amritsar Massacre, on 13 April 1919, carried out by the remorseless and cruel Brigadier-General Reginald Dyer, was likely one of the first and most graphic scenes of colonial tyranny that many of its British audience of the 1980s generation had ever seen.

Gandhi’s advocacy of non-violence enraged many people in India, one of them being Nathuram Godse, Gandhi’s murderer. Some found Gandhi’s behaviour effeminate and thus offensive. His fasting as a way of stopping violent outbursts in his country, as well as his habit of nursing his animals, his friends and his family were considered signs of effeminacy. Gandhi himself believed that every man needed women’s characteristics and vice versa. In his own words: “A man should remain man and yet should become woman; similarly a woman should remain woman and yet become man” (Pandikattu 100). This challenging of boundaries between masculinity and femininity though, could also be described as enabling a dialectical relationship between genders. Attenborough seems to be concentrating almost completely on the political and historical facts about Gandhi, largely disregarding issues that touch upon desire or sexuality and the way in which these may have affected his life and, one could argue, consequently, India. It seems that Attenborough avoided extensive examination of this topic so as not to damage the reputation of the man. There is only one scene in the movie where reference is made to Gandhi’s sexual life, or rather, the lack of it. In this scene, a Western photographer (based on Margaret Bourke-White, the *Times* photographer who was actually following Gandhi) is

talking to the actress playing Kasturba, Gandhi's wife, and it is clearly stated that the *Bapu* could not perform his marital duties, with a story then narrated to justify it. Gandhi had been nursing his old father for many days, without once leaving his side. After some time, his wife convinces him to come home to rest and they sleep together. Gandhi is then awakened by a bad dream. He immediately goes to his father's side and sees that he has passed away. He never forgave himself for not being by his father's side, while from that moment on he was unable to perform his duties, becoming a-sexual by choice. This lack of sexuality in *Gandhi* comes in sharp contrast with the manifestations of sexuality in Kureishi's works, especially his early works, as his characters pursue hedonistic pleasure.

Unlike *Gandhi*, the remaining Raj productions discussed here were adaptations of famous Anglo-Indian texts. James Ivory's *Heat and Dust* (1983), based on the novel by Ruth Praver Jhabvala (1975), depicts 'parallel' events that take place in India during the period of the Raj in the 1920s and the 1980s, in a connection that cuts across time and space. *Heat and Dust* is the story of two women. Anne, an Englishwoman in the 1980s, goes to India to do some research on her great aunt, Olivia, who went to India in the 1920s following Douglas, her husband. Bit by bit, Anne discovers the misfit that her great aunt was, a woman who did not fit into the world of the memsahibs (married white, upper-class women in India) where she lived and where expectations were exacting. Olivia had shamefully fallen in love with an Indian prince (the Nawab) and they had conceived a child. Upon discovery, Olivia was "expelled" from the British "society" of India and ended up living alone in the mountains, only occasionally visited by the Nawab. In a repetition of the story, Anne goes through roughly similar events, as she has an affair with an Indian man and they also conceive a child. What is interesting in this past-present interchange is the mode of access to the past. Access to the past is accomplished mainly through letters, making *Heat and Dust* a film that is largely based on narration rather than on the visual splendour crafted in the making of *Gandhi*. The cultural interchange between past and present in *Heat and Dust* and in all Raj productions, functions as a constant point of friction between temporal and spatial elements, which transports the spectator back and forth between the spaces and times of West and East, then and now. This tension between present and past is represented in the two women; however, it seems that the past is favoured by Ivory: the grandeur and the calmness of the Indian landscape in the 1920s are juxtaposed with a chaotic, bustling 1980s India and with a bustling and hectic London as well. Whatever is depicted about India tells of Britain as well and, in fact, it may tell us more about Britain than India, revealing the way in which the "erotic" relationship between

the two has been reconfigured; the nature of this reconfiguration can be found, I argue, in examining Kureishi's work.

Olivia and Anne function as disruptive elements that do not fit in either time's categorisation. The fact that Ivory brings marginal characters into the forefront makes him, in a way, a forerunner to Kureishi who, essentially, did the same. One of the most interesting scenes in the movie comes in the end, where Anne looks out of the window of the secluded house in the mountains where Olivia lived after her divorce, imagining some happy moments between her great aunt and the Nawab. However, the image of Anne looking outwards is superimposed with the image of Olivia living her life and that begs the question: Is it the past that is superimposed onto the present or is it the other way around? I would argue that it is neither. What this imagery shows is the complex relationship between the two which are engaged in a reciprocal type of connection. This is also reflected through the juxtaposition of the two women's experiences, disregarding time. They both have a complex relationship with an Indian man, both conceive a child, both consider terminating the pregnancy and they both end up living in seclusion. Thus, the experiences of Olivia and Anne are testaments to the difficulties of crossing into "otherness", both in the final days of the Empire, and, even still, in the –seemingly freer– 1980s.

Paul Scott's *The Raj Quartet* is a four-volume novel dealing with the final years of the British Raj, written between 1965 and 1975. It was made into a film series by ITV in 1984, under the name *The Jewel in the Crown*, directed by Christopher Morahan and Jim O' Brien. Written in a chronologically linear way, *The Raj Quartet* narrates the end of the rule of the British in India, starting from the years during the Second World War in 1942, which also marked the beginning of Gandhi's non-violent campaign known as "Quit India". The four volumes of the *Quartet* are *The Jewel in the Crown* (1966), *The Day of the Scorpion* (1968), *The Towers of Silence* (1971) and *A Division of the Spoils* (1975). Apart from the similar thematics that *The Jewel in the Crown* shares with the other British Raj productions of the time, it should be noted that it is not a full-blown movie but a television series, which invites a discussion on form and audience reception alike. Nevertheless, it too carries the conflicting meanings and ideological discourses evident in other Raj films. John Hill underlines the relevance of nostalgia as an apparatus that offers security of place and tradition in an ever-changing world, both socio-politically and geographically (*British Cinema in the 1980s* 75). With that in mind, filmic representations such as *The Jewel in the Crown* that built on nostalgia functioned as refractions of social realities and, consequently,

their examination can help the reader to understand the intricate relations between the constituent parts of imperial binaries such as centre and periphery, within the context of class, gender, race, culture, ethnicity and national identities. Even if it is a television series, then, *The Jewel in the Crown* can be included in the trend of Raj productions. It shares the same setting, narrates events pertaining to the final days of the British Empire, and includes both the nostalgic flavour of a lost time of splendour and an implicit sense of criticism for British rule, in the form of a heterosexual inter-ethnic/inter-racial romance.

The action takes place in the fictional Indian city of Mayapore and is set against the backdrop of the final days of the Empire and the rise of the Indian independence movement under Gandhi. The protagonists are Daphne Manners, who has just come to India, her Indian lover, Hari Kumar, who was educated in England and considers himself more English than Indian, and Ronald Merrick, a British police officer. One of the most important scenes in *The Jewel in the Crown* is the rape of Daphne in a place called Bibighar Gardens, which immediately brings to mind a similar scene in E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India* where Adela Quested is supposedly raped in the Marabar Caves. As a response to imperial views of the "native"² man sexually attacking white women, Ronald Merrick is given the case and he immediately imprisons and tortures Hari. Merrick is enraged with Hari not only because Hari has Daphne's affection, but because Merrick secretly loves him while at the same time he envies Hari's British education which also introduces class differences in the sexual mix. What is even more interesting is that, as the series unfolds, it is revealed that Merrick is actually a repressed homosexual attracted to Hari. Eventually, Merrick's repressed desire culminates in violence towards Hari. Daphne, having refused to have an abortion, eventually dies at childbirth, while Hari is rarely mentioned in the novel after his imprisonment. Merrick marries another woman and later dies, without people in his world knowing his true sexual orientation. The treatment of sexuality here is clearly problematic. Apart from his disgrace, the homosexual character is also the villain, and this, I argue, reinforced the homophobic backlash of the moral values of the Thatcher years, instead of offering, at the time, a launch pad for critical discussion or analysis. In this manner, non-normative sexuality was pushed to the margins created by the dominant heteronormative matrix. This goes hand-in-hand with the political environment's assertion that the nation's loss of Victorian values and morale had sparked a crisis in Britain, which was "sick", troubled by social "diseases" such as homosexuality, abortion,

² The word is derogatory but it is used in this paper precisely because it was used during much of the twentieth century, especially by colonisers, and because it depicts the verbiage and attitude of the times.

and divorce. Within such a postcolonial discourse, the figure of the homosexual is aligned with a Western sense of perversion, so as to justify the moral authority of the state.

Sexual violence is present in the most prominent scene in the movie, namely the scene with Daphne's rape in the Bibighar Gardens. There are differences, though, between the rape scene of Adela in Forster's *A Passage to India* and the rape scene of Daphne in *The Jewel in the Crown*. Forster presents Adela's rape implicitly, at the same time criticising the imperial fears of sexual assault by the promiscuous "natives". Daphne is raped by a gang of rough, smelly men. The violation of Daphne alludes to the female body being a site of ethnic antagonisms and conflicts, which is something that also has nationalist trajectories, in the body's symbolic consideration as a site where imperialist discourses collude. The body of the woman serves, then, as a medium of exchange between heterosexual men who are managing their respective imperial projects. It is interesting to read this sexual violence in contrast to the image of Johnny's (male) bruised body in *My Beautiful Laundrette*, which also becomes the site of historical conflicts, as both the regretted histories of the imperial past coexist with racial tensions of the present, as I will analyse further in the third chapter, while Kureishi reverses imperial stereotypes, i.e., the female British subject being raped by the brute "native". In fact, the entire course of relationships between people in *The Jewel in the Crown* and the way they reflect on the encounter of the two worlds, namely East and West, as this is manifested in metaphors of sexual attraction, accounts for the fact that in my view, the series both perpetuates a Western fascination with the Eastern "Other", while introducing characters the audience might identify with, albeit in a superficial attempt to bridge East and West and smooth out tensions that keep them apart. These tensions are created when a wish to overcome cultural obstacles and the perpetuation of imperial discourses of otherness, coexist. What is more, the suppressed homosexuality of Ronald Merrick, the police officer, leads to violent outbursts and sadistic behaviour directed at Hari and women alike, namely people who cannot defend themselves, let alone retaliate. Lastly, another issue pertaining to relationships, albeit a more problematic one, is the one involving an Eastern man and a Western (British) woman, a recurrent theme in *Heat and Dust*, *A Passage to India* and *The Jewel in the Crown*, which portrays a difficult combination of power relationships in terms of gender and ethnicity (Hill, *British Cinema in the 1980s* 112). I argue that problems presented in *The Jewel in the Crown* reflect the conflicts and preoccupations that existed in 1980s British society and, given that such relationships reached a large audience on a

weekly basis, instead of the singular, two-hour duration of a film, the audience reception was much wider, and therefore, so was its social impact.

It is interesting to note the implications behind the manifestations of desire in the interracial relationship between Hari and Daphne in *The Jewel in the Crown*, and the way it differs from the one seen developing between the protagonists in *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985). Despite its obviously positive connotations, vis-à-vis the crossing of social boundaries and the bridging of the two worlds, one cannot but notice the fact that the former relationship ends in tragedy, which will come in opposition to the possibilities of the Johnny-Omar relationship in Kureishi's *My Beautiful Laundrette*. Daphne and Hari's relationship is set in the 1940s, amidst the Second World War and in the last days of the British Empire, so its fate is inextricably linked with both historical events. Interestingly, both couple's encounters are carried out in secluded and hidden places. Svetlana Boym has argued that spaces for intimacy, experienced when one of the partners in a relationship is a diasporic subject, have expanded through centuries, from precarious medieval retreats to end-of-the-twentieth-century transitory locations such as: "...the back seat of a car, a train compartment, an airport bar" (*On Diasporic Intimacy* 253). This is the case with Hari and Daphne as she assumes the role of the diasporic subject in a sense –in terms of displacement at least– having moved to India, and also the one found in *My Beautiful Laundrette* where Johnny and Omar have sex at the back of the laundrette. These illicit couples enjoy the pleasures of intimacy while being in what can be termed as the outskirts of the social realm (i.e., the back room) with their pleasure-framed intimacy protected by barriers and walls. And they transform these spaces with love-making. Their desire, connected as it is with longing and belonging, and their state of being both in and out at the same time, testifies to the fact that there can never be a state of complete belonging for the constituent parts of interracial unions within the context of cultural imperialism. It is, however, possible to derive pleasure in such hidden places which allow prohibited unions, as "...the foreign backdrop, the memory of past losses and the recognition of transience do not obscure the shock of intimacy, but rather heighten the pleasure and intensity of surprise" (Boym 252). However, it seems that Hari and Daphne's relationship is often hindered: the dangerous quality of this exotic 'other' space that is India, is made clear in the rape scene. Full unity can never come about, which is made clear in all the scenes in which Hari and Daphne are together, which are beset with tension. Every time they are to fulfil their union, something or someone prevents it. After first meeting at the party, Hari leaves because he feels out of place. Daphne labels her own situation as culturally mixed

but Hari leaves shouting, “It’s not the same”, implicitly referencing his skin colour. Captain Merrick disrupts their next meeting at a parade. In the end, despite an attempt at catharsis through Merrick’s murder, *The Jewel in the Crown* leaves the audience with a mere reproduction of many of the stereotypes that perpetuated and rationalised the dominance of Britain over the Indian subcontinent: exoticism, otherness, savage “natives” and chaotic spaces that need the presence of a civilised nation.

Another made-for-television film, which came out in the same year as *The Jewel in the Crown*, is John Howard Davies’ *Kim*, based on Rudyard Kipling’s 1901 novel. The story of Kim, a racially mixed boy, is set with the Great Game, namely the political conflict for power between Russia and Britain in Asia, as its background. In 1984, a film made for television (starring Peter O’ Toole as the Lama and Ravi Sheth as Kim) was filmed on location in India. *Kim* is closer to *Gandhi* than, say, *Heat and Dust*, in the sense that it makes use of the Indian landscape and focuses on the troubled identity of a hero, which mark it more as a traditional empire film and a historical epic. There are two major themes worth consideration. Firstly, Kim’s inner conflict of identities, with his Irish ancestry colliding with his street life in India and the presence of women as threats to the male homosocial bonds forged by male enterprises and adventures, on which the Empire was built. Kim, who is called a friend of the entire world, often reflects on his troubled identity: “I am Kim. I am Kim. And what is Kim” (*Kim* 224)? He associates with Buddhists (the Lama), Muslims (Mahbub Ali) and the British, caught as he is between East and West, remaining both a colonised and a colonising subject at the same time, while experiencing psychic crises regarding his identity. This is evident in other characters as well. Hurree tells Kim at some point that he “...cannot occupy two places in space simultaneously. That is axiomatic” (*Kim* 122). Kim, under the weight of these psychic crises, breaks down and cries: “Kim burst into a flood of tears” (*Kim* 165). Given that the movie narrates the final days of the Empire and Kim is an imperial subject “going native”, these tears lament the dissolution of the Empire itself, despite the efforts by Kim, a racially mixed subject, to uphold it.

Secondly, Kim’s apparent loathing of women works as a justification of the end of the Empire, which came about because women weakened the homosocial bond between the men who built it. Women are either conspicuously absent in the masculine fantasy of the colonial enterprise or sources of trouble when they try to cross the boundaries of colonial communities. Women such as Daphne in *The Jewel in the Crown* or Olivia and Anne in *Heat and Dust* are exactly that: subversive trouble-makers. The same goes for

Kim, even though the presence of women is much less apparent. The portrayal of sexuality of the imperial female subject in *Kim* is, in a seemingly misogynistic way, that of unfaithfulness and frivolity that threatens the very foundation of the Empire. This brings to mind the sexually emancipated Tania in *My Beautiful Laundrette*, whose character leaves the audience hoping that her disappearance at the end of the movie does not signify a removal from the way of men per se, but rather a quest for personal and sexual freedom as she asserts her own sexuality by fleeing an arranged marriage. The depiction of sexuality in the main protagonist, Kim, is that of the exclusion of the heterosexual relationship between the native male and the female imperial citizen, a weakness that could endanger the Empire. For instance, during his descent from the hills into Shamlegh, Kim refuses the sexual advances of Lispeth, a *memsahib*, the colonial's worst nightmare, who serves as a marker of the danger the Empire is facing, with Kim (and the audience) wondering how someone could follow the Great Game when so "pestered" by women. Kim thus refuses to fall prey to Lispeth's sexuality and continues to support the Empire. Following Kipling, John Howard Davies simply leaves his hybrid subject lingering between worlds, sexualities and loyalties. Kim is able to absorb imperial knowledge, as he is not a 'native' per se. Thus, the novel's imperial predispositions are reproduced in the masculinist film. Interestingly, Kureishi was also accused of being too male-oriented in his characterisation, a point to which I will return in subsequent chapters. The gap created by the removal of the female element is filled with a male, homosocial bond. The novel and the television series both begin with Kim forcefully pushing away all of his opponents to sit on a big cannon in Lahore (that can be read, quite clearly, as a phallic symbol). Later on, he joins the British Secret Service, abandoning (sexual) desire for power. There is an underlying homoerotic theme here, since Kim abandons his beloved Lahore because of his love for the British Empire, constructed by and maintained as a largely male entity. What is evident is a homoerotic inter-male transfer of power between Kim and the Empire (as the latter was built based on a heterosexual, androcentric tropology) as he says that whoever has the 'fire-breathing dragon', meaning the canon, holds the Punjab. This becomes even more evident during Kim's training, where an underlying homoerotic transfer of power through knowledge between Lurgan and the boy, takes place.

By the end of the story, Kim is absorbed in the Great Game. This marks the film as a repetition of the novel's imperial treaty that ratifies the established order and an unconscious nostalgia for the loss of India. The character of the Babu in the movie underlines the impossibility of the two worlds within which Kim oscillates, to coexist.

Cultural hegemony is ratified in his words, when he says that he is only a Babu, showing off his English, as all Babus speak in English to show off. His self-negation through language sanctions the coloniser's superiority over the "native" subject who is assigned an inferior position compared to the British subject, which in turn ensures that East and West can never meet; and in *Kim*, they do not. This is also the message the audience of the television serial in the 1980s absorb, but it is also what Kureishi will undermine through his sexual parody of the imperial genre. Kureishi made sure that there actually is a possibility for the two worlds to understand each other, in a coming together that does not entail forgetting regretted histories of the past, something that is reflected in the hopeful ending of the relationship between Johnny and Omar in *My Beautiful Laundrette*.

The final Raj film I will be examining, David Lean's *A Passage to India*, was released in 1984, and it was based on what is arguably the most well-known novel by E. M. Forster, one that was written –and takes place– during the British Raj. The film, much like *Gandhi*, received a lot of praise in the Western world, winning two Academy Awards. Set in the 1920s, during the last years of the British Raj, *A Passage to India* begins with the story of Adela Quested travelling to India to join her fiancé Ronny. Adela travels with her future mother-in-law, Mrs Moore. *A Passage to India*, just like *Heat and Dust*, focuses on the problematic, intercultural relationships between Western women and Eastern men in colonial times, which also reflects social preoccupations still existent in the 1980s. The Viceroy of India travels on the same ship and, upon arrival, there is a huge welcoming ceremony at the "Gateway of India". This immediately creates a contrast between the depicted calmness of the British landscape and the chaotic and loud Indian space. This contrast, evident in the spectator's eyes, reinforces the idea that Lean's account of India was that of an exotic space of desire, essentially an 'Other', seen from a Eurocentric point of view, which naturalises the civilising presence of the Westerners. While in India, Adela and Mrs Moore meet Mr Fielding, an Englishman who obviously respects Indian culture, and Dr Aziz, a Muslim Indian, who invites them to visit the Marabar Caves. It should be noted that the account of their visit is one of the most compelling in English literature, as the erotic geography of the space is beautifully associated with the maternal image of India. While visiting the Marabar Caves, Adela gets lost, and when she is found, she accuses Aziz of raping her. Finally, as she retracts her accusations, she is consequently expelled by both communities. Interestingly, unlike the ending in the novel, the film ends with Fielding and Aziz's reconciliation. Taking liberty to change the ending of the film from the original one in the novel, the director offers a positive view toward the future –a

“happy” ending— which, some would argue, easily enabled a popular following and the film’s subsequent commercial success. The last scene of the movie includes the two friends reconciling, with Aziz’s children present and Fielding’s wife pregnant, an allusion to future generations. Thus, Forster’s complex and intimate account of the relationships between British and Indians, with the implicit homoerotic element, was oversimplified in the hands of Lean who provided his audiences with what they might have expected, namely a happy-ending without any sort of implications. This takes away the power of the novel, one of the best engagements in the fiction of “cultural self-examination” (*The Rhetoric of English India* 132). Lean’s ending obviously changes the dynamics of Forster’s narrative: Sara Suleri has argued that the relationship between the two characters point to the fact that “Forster’s narrative is uninterested in stereotypical imperial masculinity...instead [it] attempts to reconfigure colonial sexuality into a homoeroticization of race” (*The Rhetoric of English India* 135). Since the ending has so dramatically changed in the movie, colonial sexuality not only does not get reconfigured but it is upheld, as the homoerotic element is silenced. Since there cannot be a single, unitary and homogenising signifier for a particular signified in postcolonialism, as each situation carries a unique set of –largely historical– characteristics, homoerotic instances in postcolonial culture should be interpreted through the aftermath of their interaction. One such discrepancy is precisely the one found in Forster’s work, where the force of nature and geography clash with the power of the homosocial bond. On the contrary, this is not what we see in Lean’s film, as the ultimate reconciliation between Aziz and Fielding does not pose any threat to imperial identity. The director himself admitted that he selectively extracted from Forster’s novel to present what he felt was the “true” legacy of the British in India: “It’s all very well to criticise the English, but just take a look at New Delhi...look at the postal system, which works. We’ve left them all sorts of bad things, I suppose, but they’ve also got some very good things” (qtd in Kennedy 31-32).

Adela’s clearly repressed sexuality is closely related to the cultural construction imposed by British society in the 1920s, which is also present in the re-enactment of the Victorian ethos in the 1980s. This is evident in her wandering into a Hindu temple with erotic engravings, which shocks her and forces her to run away, with a group of monkeys shouting at her. In Forster’s novel, Adela is an obstacle to the friendship between Aziz and Fielding, as are all women for Kim in *Kim*. The solution that Lean tries to put forward in the movie is to take a step towards male reconciliation. However, this is an attempt that stops at male friendship, marking a repressed sexual subtext pertaining to a non-

heteronormative, interracial and cross-cultural sexual identity, one that will be shared by Johnny and Omar in *My Beautiful Laundrette*. Hanif Kureishi will bring such repressed, sexual subtexts to the forefront with his bold stance pertaining to non-heteronormative sexuality which he does not repress or manipulate, as some directors of the Raj Revival trend have done, but which he parades in broad daylight in the face of British society, making it accept its own diversity, while underlining the fact that such a re-imagining of sexuality can surpass political limitations. Alongside the relationship between Johnny and Omar, women in Kureishi's films are given much greater roles and are not considered obstacles as they are in Raj films. For instance, Tania's assertion of sexual independence in *My Beautiful Laundrette* or the re-actions of Alice in *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid* are strong testimonies of the power of affect to challenge the supposedly "natural" order.

Voices Against the Raj Revival Genre

The complexity of British society in the Thatcherite 1980s, reflected in issues such as sexuality, the integration of immigrants, race, nationalism and financial hardships, all pertaining to Britain's changing position in the world, were reflected in Raj films and especially in their re-vision of the country's imperial past, as memories of the haunted imperial identities seemed to be already on course to becoming multi-ethnic and multicultural. Along this line of thought, the said filmic representations were approached by audiences as alternative realities, whose examination aimed at providing a better understanding of the multifaceted associations between the binaries at work in the interconnected labyrinth of class, gender, race, culture and national identities. Of course, such a trend did not go unnoticed, as has been previously argued. The voices against such empire fictions were spearheaded by Salman Rushdie, who in "Outside the Whale" (1984) argued that such representations were a revisiting of colonialism as well as an attempt to revive it in a different context. Rushdie put forward the idea that Raj productions illustrate a nostalgic vision of the past embedded in a sense of past splendour. This, in turn, stems from portraying India according to orientalist discourse (to use Said's words) based on a Eurocentric notion of the "other". Salman Rushdie saw direct connections between Raj Revival films and the political context in Britain at the time. He found the films to be "...the artistic counterpart to the rise of conservative ideologies in modern Britain" ("Outside the Whale"). Raj Revival films, as a subgenre of British "heritage films", which started with *Chariots of Fire* (1981), and which glorified traditional values, focused on the

nation's past, selling it to Britain and the world, turning it into a commodity based on their popularity, as they were engaged in an attempt to define "proper Britishness" (Yousaf 19). Indeed, if there is one common thing about all Raj films it is that, on the one hand they "ruthlessly objectified" (Mendes 68) the English past for the global market and that, on the other hand, they "racially and ethnically [purified it] to encourage identification with mainstream culture for an increasingly diverse audience in post-imperial Britain" (Mendes 68). Rushdie's concerns about the accuracy of the representations of the past in visual culture through these films were enhanced by the fact that these directors were all white (even though James Ivory did work with his partner, the Indian-born Ismail Merchant): Christopher Morahan and Jim O' Brien who directed *The Jewel in the Crown* (1982) and John Howard Davies, who directed the television film *Kim* (1984). For Rushdie that meant that whites, once again, spoke for non-whites, and that these forays into the imperial past resulted in stereotyped portrayals of South Asians. These portrayals contributed to the perpetuation of a false image of the Indian subcontinent in what Rushdie termed "Raj Revisionism", while infusing nationalist identities with imperial fantasies, as a solution to postcolonial social anxieties:

The continuing decline, the growing poverty and the meanness of spirit of much of Thatcherite Britain encourage many Britons to turn their eyes nostalgically to the lost hour of their precedence. The recrudescence of imperialist ideology and the popularity of Raj fictions put one in mind of the phantom twitchings of an amputated limb. Britain is in danger of entering a condition of cultural psychosis, in which it begins once again to strut and to posture like a great power while, in fact, its power diminishes every year [...]. The rise of Raj revisionism, exemplified by the huge success of these fictions, is the artistic counterpart of the rise of conservative ideologies in modern Britain (Imaginary Homelands 92).

Rushdie talks of a refurbishment of the tarnished image of the Empire, saying that both televised and filmic productions such as *The Far Pavilions*, *The Jewel in the Crown*, *Gandhi* and *A Passage to India* were a part of this endeavour, which "encourage[d] many Britons to turn their eyes nostalgically to the lost hour of their precedence" ("Outside the Whale" 92). It is true that, as Huggan argues, Rushdie's essay unravels the implications of contemporary revisionist narratives that rework imperial themes (*The Postcolonial Exotic* 112).

However, even though Rushdie was correct in identifying the link between the issue of nostalgia in Raj productions and the ideological workings in Thatcher's Britain, it can also be said that a fascination with the past could indicate, at the same time, a morbid fascination with current socio-political decline (Huggan 114). Indeed, John Hill argues that such films "...do not straightforwardly endorse the empire but reveal a liberal concern to show up its idiocies, injustices, and, to a limited extent, even its brutalities" (*British Cinema in the 80s*, 99). Moreover, Rushdie's arguments are directed against all Raj films, indiscriminately, a view that Kureishi also shared in his views on Raj films, without taking into account the specificities of each work, which in the end, could amount to a lot in the end. But, did Rushdie's critique open up questions about the India that he refers to in his work? Can it lay claim to a reality or an existence that is more 'true' or valid than that created by Raj films? I tend to agree with Mendes, who argues, that the India portrayed in the Raj revival is as much an imagined one as "the India Rushdie has created through his writings" (*The Empire on Film* 69). This imagined India is clearly depicted in Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1980), where during the transition of the country from British colonialism to independence children born at midnight were endowed with magical powers. Saleem Sinai, the protagonist, is, therefore, the symbol for an imagined and enchanting India, as much a fiction of imagination, as the one portrayed in Raj films. In any case, one should consider how much India, as a concept, can be designated a homogeneous entity. In that, Rushdie's view that Raj films promoted the imperial past and promoted it as a historic reality can be contested, as I argue that films such as *Gandhi* were indeed critical of the Empire and its past violent wrongdoings. Indeed, the scene depicting the horrors of the Amritsar Massacre is especially condemning for the British. Raj films were fully aware that they could not recreate the past; rather, they are "...as much about the failure of representation as *Midnight's Children* is" (Mendes 69). In a way, then, as Huggan has argued, Rushdie actually indulges in the very phenomenon he tries to disavow (*The Postcolonial Exotic* 25-26). Moreover, Rushdie puts forward a view that argues that the colonial project interfered with the history of the Indian subcontinent.

It was amidst such discussion that Hanif Kureishi emerged. Even though he also directly engaged many "backward-looking" films that promoted "lost greatness" together (Moore-Gilbert 72), his work establishes some distance between himself and Rushdie. Kureishi does not recreate the imaginary India of either Rushdie or the Raj films, but he offers a different version of diasporic India. This is represented in London by its immigrants who are portrayed in all their social and sexual complexities. The powerful

socio-political trajectories of his work –as he was advocating a different kind of British cinema through his fringe work– make us examine his first cinematic works, namely *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985) and *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid* (1987), as interventions regarding the country's future. At the same time, Moore-Gilbert argues that Kureishi's films engage explicitly with the films in the Raj Revival trend, as Kureishi was vexed by their huge commercial success (Moore-Gilbert 73). Indeed, Kureishi was clearly against the expensive productions of the Raj films, making sure he distanced himself from them, filming his work on a budget:

I was tired of seeing lavish films set in exotic locations; it seemed to me that anyone could make such films, providing they had an old book, a hot country, new technology and were capable of aiming the camera at an attractive landscape in the hot country in front of which stood a star in a perfectly clean costume delivering lines from the old book (The Rainbow Sign 43).

Kureishi completed *My Beautiful Laundrette* on a low budget, and he felt happy for it, as he did not feel any commercial pressure, which freed him up to do his movie as he pleased: "It was shot in six weeks, in February and March in 1985, on a low budget and 16mm film. For this I was glad. There were no commercial pressures on us. No one had a lot of money invested in the film who could tell us what to do" (Moore-Gilbert 43). Such an examination leads us to believe that Kureishi's films are engaged in a dialectical process with Raj films. Moore-Gilbert argues that the "links between Kureishi's films and 'Raj Revival' cinema are strengthened by his use of some of its leading Indian actors, particularly in *Laundrette*" (Moore-Gilbert 74). The use of certain actors in *My Beautiful Laundrette* such as Saeed Jaffrey and Roshan Seth, along with Daniel Day-Lewis, all of whom also appeared in *Gandhi*, furthers the links between Kureishi's work and the Raj Revival films, showing not only the comic nature of Kureishi's parodies but also his ironic disposition towards the system. Of course, there are differences between Raj films and Kureishi's cinematic work as I will explain further in the third chapter in my discussion of *My Beautiful Laundrette*. For instance, it can be argued that desire and sexuality are treated altogether differently, as Tania's assertion of sexuality in the ending of *Laundrette* shows she is opposed to the life her community has chosen for her. Likewise, in *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid* (1987), the politically conservative Alice joins the feminist network at Rosie's flat. Moreover, in contrast to the exotic, orientalist India in Raj films, Kureishi's view on sexuality and desire turn London into a queer space. Lastly, desire and sexuality

in Kureishi reflect a “desire to remedy its exclusion of significant areas of human experience” (Moore-Gilbert 87). Thus, the juxtaposition of films belonging to the Raj Revival trend with Kureishi’s cinematic work shows not only the general feeling of the era but also the full extent of Kureishi’s radical vision, differing as it did from “official” visions of the time put forward by the minds behind the Thatcher administration.

As opposed to Raj films, in Kureishi’s cinematic work, the idea of a stable national identity is challenged, putting forward conflicting visions of Britishness. Kureishi focuses instead on the political situation in Britain and invites his audience to face difficult realities of the time (i.e., unemployment, the rise of neo-fascism, etc.) and come up with their own answers, showing that complex issues such as modes of belonging for individuals, families and communities, could be resolved without finding refuge in a romanticised and glorious, but long-lost colonial past; and he does so by combining in his fiction political tensions and sexuality. Moore-Gilbert argues that Kureishi’s films were partly aimed at “puncturing glamorous visions of Britain’s imperial past” (Moore-Gilbert 75), which found their way into the present. Kureishi foregrounds non-normative sexuality, which is hidden or repressed in most of the Raj films, and thus disrupts and re-envision the Britain and India colonial romance. Kureishi transgresses politics through the sexual liberation of his characters, through which he offers an answer to questions of belonging for the South Asian diasporic community in Britain. Let us not forget that up until a few years prior to Kureishi’s emergence, the state was policing queer and “non-normative” sexualities by legislative means. It was not until 1967 that homosexuality was decriminalised in England, with Scotland and Ireland following in 1980 and 1982, respectively. So, Kureishi’s portrayal of such an embodiment in his early cinematic work becomes all the more radical.

It is true that media culture often forms point of reference, or the centre, against which people define their sense of class, race, ideology and sexuality and helps shape the binaries around which people’s views on ethics and aesthetics are formed. Thus, Kureishi tried to subvert a number of literary tropes in colonial discourse that were dominant in British cinema and especially Raj films. Nahem Yousaf has argued that despite their apparent popularity and apparently socio-realist narrative structures, Kureishi’s films are “...complex in the principles of their organisation in the sense that they articulate a dialogic tendency which is responsive to the diverse and complex qualities of our British blackness - our differentiated specificity as a diaspora people” (Mercer 31). Indeed, in contrast to Raj films, Kureishi’s early cinematic work represents the contemporary social and sexual complexities of the South Asian diaspora in Britain. To give but one example, he parodied

the conventions of the colonial romance which were reproduced in Raj films, by subverting them: Omar is the dominant partner in the relationship in *My Beautiful Laundrette* (i.e., the colonised desires the coloniser instead of the other way round, and the action is set not in India but in London), and Omar is the one who ‘civilises’ the “native” by giving Johnny work. Instead of the colonial male sexually conquering the native female, then, in this reversal of roles it is the non-white man who enjoys the native British man.

It can be argued, then, that the pioneering element in Kureishi’s films lies in the fact that within a cinematic environment where juggernauts of British cinema such as *Gandhi* and *A Passage to India* dominated the scene, Kureishi put forward a new-found sense of a fluid identity. Essentially, he successfully did what the filmic representations of the Raj tried to do but did not manage to accomplish: to give central roles to marginal characters, which functioned as a catalytic agent. In that, the existing frictions between different cultural and social groups and communities such as the immigrants or the working class, and the British, could be alleviated, ushering aside the policies of neo-conservatism. This was done in a decade where artists opposed the commodification of artistic freedom as they raised, “...questions about the ideological successes of Thatcherism” (Hill, *British Cinema in the 80s* 12). The implications for the arts –and especially on the film industry– of the Thatcherite economic, ideological and moral agenda provide the artistic milieu in which Kureishi emerged. Cultural production and reception are inevitably linked to social realities and conflicts and can be caught in contradictory positions, as I have argued is the case with the Raj Revival films. Thus, media culture cannot be simplistically labelled as a tool of dominant ideology but, as Kureishi demonstrated through his work, it can be located amidst social clashes and competing ideologies of the time. Kellner states that media culture provides the material out of which many people construct their sense of class, ethnicity and race, nationality, sexuality, and of “us” and “them” (Kellner 1). Media culture helps to “shape the prevalent view of the world and deepest values: it defines what is considered good or bad, positive or negative, moral or evil. Media stories and images provide the symbols, myths and resources which help constitute a common culture for the majority of individuals in many parts of the world today” (Kellner 1). It is exactly through these manifestations of media culture that Kureishi was able to point to a common culture for everyone in Britain.

Conclusion

In my discussion of the filmic productions known as “the Raj Revival”, which were produced and released in the first five years of the 1980s in Britain, I have attempted to set the milieu within which Kureishi emerged in 1985, with *My Beautiful Laundrette*. Kureishi put forward his own version of British-Indian relationships, using a mixed cast of white and South Asian actors, underlining at the same time the significance of visual culture in creating –or recreating– of social phenomena and realities. The Raj productions mostly dwell within a splendid theatricality, portraying India as an exotic space, where interracial and homoerotic sexual relations were difficult, if not impossible. Raj films temporally and spatially re-visited a place of strict hierarchy, a space with discrete identities, which were difficult to transgress. This reflected on the instability of contemporary subjectivities in a Britain filled with immigrants from the former colonies. The most successful Raj films – both financially and in terms of popularity – were set in or around the 1920s, toward the end of the Empire, and may be seen as an attempt to come to terms with the traumatic experience of losing the Empire. The success in this is often overshadowed by the repetition of sexual and racial stereotypes, and the political search for a new powerful global position for Britain hindered this effort. Raj Revival films often depict a specific set of characteristics that define what is supposedly quintessentially British. *A Passage to India*, for instance, is focused on cultivated, upper class, white, male subjects that do not fit in the chaotic space of the Indian landscape. By privileging a specific race, class and gender, or even religion then, such films created a set of limits within which people could be called British. On the other hand, *My Beautiful Laundrette*, produced just one year after *A Passage to India* and released amidst the immense international success of Raj Revival films, brings the action back to England and specifically to its metropolis, London, focused as it is on communities and individuals that mainstream culture considered aberrant and therefore had previously ignored. These included the poor, unemployed, immigrants, homosexuals and drug users, those marginalised in Thatcher’s England. In fact, both Kureishi and Stephen Frears have stated that they filmed *My Beautiful Laundrette* as part of an attempt to voice their views and intervene in the contemporary political situation by challenging official narratives and policies of the time. Kureishi defies the conventions of Raj Revival films by presenting the South Asian experience in mid-1980s Britain showing the subcontinental space exclusively articulated through the fantasies and the narratives of South Asians in Britain, not directly. Since none of the action in *My Beautiful Laundrette*

is set in the Indian subcontinent, Kureishi avoids the nostalgic re-visiting of the imperial past by re-imagining desire, and assigning the status of sexual metropolis to London. The relationship between past and present in Kureishi's work is a highly complex process that requires a thorough examination in order to assess the true extent of its ramifications.

Finally, Kureishi's cinematography helped in assigning protagonistic roles of formerly marginal elements (i.e., non-white, homosexual characters) involved in interracial romantic relationships. His on-screen representation of such a kind of diasporic intimacy, *vis-à-vis* a non-normative, interethnic and interclass romance, functions as a powerful tool against the rigid and fixed boundaries of the dominant order, which was looking at the past for reassurance. This order, actually advancing a sectarian process that kept communities apart, supports Said's notion that a long tradition of false and romanticised images of Asia in Western culture had served as implicit justification for colonial and imperial ambitions (*Orientalism* 134). Kureishi re-imagines the romance between Britain and South Asia through a new, sexual, imaginary space, which can be more inclusive, more accepting. The body of Johnny in the final scene of *My Beautiful Laundrette* is an example of such a space, as it becomes a site of past and present co-habitation, a site where historical conflicts, including pain and violence, as well as affection and intimacy, can be healed, as is exemplified by Omar tending to his lover's wounds. This signals hope for the future and thus Kureishi's first cinematic work was released within the constrictions of a conservative society that refused, or was unable, to look far beyond impressive theatrical re-presentations of a glorious and long-lost past.

As a post-script, I would like to include a discussion of the 2012 film, *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel* (directed by John Madden) which is an adaptation of Deborah Moggach's novel *These Foolish Things* (2005). Almost thirty years after the Raj Revival films' success, in what can be labelled as the latest addition to the genre, this movie signals a cinematic revisiting of the Indian space. This space, which Kureishi avoided dealing with in his early work, and which will return later on in his memoir, *My Ear at His Heart*, published in 2004, returns to the screen, as a group of white pensioners go to India, with their interaction with the country having interesting connotations for each one. It can be argued that the film shares some characteristics with the Raj Revival films and could be considered as the latest addition to this genre; however, it also marks the way in which the genre has changed. Indeed, the film reintroduces the space of India, which is still very much present in the British imaginary, yet it puts forward a new kind of dialectical process between India and Britain, where it is made clear that the romance between them has been

reconfigured, revisiting, as it does, colonial paradigms and repeating many of the same, old myths but in an intentionally humorous way, which points to a re-imagining of issues such as the relationship between past and present, and the issue of nostalgia. The Indian space – and all issues connected to it – that was excluded by Kureishi and the British South Asian diasporic movies that followed, is once again revisited, but not in the same way as in the Raj films. The space of India which Raj films temporally and spatially re-visited denotes a limited space with isolated identities that were consequently difficult to transgress. On the contrary, the identities of the characters in *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel* are not caught in such an impossible position, they are not static or detached, and they have the possibility of transgressing and transforming, which, in turn, marks a transitive space where the British, who return to India, are provided with a possibility of exit.

This revisiting of the space of the subcontinent re-envisioning more enabling possibilities for nostalgia and the British-India romance. This is most interesting in the sexual subplot regarding Graham, a retired High Court Judge, who is looking for his first and only love, having spent his childhood in colonial India. His expression, “I’m gay”, to Jean, who flirts with him, is much more explicit than any other assertion of sexual identity we have seen in any Raj film where the homosocial element is prominent. Hoping to reconnect to a past he realises he should never have left, Graham manages to find his old partner, hugging him passionately without any words. The signification process of the narrative leads to a moment of reconciliation and redemption. Graham’s subsequent death and cremation with Hindu rites marks a spiritual release for the contradictions of the embodied subject, and signals the possibility of incorporating Indian “exotic rites” into the British imaginary. Like Graham’s, every story in the film leads to the conclusion that it is never too late for preconceptions and stereotypes regarding individual and collective imaginaries alike to change, with India, whose space is still very much present in the British imaginary, serving as the enabling agent that allows transgressive and transformative experiences for all the characters. Whereas Raj films often repeated sexual and racial stereotypes, this new space seems to provide the white British who revisit it the possibility to transform. Sonny, the manager of the hotel, both upholds and reverses such stereotypes as he negotiates his racial and national identities in performative ways. In his dealings with the British pensioners, he uses very proper, correct, “imperial” English that nobody uses anymore and in his personal life he is a modern Indian with a girlfriend. In that, he is both a stereotyped product of the Empire and a modern Indian character at the same time.

The movie is, in a sense, a bildungsroman film, a coming-of-age story that is, with the starting point being not adolescence, but retirement, which marks not an end, but a new beginning. The film is aware of the fact that it is replaying some of the old colonial narratives regarding racism and sexuality, but does so in a light-hearted way. In the end, the characters' possibilities of transforming are realised. Graham dies a happy man having reunited with his lover, Muriel goes from being an unrepentant racist to forming a friendship with an "untouchable", Douglas starts a relationship with Evelyn while Norman finally has sex. It seems that the stories of the characters, stemming from financial, romantic, emotional and personal circumstances all intertwine with India as they culminate towards the bittersweet ending. Nostalgia is no longer manifested through a seemingly impossible coexistence of past and present; rather, the tension between these two constituents, depicted comically, brings new possibilities. By the end of the movie, all the characters have come to terms with their past and are set to have a more hopeful future with greater awareness of their inner or secret desires. The cinematic return of the white British to India, in the comic way we see in the movie, is a result of changes in British society, as much as it is a response to the legacy of the reconfiguration of the British-South Asian romance triggered by Kureishi's work. In order to evaluate his impact more fully, I will next examine what is, undoubtedly, Kureishi's most radical and renowned contribution to culture to date, his first major cinematic work, *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985).

Chapter III

My Beautiful Foreigner: Racialised Desire in *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985)

Queer desire does not transcend or remain peripheral to [...] colonialism and racism, but instead it becomes central to their telling and remembering: there is no queer desire without these histories, nor can these histories be told or remembered without simultaneously revealing an erotics of power (Gayatri Gopinath, *Impossible Desires* 1).

There is only desire and the social, and nothing else. (Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* 31)

Raj Revival films were very successful in marketing and selling a particular part of Britain's national literary heritage, at the same time creating and promoting a myopic notion of what it meant to be British through the portrayal of a set of characteristics, such as being upper middle class or white. Having established the cinematic context within which Kureishi emerged, I argue in this chapter that *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985) engaged directly with a narrow socio-political context, highlighting the marginal aspects of British culture, such as racist violence and fascism. *My Beautiful Laundrette* was filmed and shown in British cinemas amidst a transitional and turbulent decade. Social upheaval – due to a soaring unemployment rate, the rise of fascist subcultures (and organisations like the National Front), and the rise in racial violence against immigrants– created insecurity in people and challenged prevailing notions of “Britishness” and what this entailed. This uncertainty was heightened by the political norms of the time, which attempted to define a new kind of British identity as an offshoot of an attempted re-elevation of the country to the status of superpower. The problem was that this effort excluded –often through official narratives or legislation– everything and everyone that did not “fit” into clearly defined categories. This social anxiety was boosted by the Thatcher administration's attempts to create a new British identity based on the past, excluding at the same time racial and sexual minorities rhetorically and legislatively. *My Beautiful Laundrette* was made in response to such attempts, depicting as it does the grim aspects of England in the 1980s. Not only does

it reflect harsh social realities, but the protagonists' interracial, interethnic and queer relationship can be read as an allegory which creates hope for Britain's future, in which conflicting entities can come together. This is not to say, however, that the film actually bridges differences in the real world; rather, it shows a space, the colourful, renovated laundrette, where this fantasy of unity can exist. Having established Kureishi's departure from the filmic representation of the Raj and having positioned him in relation to the socio-political and literary context of the time, I move on to examining the work that shows exactly the way in which he is groundbreaking in British cinema. It is the scope of this chapter to show how *My Beautiful Laundrette* revises traditional romantic conventions grounded in white, heterosexual norms to include the homoerotic experiences interconnected with the diasporic ones. Indeed, Kureishi elevates queer characters to the level of protagonists, effectively linking the political element with sexuality in a way that the latter is not a by-product of the former but an equally valuable constituent part, all the while grounding such questions in the notion of belonging.

For writers such as Hanif Kureishi, pleasure derives from the fulfilment of desire as a fundamental right of the individual: "I imagine the desire for more freedom, more pleasure...to be fundamental to life" ("Some Time with Stephen"). By definition, any political establishment within which the individual is denied pleasure is an oppressive one, as the pursuit of pleasure is carefully monitored and even legislated. Indeed, insofar as the political context of a given culture affects the lives of individuals, it is imperative to examine a new "intercourse" between affect and the political, especially pertaining to the way postcolonial nationhood has been "imagined", which touches upon the coexistence of desire and violence we see at the end of *My Beautiful Laundrette*. Since affect is a sense of feeling, rather than a rational thought, it is uncertain and not governed by rules and limits given that it is experienced differently in each individual. And I use desire in *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985) in the way Sedgwick treats it, as "... analogous to the psychoanalytic use of 'libido' [...] for [its] affective or social force [...] that shapes an important relationship" (Between Men 2). What is more, this idea on the affective force of the libido brings to mind Deleuze and Guattari and their notion of desiring machines. For them, desire is a machine that produces reality and the object of desire is another machine connected to the first one. Since desire produces reality, then, social production and all the relations and forces within it are "purely and simply desiring-production itself under determinate conditions. We maintain that the social field is immediately invested by desire, that is, the historically determined product of desire, and that libido has no need of any mediation or

sublimation, any psychic operation, any transformation, in order to invade and invest the productive forces and the relations of production. There is only desire and the social, and nothing else” (Anti-Oedipus 31). Desiring machines are everywhere: the world is a machine, our body is a machine and they are all connected to each other. Every machine, then, enables the flow of desire to another machine; what we term as libido, then, is nothing but the effort of these machines to produce desire (Anti-Oedipus 46). In turn, this multiplicity produces subjectivity. As Lacan has argued, the mirror stage marks the initiation of the subject into the realm of the symbolic, into language. However, such a construction of the subject as we see in my examination of Hanif Kureishi’s work through desire, gestures towards the issue of affect as being a non-conscious experience of intensity that cannot be fully realised in language (Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual* 30). Driven by the multiplicity of meanings such a reading may carry, therefore, I argue that the usefulness of the theories of desire and affect lies in their ability to open up a space of indeterminacy –and, consequently, of possibilities– which allows us to introduce emotion and desire within the processes of constructing subjects and subjectivities.

Such a moment of constructing and explaining a self within the social realm can be found in *My Beautiful Laundrette* as the characters’ actions and choices lead to a final performance on the “stage” that is the renovated laundrette. Their played out desires result in both violence and healing, appealing to the body as a desiring machine itself, which is the site of vital performances, bringing together as it does the characters’ played-out desires, past and present, sexual intimacy and imperial legacy, desire and violence, becoming a desiring machine that enables the flow and interaction of these elements which, in turn, leads to the construction of a subject that gestures towards a more hopeful future for British society. The links between the processes one sees while reading Johnny’s body are further strengthened by Kureishi’s view, who reads racism as a kind of desire, which he linked with violence:

Racism is a kind of snobbery, a desire to see oneself as superior culturally and economically, and a desire to actively experience and enjoy the superiority by hostility of violence. And when that superiority of class and culture is unsure or not acknowledged by the Other...but is in doubt, as with the British working class and Pakistanis in England, then it has to be demonstrated physically (*My Ear at His Heart* 46).

It would be interesting then to look into the manifestations behind this relationship between desire and violence. Consequently, one should look at affect not only as an intense

pre-feeling that has the power to move subjectivity beyond existing exigencies, as Brian Massumi defines it (*Parables for the Virtual* 30), but also as something inherent to violence. Marco Abel has argued that shifting from representational understandings of violence toward an account of its affective forces is a necessary step in developing more ethical tools to intervene in the world (*Violent Affect*). Insofar as affect is circumscribed by politics, one can imagine its possibilities as well as how it operates within an established dynamic of exchange. It is, then, imperative to engage with questions of sexuality, especially with those pertaining to non-heteronormativity, embedded within the frame of home, as by not doing so one perpetuates the assigning of heterosexuality with the status of the norm, both on a local and a national level. Kureishi's film portrays the state's ideal notion of home that adheres to heteronormative principles interconnected with neoliberalism and juxtaposes them with the assigning of protagonistic roles to queer characters such as Omar, creating thus a new space where questions of both national and community belonging could be addressed. Kureishi's film shows the ways in which the 1980s neoliberal agenda was undermined by queer modes of belonging, that transcend racial, sexual and class boundaries. Indeed, I argue that diasporic subjects, such as Omar, can discover their own terms for belonging in transitional 1980s Britain, through non-heteronormative articulations of diasporic, forbidden and intimate desire that challenges traditional definitions of the space of home, and, consequently, the idea of nation itself.

This chapter argues that Kureishi's work challenges established political norms through sexuality, by bringing a successful, queer, interracial romance involving two members of marginal groups into the spotlight of Western visual culture. At the same time, it addresses the intersection of sexual and racial identity, to the extent that sexual liberation can function as an agent that challenges a specific view of society, that is, the one that right-wing policies had envisaged. This is a theme that we also find in Kureishi's next cinematic work, namely *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid* (1987), which narrates various kinds of sexual relationships working towards a multicultural society. These two works constitute vibrant portraits of the lives of British South Asians. The major success of *My Beautiful Laundrette*, in particular, opened the hitherto obscure world of London's South Asian immigrant cultures to public scrutiny, bringing to the forefront its members' anxieties, loves, sexual expressions and identity issues. Sukhdev Sandhu has argued that Hanif Kureishi is responsible for positioning Asians in England under the spotlight: "Through a series of plays, films and novels –from the end of the 1970s to the present day– he has represented their lives to mainstream audiences with unrivalled wit and candour.

Not only did he show that their lives were worthy of public attention, but he did so in a manner that eschewed worthiness” (*London Calling* 230). Apart from being the first successful work which earned Kureishi worldwide recognition, *My Beautiful Laundrette* offers a vision of British society at the time and, as laid out in the previous chapter, manages to challenge Thatcherite policies, ironically and comically. Engaging in neo-conservatist processes similar to the one found in Reagan’s America, Thatcher tried to assimilate South Asian immigrants, and especially the financially successful, represented in the film by the character of Omar’s uncle, Nasser, which would transform South Asian diasporic subjects into mere pawns of the British capitalist machine once more, much like the imperial processes of exploiting people from the Indian subcontinent that had been the norm for decades. Kureishi resists this transformation process through the sexual liberation of his characters, which re-imagines desire and sexuality in their revolutionary potential, pointing at a possibility for social and political change, illustrating at the same time the ways in which queer modes of belonging cut across boundaries of class, race and sexuality.

Irony, Parody, and the System

Kureishi is fascinated by characters that disrupt “pure” categories and challenge a hegemonic binary relation. In fact, there are moments in his early works that are hedonistic, depicting, as they do, complete sexual freedom in all its forms. His characters move freely between sexualities, national identities and social behaviours and, consequently, his work touches upon the interconnectedness and the complexity of issues such as gender, race, ethnicity and masculinity. Kureishi creates complex and contradictory characters who do not necessarily belong anywhere, at least not “neatly”, sexually or socio-politically. Indeed, even though Omar in *My Beautiful Laundrette* seems to be rejected by both cultures, and even if he does not openly exhibit a preference for belonging to either, he instead belongs to both; he simultaneously takes from both cultures as he tries to define an identity that takes into consideration the ethno-cultural differences between – and surprisingly, intersections of– the two. The story in *My Beautiful Laundrette* features Omar, a second-generation Pakistani immigrant, who hires Johnny, a white Cockney and former National Front member, to help him revive an old laundrette that Omar’s uncle, Nasser, has entrusted him with, after the latter promised Omar’s father to help him out. As they work side by side, and despite the fact that both of their communities oppose it, their

relationship flourishes. The apparent inability to “fit in”, exhibited by members of the South Asian community, is best shown by Omar, the protagonist, who struggles to be accepted by both communities. Kureishi does not provide a comfort zone to the complexities he presents on screen. He represents the acquisition of a new space as an ongoing process for the immigrant community, as it was at the time *My Beautiful Laundrette* was released; Kureishi presents the transformation as an ongoing process. Therefore, no one could have had a definitive answer to the complexity of the issue of belonging, but he makes sure that there is a possibility for the two worlds featured in these films to understand, interact, and form a multi-layered relationship.

A notable quality worthy of focus in *My Beautiful Laundrette* is found in the treatment of the sexual relationship central to the story. The relationship is not dressed in any “identity” discourse; there are no “gays” as such. Moreover, the love affair between Omar and Johnny develops naturally, even though it is kept a secret. I will, therefore, use the terms “same-sex” or “non-heteronormative”, rather than “gay”, as such a process also goes against a Western taxonomic frame, which limits and reduces the importance and limits the trajectories of the relationship we see in *My Beautiful Laundrette*. “Gay”, simply, does not cut it, even given the fact that Kureishi used the term in an interview, probably for people to understand him better. When he wrote the screenplay, Kureishi said he wanted to write about race, class and sexuality: “A love story between a gay Pakistani and a skinhead? In those days, you didn’t see men kissing on screen. Now you can’t get away from it” (Kureishi, *The Late Show*). The fact of the matter is that he did not use it in the movie: Omar and Johnny’s relationship is not a sexual one between two white male bourgeois characters, but an interracial, interethnic, interclass entanglement that cuts across boundaries pertaining to class and race. As Johnny and Omar challenge white, racial and heterosexual norms, they also challenge the foundations on which British national identity (i.e., white, Anglo-Saxon, heterosexual) was trying to reinvent itself, as legacies from the imperial past were passed down onto postcolonial culture (as discussed in the previous chapter in relation to the films of the Raj Revival).

As argued in the previous chapter, *My Beautiful Laundrette* engaged directly with Raj Revival films. Indeed, Kureishi used the same actors for a number of his works, which created a sense of association with the audience, as they recognised the characters they saw on screen. Moore-Gilbert argues that the “links between Kureishi’s films and ‘Raj Revival’ cinema are strengthened by his use of some of its leading Indian actors, particularly in *Laundrette*” (74). Particularly, Saeed Jaffrey, Roshan Seth and Daniel Day-Lewis, all of

whom were in *My Beautiful Laundrette*, appeared in *Gandhi* (1982) as well, which furthers the links between Kureishi's work and the Raj Revival films, showing not only the comic nature of Kureishi's parodies, but also his ironic disposition towards the system. Moreover, Ayub Khan Din, who plays Sammy in *Sammie and Rosie Get Laid* (1987), also played a student in *My Beautiful Laundrette* in a recycling of directors, actors and writers by Kureishi. Ayub Khan Din also wrote one of the films that Kureishi's work enabled within this British South Asian trend of the British Cinema, namely *East is East* (1999). Lastly, Roshan Seth also appeared in *A Passage to India* (1984) and later in Kureishi's *London Kills Me* (1991) and *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1993).

Of course, the engagement of *My Beautiful Laundrette* with Raj Revival films goes beyond the mere recycling of actors or writers, as their behaviour, attitudes and feelings are examined. When Nasser speaks with Salim about Johnny, the former verbally attacks Johnny's masculinity as the coloniser: "I'll have my foot up his arse at all times" (*My Beautiful Laundrette* 45). This ironic, metaphorical sodomy of Johnny by Nasser, reverses imperial binary oppositions, the colonised and the coloniser, through its sexual connotations. There is also another reference to sodomy by Nasser, towards the end of the movie, when he says that Pakistan has been "sodomised by religion" (*My Beautiful Laundrette* 86). There is also difference in the treatment of -both male and female- characters in terms of desire: In David Lean's *A Passage to India* (1984), the relationship between Aziz and Fielding is downgraded to male friendship by the director, without any sort of erotic connotations, marking a deferral of desire in the movie, where ultimate fulfilment is not possible; whereas in the novel, the film transfers sexual anxiety onto the character of Adela, who seems to become an obstacle to the affection between Fielding and Aziz. In *My Beautiful Laundrette*, Tania, Omar's cousin, whom they try to force into marriage with Omar is not (as Adela is in *A Passage to India*) an obstacle, as both men continue to fulfil their sexual desire with each other. What is more, Tania does not appear to have any sexual anxiety, as she reveals her breasts for Omar, and flirts with Johnny. Kureishi, talking about the movie, has mentioned that he regrets that "at the end of *A Passage to India*...certain kinds of free and equal relationships will not be possible while one consciousness dominates another" ("The Power to Provoke"). Through Omar and Johnny's expressed desires, Kureishi seems to be saying "here and now", defamiliarising the romance, parodying the imperial novel whose conventions were reproduced in 1980s films, challenging political limits through the sexual liberation and fulfilment of the relationship between his own characters and explicitly reworking sexual relationships to

probe the collusive relationships of the imperial past, and their translation and re-translation into the postcolonial present of 1980s Britain. Indeed, *My Beautiful Laundrette* is not set in the past, in an exotic, Oriental and almost mythical country. On the contrary, it is with its nose in contemporary Britain, depicting the harsh realities of racism and class divisions. Desai has argued that *My Beautiful Laundrette* “...transformed the playing field. Kureishi’s films irreverently approach the experience of Asians in Britain, challenging dominant conceptions with their plurality of identities and rejection of essentialism” (*Beyond Bollywood* 56). This is exactly why Kureishi succeeded: he brought in marginal London characters and slapped the image of the then-regenerating British nationalism movement in the face, in the middle of the Thatcherite era. Kureishi removes the visual pleasure of a neocolonial aesthetic that utilises the vastness of space seen and reconstructed through nostalgic sepia and brings the core of his work back into the colonial metropolis. This is turned into a sexual site with the participation of immigrants, and constituted a recognisable portrait of the South Asian diaspora in London.

Luke Ferretter argues that by the time Kureishi wrote *My Beautiful Laundrette*, he was convinced that an ironic portrayal of the lives of members of the South Asian Diaspora under the Thatcher administration was the most effective cultural means of criticising the racism fostered by the government, whose ideological fusion of ideas of the nation with those of race, worked to constitute Britain’s immigrant communities as a cultural threat to be countered (“Hanif Kureishi and the Politics of Comedy” 13). As Norman Tebbit, Chairman of the Conservative Party said in 1990: “In recent years, our sense of insularity and nationality has been bruised by large waves of immigrants resistant to absorption, some defiantly claiming a right to superimpose their culture, even their law, upon the host community” (Ferretter 13). What is more, the Thatcher administration’s tolerance towards “irregular” sexualities was practically non-existent as Section 28 of the Local Government Act (1987-88) prohibited people from “publish[ing] material with the intention of promoting homosexuality” or “promote[ing] the teaching in any maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship” (“The Local Government Bill” 6). Kureishi responds ironically to this political culture of blatantly interfering with regulation of sexuality, by portraying the main protagonist of his film as a homosexual immigrant and therefore an outcast by New Right ideology or standards. One irony lies in the fact that this homosexual immigrant happens to be financially successful through hard work, thus fulfilling the qualities that a “good” immigrant should have, just like his uncle, Nasser. The system does not know what to do with such a person and this is

where Kureishi's irony comes out at its best. A similar use of irony is evident in the character of Omar's father who resists the capitalistic order, but, at the same time, retains a very heteronormative stance towards his son. Kureishi himself saw Papa's politics as the "the sort of hopeful socialism he might have learned at the LSE in London in the 1940s. It is a socialism that would have no hope of finding a base in [...] 1980s Britain" (*Collected Screenplays* viii). Moreover, a sense of irony is revealed when Johnny is talking to his former friends:

Genghis: Why are you working for them? For these people?

You were with us once. For England.

Johnny: It's work. I want to work. I'm fed up of hanging about.

Genghis: I'm angry. I don't like to see one of our men grovelling to Pakis.

They came here to work for us. That's why we brought them over. OK? (My Beautiful Laundrette 49)

Such reversals disrupt the established order and make *My Beautiful Laundrette* a political, Bildungsroman film. *My Beautiful Laundrette* is a film about racism and various types of exile, despite (or even because of) the fact that Kureishi critiques the established norm through irony, comedy and satire. *My Beautiful Laundrette* was the first mainstream, commercially successful film to bring such postcolonial antitheses (i.e., financially successful agents that exhibit non-heteronormative sexualities) into broad daylight which made British society, which at the time was tangled up in the Thatcherite politics of "Being Great Again", face reality. Kureishi seems to be fascinated by uncategorisable characters who challenge seemingly pure boundaries. This most likely stems from his own circumstances, as his mother and father were of two cultures and raised their son with an understanding of both. Kureishi not only likes the uncategorisability of characters, he delights in developing the dangerous character, the one who walks the edge. As non-heteronormative sexuality has traditionally been looked down on by conservative establishments such as the one in 1980s Britain (as they were seen to not fit into prescribed sexual and gender boundaries), it is only natural that a writer who goes against the norms would attribute precisely those traits to his characters. Kureishi's irony does not stop at having a homosexual, successful, immigrant businessman as the protagonist. It is the successful business that enables Omar to employ Johnny and "mitigate the racialised power relations between them" (Desai 56). Omar changes the name of the laundrette from "Churchill's", after the great British statesman, to "Powders" which can be an allusion to the drug selling activities of Selim, whose money was used to make the laundrette viable.

The name “Churchill’s” belonged to a time when the neighbourhood was in bad shape, “..situated in an area of run-down, second-hand shops, betting shops, grocers with their windows boarded up” (*My Beautiful Laundrette* 20), whereas the “Powders” sign with its bright colours points to a brighter future. Such irony is an effective cultural form of a direct critique pointed to the entire political culture of the time, directed as it is against a political context clinging to notions of the past.

The Characters: Criticism and Reception

Even though the critically acclaimed *My Beautiful Laundrette* was made on a budget of less than one million (U.S.) dollars, it grossed more than seven million dollars worldwide. This commercial success is in itself –ironically– the essence of British entrepreneurship. In an interview to Lynn Hirschberg, Kureishi said that he expected the success of the film:

Actually, I did have a sense about the movie's potential. On the way to Edinburgh for the first public screening of *Laundrette*, I turned to Daniel Day-Lewis, who played the skinhead, and said, “Our lives are about to change”. And they did: we became popular. And that mended a lot of wounds (Hirschberg).

This mending of wounds that Kureishi is talking about is not only an allusion to the mending of Johnny’s wounds by Omar, which we will discuss below, but also a nod to the fact that the South Asian diaspora in Britain was now in the forefront, it was now popular, which is something that opened up possibilities for the future. These possibilities pertain to a hopeful future transformed by the power of affect, just like the space of the laundrette, which stands at the centre of these possibilities stemming from the “...interrogation of race, class, gender, and sexuality in Thatcher’s England, where Asian British men negotiate a place in society only through acquiring capital” (Desai 56). This mending of wounds also alludes to the fact that the controversial thematics of the film reached a very wide audience, and it was the first Asian British film to do so, with Kureishi becoming the “first highly visible Asian British filmmaker” (Desai 56). Indeed, both *My Beautiful Laundrette* and *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid* which followed, not only foregrounded racial, class, sexuality and gender politics, but became two of the first films “...in the public culture of the Brown Atlantic” (Desai 56). Indeed, critics from both sides of the Atlantic praised

Kureishi. *My Beautiful Laundrette* was nominated for an Oscar for Best Screenplay Written Directly for the Screen, won a BAFTA Award and several other awards (*My Beautiful Laundrette*, IMDB). Such a success entailed access to a greater audience. Desai has argued that the emergence of films such as *My Beautiful Laundrette* marks a moment in which “South Asian diasporic filmmakers in Britain gained access to the means of greater circulation and production...films were able to reach wide audiences and soon became significant to the process of imagining diasporic communities and identities” (*Beyond Bollywood* 42-43).

Reception from the South Asian community, however, was not as favourable, because many perceived a reproduction of stereotypes. First-generation immigrants especially disliked what they thought was the reproduction of a negative image of South Asians as amoral, sex-crazed, homosexuals and/or drug dealers. Director Mahmood Jamal, for instance, said that *My Beautiful Laundrette* is exactly what South Asian filmmakers must avoid, as it is reinforcing stereotypes “of their own people for a few cheap laughs...what is surprising about the film is that it expresses all the prejudices that this society has felt about Asians and Jews –that they are money-grabbing, scheming, sex-crazed people” (qtd in Ranasinha 46). In Jamal’s view, which reflected the view of many others, South Asian characters did not need the negative publicity, living as they were in an already racist society. However, I argue that Kureishi’s work is much more complex than merely a stiff reproduction of racial stereotypes intended to provoke cheap laughs. In an interview for *The Times* a few years later, Kureishi defended himself by saying,

I cannot do PR for special groups of people...You can’t create ideal types, you have to ask questions. I suppose I’m a chronicler of British society of the 1970s and 1980s, and my job as a writer is to tell the truth as I see it, not to tell lies in order to appease special interest groups. Of course it may be polemical to write about anything at all –just describing things may be illuminating to other people in society (The Late Show).

The fact that *My Beautiful Laundrette* was one of the very few British South Asian films of the time subjected it, in a way, to every form of criticism as there was little, if no, point of reference. Kureishi’s views led many South Asian organisations in Britain and abroad to reject the film as they thought it portrayed all of the immigrants in England as drug-taking homosexuals. For instance, members of the Pakistani Action Committee in New York demonstrated against its release outside US theatres, shouting comments, such as: “*My Beautiful Laundrette* is the creation of a sick and perverted mind” (Miller). Confined

within the limiting context of the belief that a Pakistani on screen represents the entire community, these organisations did not realise that Kureishi actually helped trigger a movement that did not treat immigrants as stereotypes or as tradition-bound or helpless subjects, thus actually reversing the colonial view on them.

Such a criticism reflects primarily on the film's character portrayal. However, it seems that it is the characters' actions, their played-out desires and choices, which enable the final performance in the restored laundrette. For instance, despite the fact that Nasser has been the epitome of entrepreneurship that the political context of the time put forward, and he tries to combine politics and sexuality, his process of assimilation fails by the end of the book:

Nasser: We'll drink to Thatcher and your beautiful laundrette.

Johnny: Do they go together?

Nasser: Like dall and chipatis! (*My Beautiful Laundrette* 37)

In the end, however, Nasser is unable to balance his family, his mistress and his businesses and his life starts to crumble. His wife plans to return to Pakistan, his daughter wants to run away, his English mistress leaves him, and he spends a lot of money on gambling. Indeed, he fails, because he does not come to terms with his past; on the contrary, he tries to escape it, rejecting it altogether: "I am a professional businessman, not a professional Pakistani" (*My Beautiful Laundrette* 23). This subsequent fall goes on to testify to the opposition of Kureishi to the limitations imposed on immigrants by the state.

In contrast to Nasser, who is trying to "squeeze the tits of the system," his brother Hussein, Omar's father, can be read as a critique of the failed Left, which did not provide a viable alternative to Thatcherite politics. Even though Hussein seems disconnected from the world, isolated as he is in his room, he still relies on his brother for money. He sends Omar to his brother with the expressed wish to get him a job and a wife, relying thus on the personal and business ethics of right-wing policies, which he supposedly opposed. What is more, it could be argued that Johnny falls in love with Omar in the first place because he is a successful businessman. Johnny's "queerness", then, lies as much in the exposure of the homoerotics of British nationalism as it does in the offering of his dispossessed labour to immigrant entrepreneurship, which, after all, validates Thatcherite neo-liberalism, as this allure, invested as it is in the prevalent capitalistic essence of the time, has a profound effect on the union between them. Ranasinha says that Hussein's heterosexist, patriarchal masculinity testifies to how a same-sex union is defined against the different forms of masculinity in the film (*Hanif Kureishi* 43). So the construction of masculinity in *My*

Beautiful Laundrette is irrevocably interconnected with politics: for instance, it is the socialist, intellectual and seemingly radical Hussein who initiates the introduction of Omar to the entrepreneurial world. At first, then, Omar seems greedy and Nasser seems to be correct, as Moore-Gilbert argues:

Neither Johnny nor the film itself offers any persuasive alternative to Nasser's faith that social justice is something best achieved by the workings of the free market. Equally, *Laundrette* fails to challenge the New Right's ethos of possessive individualism. Omar increasingly resembles that peculiarly 1980s figure, the self-centred and consumption-driven yuppie. Indeed Tania's increasing disaffection with him stems from her perception that Omar is getting as greedy as her father (*Hanif Kureishi* 103).

However, one could argue that Kureishi is deliberately drawing such a figure to mirror contemporary society, as the complexities of the characters point to the drawing of a recognisable portrait of the full spectrum of the British South Asian diaspora.

Omar's cousin, Tania, seems to be working as a foil, trapped as she is between various unions in the film. Gopinath has argued that she functions in a classic homosocial triangle, as a conduit to the desire between Johnny and Omar (*Impossible Desires* 4). In the final scene, she disappears on a train platform; her future, much like her present, is uncertain. Critics such as Mahmood Jamal read this "disappearance" as an inability or unwillingness by Kureishi to find a proper space for Tania to occupy, removing—in the process—an obstacle in the Omar-Johnny relationship, given that both Nasser and Hussein wanted to marry her off to Omar. Similarly, Ranasinha claims that Tania is structurally marginalised because she does not conform to the accepted role of women in both cultures and she cannot be accommodated by the film (*Hanif Kureishi* 48). Moreover, as Desai has argued, Tania cannot access the same spaces as the male South Asian British characters and she is only left with the option to leave home and family (*Beyond Bollywood* 56). Lastly, as Sedgwick argues, the shapes of sexuality depend on and affect historical power relationships, and a corollary is that in "a society where men and women differ in their access to power, there will be important gender differences, as well, in the structure and constitution of sexuality" (*Between Men* 2). It seems then that Tania does escape her impossible position, using the only way out left for her, which entails a bodily disappearance, as she does not have access to the space of possibilities that male characters in *My Beautiful Laundrette* have, such as those that Johnny and Omar are treated to. This can be attributed to an inability or unwillingness on behalf of Kureishi to narrate the male

and female experiences of his characters equally. It can be said that Tania is needed for Johnny and Omar's relationship to work, as Kureishi's "...excavation of the legacies of colonialism and racism, as they are mapped onto queer (male) bodies crucially depends on a particular fixing of female diasporic subjectivity" (*Impossible Desires* 4). So, she seems to gesture towards another narrative of female diasporic subjectivity, as Kureishi's framing of the "female diasporic figure makes clear the ways in which even ostensibly progressive, gay male articulations of diaspora run the risk of stabilising sexual and gender hierarchies" (*Impossible Desires* 4-5). This is certainly a valid point which, as I will argue later on, not only justifies to an extent the criticism raised against Kureishi, especially by Ruvani Ranasinha, for his treatment of female characters, but something that will emerge quite powerfully in his memoir, published in 2004, almost 20 years after *My Beautiful Laundrette*. More specifically, in my examination of *My Ear at His Heart*, I will examine the relationship between Hanif Kureishi and the female and male characters in his life, most notably his mother, his father and his uncle, arguing that not only is his own quest for an identity hindered by the effect of these characters in his life, focusing on the concept of postmemory, but such "obstacles" have everything to do with the different manifestations of masculine and feminine sexuality in his work, which reflects the author's familial relationships. At the same time, my examination of *My Ear at His Heart* provides the reader with an insight of how and why Kureishi's female characters were created the way they were, while also examining the objections of Kureishi's family and especially of his sister Yasmin, to the publication of the book. For instance, even though I disagree with the view that Tania is a marginalised, passive character, at the same time one cannot deny that she is not explored as much as the male characters in the film, nor does she have the same life opportunities as they do. Indeed, I put forward the idea that not only is Tania not an obstacle to the relationship between Omar and Johnny, as she does not appeal to either of them, but it could be argued that she should not be read as a victim nor are we obliged to see her disappearance as a female sacrifice at the altar of queer diasporic subjectivity. Even though it may be true that Kureishi tells his stories from a male point of view, one should keep in mind that although at the end of the film, Tania's life is left untold, we do not know what happens to the relationship between Omar and Johnny either. We, as audience, desire its continuance; similarly, we wish the best for Tania as she leaves the oppressiveness of an arranged marriage. Moreover, she is not passive and desexualised; rather, she is confident, fearless, outspoken and sexually free, challenging thus the normative heterosexual behaviour of colonial times, which the cultural production of the

time was reproducing in Raj Revival films. She is a complex and under-developed character then, but not a weak one by a long shot. Thus, we are drawn to the conclusion that the nature of the characters' relationships and the results of their actions which lead to the final scene of *My Beautiful Laundrette*, highlight a series of multiple allegiances within the context of the interaction between affect and the political, as the complexity of interactions in various political sub-groupings which function as symbolic orders in 1980s Britain is underlined.

Diasporic Intimacy: The Body as a Site of Historical Conflicts

Climaxing towards the most interesting scene in the movie, the connotations of the notion of diasporic intimacy in the way Svetlana Boym has formulated it, can go a long way to explain the sexual behaviour we see in the film, taking into consideration its close relationship with the notion of home. Boym has argued that "the object of longing[...] is not really a place called home but [a] sense of intimacy with the world[...] Intimate means innermost[...] very personal, sexual[...] I speak about[...] a diasporic intimacy that is not opposed to uprootedness[...] but is constituted by it" ("On Diasporic Intimacy" 252). Boym here has linked intimate desire with the diasporic element, in the sense that in a diasporic environment such as 1980s England, the intimacy we see in the interracial, non-heteronormative relationship between Omar and Johnny, draws heavily from the very nature of being away from home. This is why one could argue that the sexual expression of Omar reflects the hope for the immigrants' position in a postcolonial space, as it points towards an alternative way out from the narrow contextualisation stemming from uprootedness and feelings of not belonging. However, I do not use the concept of diasporic intimacy as a definite, universal and transparent sense of belonging. On the contrary, such intimacy is dystopic (as in problematic) by definition, as it presupposes the impossibility of a unitary, single home. On the other hand, one cannot deny the possibilities it can offer, as it "...thrives on the hope of the possibilities of human understanding and survival" (Boym 252). It is true that Kureishi's characters enjoy– in full– the pleasures of their adopted home. As was previously mentioned, Boym has identified that intimacy expanded through centuries culminating to its expression in transitory locations (Boym, 253). Indeed, Kureishi's characters (most notably, Omar in *My Beautiful Laundrette* and Karim in *The*

Buddha Of Suburbia) enjoy the secret pleasures of the foreign background. There is pleasure in the pain for the homeland, then, as intimacy cuts across time and space. This is exactly the case in *My Beautiful Laundrette*, in the scene where Johnny and Omar have sex at the back of the laundrette. They enjoy the pleasures of intimacy while seemingly being at the outskirts of the social realm (i.e., the back room) and their pleasure-framed intimacy is protected by the walls of the laundrette.

Kureishi evokes diasporic intimacy as fraternal affection bringing together two distinct, pariah groups, the immigrant and the skinhead, through the mentioning of another marginalised group, the queer one. Despite the fact that there can never be a state of complete belonging for the immigrants within the context of cultural imperialism, as the character of Nasser, Omar's uncle portrays, it is possible to derive pleasure, as "The foreign backdrop, the memory of past losses and the recognition of transience do not obscure the shock of intimacy, but rather heighten the pleasure and intensity of surprise" (Boym 255). This relationship could be seen as the mutual enchantment of two marginalised characters from different parts of the world, set against a foreign home for both. Thus, the relationship entails a sense of possibility and hope for those in the audience who can relate to the queer situation of being simultaneously alienated from and engaged with life in the metropolis. The need for love and intimacy plays out in a diasporic environment and especially in an enclosed space, hidden from public view and specifically, in the back room of the laundrette. The room is small, poorly lit and features a two-way mirror. That way, Omar and Johnny can see outside, although the others cannot see them. What they see is Omar's uncle dancing with his mistress, Rachel. Omar and Johnny open up a bottle of champagne and, as they discuss the success of their business, they begin to disclose more about themselves, obviously growing closer. Omar talks to Johnny about how the former's father saw Johnny marching against immigrants, and how that affected Omar's mother:

What were they doing on marches through Lewisham? It was bricks and bottles and Union Jacks. It was immigrants out. It was kill us. People we knew. And it was you. He saw you marching. You saw his face, watching you. Don't deny it. We were there when you went past. Papa hated himself and his job. He was afraid on the street for me. And he took it out on her, And she couldn't bear it. Oh, such failure, such emptiness (*My Beautiful Laundrette* 43).

While saying these words, Johnny walks over to him slowly, takes off Omar's jacket and starts touching Omar's chest. Omar looks away, saying, "Such failure, such emptiness." Johnny leans on Omar's shoulder and they lie still without saying a word. This connection in such a confined place creates an intimate union within a hostile socio-political environment that otherwise completely forbids such a romance, thus becoming a safe house behind enemy lines. This is one of the most important scenes in *My Beautiful Laundrette* as the two lovers indulge in intimate pleasure being in a transitory location such as the back room. So they occupy an in-between space, seemingly in the heart of society, as they are within a successful business and everyone is waiting for them outside, but also hidden from plain sight, while the two enjoy their pleasure. Graham Huggan has argued that the laundrette scene might be read on one level as an,

...allegorical variant on Bakhtinian carnivalisation - as an extravagantly comic overturning of the anti-immigrant 'whitification' policies of the Thatcher decade...in such a reading, the renovated launderette becomes a classless space of intercultural celebration, in defiance of the racial battles fought almost daily outside its windows (The Postcolonial Exotic 100).

The fact that people who would be shocked to find out what was going on were waiting outside only serves to heighten the pleasure. The laundrette harbours the forbidden pleasure derived from the interracial, prohibited desire, which enables Kureishi to intervene in discussions about what it means to be a citizen of Britain in the 1980s. It is important to note here that the relationship between Johnny and Omar is never seen outside politics and history; indeed, in all of Kureishi's films, one can see his association of sexual with political repression (Moore-Gilbert, *Hanif Kureishi* 91, 212).

This interconnection of political and social violence (reflected in Johnny's wounds which he gets as he tries to defend his lover from his former friends) and of desire (in Omar's affection toward his lover) also make one think that the cross-class, cross-racial, non-heteronormative relationship between Omar and Johnny goes as far as to illuminate the problematic, contradictory, and, more often than not, violent effects of class, ethnic, and communal categories in Thatcherite Britain. Indeed, some argue that violence entails a secret affection and bonding between the constituent parts and the same is said about homophobia. Stallybrass and White state that elements of experience that are subordinated in a society become central in the formation of desire: "These low domains, apparently expelled as "Other", return as the object of nostalgia, longing and fascination [...] (marginal elements) become symbolic contents of bourgeois desire" (*The Politics and*

Poetics of Transgression 191). In *My Beautiful Laundrette*, from the very beginning, violence is connected with desire. The first job that Omar assigns to Johnny is to “clean out the bastards” (*My Beautiful Laundrette* 33), referring to Johnny’s former friends who linger and loiter around the laundrette. Johnny gets rid of them by force, and this power difference sparks up their desire for one another. Next, Johnny puts his arm round Omar, who turns to him, and they “kiss passionately on the mouth. They kiss and they hold each other” (*My Beautiful Laundrette* 45). Thus, Kureishi connects the moment of love and affection with a somewhat balanced display of the power relation between Omar and Johnny which mutually arouses desire.

Their sex scene at the back of the laundrette is an instance of diasporic intimacy, which adheres to pleasure derived in a foreign environment; Kureishi’s characters enjoy the secret delights of life, and for Omar as a diasporic subject in particular, a new way of being is presented, infused with the pleasure of the foreign (Boym). In this scene, the violence of the neo-fascist group is directed against their former member, Johnny, who has betrayed them. While chasing Johnny, the skinheads break the window of the laundrette, which separated the ugliness of these particular urban streets from the beautiful and renovated space inside the laundrette. So the space of the laundrette, just like Johnny’s body which is contained in it, is now a site of change and possibility that at the same time bears the marks of violence. We then see the two inside, with Omar tending to Johnny’s wounds, as desire is intertwined with violence:

Omar: You are dirty. You are beautiful.

Johnny: I’m serious. Don’t keep touching me.

Omar: I’m going to give you a wash (*My Beautiful Laundrette* 128).

Johnny tries to leave, but Omar kisses his neck and Johnny stays. It is exactly the outcome of their intense feelings in this scene that transforms their relationship; the scene functions as a counter-image to violence, while at the same time, it contains it. We may recall Marco Abel’s view on how we can look at the affective forces of violence in a new way and intervene in the world in a more ethical way, given the all-pervasiveness of violence as an ontological necessity (*Violent Affect* 34). Johnny and Omar’s relationship is responsible for much of the violence we see in the film. Instead of looking at affect merely as a rival force to the political and its trajectories, which would mean that it is reduced to its subset given that it can only work as the latter’s opposite, I put forward that there is much to learn from the coexistence of the two. One cannot deny that violence was integral to colonial practices and that it was being translated into contemporary Britain through politics and

culture alike. It is the infusion of violence with desire, however, that shows how such coexistence is necessary for the remembering of regretted histories of the colonial past and its imperial legacy which more often than not pertained to racial violence. It is also an important step in moving forward. Sara Suleri argues that the inevitably retroactive narrative of the postcolonial condition, "...allows for the inclusion both of its colonial past and of the function of criticism at the present time as necessary corollaries to the telling of its stories (*The Rhetoric of English India* 21-22). Indeed, past and present culminate in the queer, racialised body of Johnny in the final scene of *My Beautiful Laundrette*.

The film ends with Omar and Johnny playfully splashing water on each other, without saying any words. The water imagery and the absence of verbal interaction enable us to read their coming together as a kind of rebirth for their relationship which gestures towards the implicit, albeit impossible, promise of Deleuze and Guattari of completion and unity in a return to the mother. Indeed, water can be seen here as symbolising the essential source it is, as significant as air, to sustain life. This scene brings to mind Massumi's argument about the affect being a non-conscious experience of intensity, a moment of unformed and unstructured potential that cannot be fully realised in language (*Parables for the Virtual* 30). Of course the kind of unity we see in Johnny's body does not gesture towards a perfect completion but, rather, it is a testimony to the complexity of such an uneasy union; still it does offer hope for the future. Hence, Johnny's body, with its containment of both desire and violence, is integral to its understanding as this body becomes the site for the realisation of what seems to be an instinctive and intense feeling that allows subjectivity to escape political limits. Rather than being singular then, desire and sexuality in this scene become a network of flows and energies that are open to transformation and are, as such, undetermined. This transformation enables bodies to frustrate the predictable results of sexual performativity, pertaining to binarisms such as male/female. Such multiple possibilities of connection enabled by the flow of desire transform Johnny's body, then, which should not be viewed as a source of anxiety but, rather, as a promise for productive becomings, precisely in its fragmented nature. This fragmentation reminds us of Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the body without organs, the body that is, which is engaged in a process of becoming, celebrating as they do at the same time corporeal disorganisation. By that I do not mean that corporeality is denied altogether; rather I gesture towards a way of rethinking it that avoids the Lacanian narrative of thinking the body through the illusion of unity, after the mirror-stage. Johnny's body is, then, a body "populated by multiplicities" (*A Thousand Plateaus* 30). Thus, as Massumi

says, we need to “...rethink body, subjectivity, and social change in terms of movement, affect, force, and violence – before code, text, and signification” (*Parables for the Virtual* 66). So one should not rethink Johnny’s body as a return to the pre-subject state of infancy but as a deconstruction and queering of it, which entails “taking apart egos and their presuppositions” and “liberating the prepersonal singularities they enclose and repress” (*A Thousand Plateaus* 362). Johnny’s body is exactly that in this last scene of *My Beautiful Laundrette*: it is a process, a historical archive which changes and which includes the violent marks of Britain’s imperial legacy and racist present. In rethinking the body then, one is invited to rethink the relationship between the colonial and the postcolonial, violence and desire, Britain and India: the aftermath of these clashes are evident on Johnny’s queer, racialised body. Such a deconstructive reading of the body as a process which includes all these elements suggests the hope for the birth of a new Britain which carries the marks of its imperial legacy, but which is also able to heal itself from the shame of its racist past –and present– through the power of affect which is what enables these fluid processes pertaining to the self and the body. It can be argued, then, that the affect’s force of unconscious desire breaks through the political, inciting hope in audiences that the relationship will continue and enabling the creation of a new fantasy for a “healed” England. Indeed, the healing of wounds, within this context of the relationship between racialised desire and history, alludes to a re-negotiation of the colonial past, thus allowing the affective to intervene in political discussions pertaining to England’s future. Thus, queer desire in Kureishi’s films changes the focus of a diaspora looking backwards, as it undercuts the logic of ethnic/racial purity and authenticity (*Impossible Desires* 2). Kureishi’s characters do not go back to the past, as conventional diasporic discourse evident in Raj Revival films dictates, but they move forward, which is evident in their transformation.

Such manifestations of racialised desire manifest themselves on Johnny’s body, which is the focus of tensions we see throughout the film, becoming what Radhika Mohanram has termed “a threat to the myth of ontological purity of the nation” (*Postcolonial Spaces* 121). Desire, therefore, is central to the telling and remembering of these histories, while at the same time, I argue, it can point to ways of coming to terms with the past and offer a relatively better image of the socio-political future of Britain. Gayatri Gopinath has argued that it is precisely through Johnny’s body that histories of the past are brought into the present, and that their legacies are imaginatively contested and transformed: the queer racialised body becomes a historical archive for both individuals

and communities (*Impossible Desires* 4). For Omar, she continues, desiring Johnny is irrevocably intertwined with the legacies of British colonialism in South Asia and the more immediate history of Powellian racism in 1960s Britain (*Impossible Desires* 1-2). Indeed, it could be argued that part of the film's significant impact was precisely this manifestation of the sexualised body because the sexualised body was not something removed from ordinary life anymore. Johnny's diasporic body in *My Beautiful Laundrette*, for instance, violently damaged by his former friends of the National Front, and at the same time the desire it creates for Omar, deliberately brings back forgotten or suppressed histories, becoming a site for historical struggles between past and present, while the tending of his wounds by his lover underlines both the problematic nature as well as the potential of their relationship. This is how desire is used in Kureishi's early work, as a mediator bringing together seemingly opposite worlds, not eradicating their differences in the process, but respecting, exploring and exploiting them. In doing so, he uses the projected audience's desire, namely to see the queer relationship surviving, and creates a need for the definition of a new kind of Britishness in the process. And it is precisely desire, manifesting itself in bodily terms, that opens up the space of possibilities for the South Asian diaspora in Britain. There can be no queer desire without these histories, nor can these histories be remembered without simultaneously revealing an "erotics of power" (*Impossible Desires* 1-2).

This co-existence of violence and desire, culminated in the tending of wounds on the queer, racialised body of Johnny by the immigrant Omar can be read as an allusion to a different kind of nation and a different, more hopeful future for Britain, in Kureishi's refusal to represent the black experience as self-contained. Indeed, *My Beautiful Laundrette* was described as one of the most

...riveting and important films produced by a black writer in recent years.

[What] made it controversial [is] its refusal to represent the black experience in Britain as monolithic, self-contained, sexually stabilised and always 'right-on' [...] always positive [...] the text crosses those frontiers between gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality and class (Hall, "New Ethnicities" 449).

It is my belief that the film subverts stereotypes regarding non-heteronormative sexuality but one could question whether the mere attribution of homosexual characteristics to a former Nationalist Front member is enough to change society. Is the kind of nation that *My Beautiful Laundrette* is envisioning a viable alternative to reality? In an attempt to answer

such questions, this chapter has unravelled the complexities behind Kureishi's choices in characters. By positioning audiences to desire the romance Kureishi constructs, *My Beautiful Laundrette* wants the union of precisely those heterogeneous elements to be embodied by the characters. Kureishi says that:

I used my creativity to put together all these things I couldn't put together in the world. I wrote a screenplay [*My Beautiful Laundrette*] about a skinhead and a Pakistani boy running a laundrette together, and they were in love. So you create a unity...I became a hippie socialist kid obsessed with sexual freedom and novels and making social change. We thought all of us – black people and gay people and feminists – were part of the same fight (Hari, emphasis added).

Of course such a way of thinking entails a utopian implication in that “contemporary Britain has within its grasp the possibility of expanding traditional conceptions of national identity to create for the first time a genuine and revolutionary, though always *contradictory* rather than blandly harmonious, unity-in-diversity” (Bart-Moore Gilbert *Hanif Kureishi* 92). The unity that Kureishi talks about, which desire enables, is not harmonious and without friction; in that, it can be linked to the notion of the desiring machines which do not express cohesion or continuity, nor do they seek completion in an absent other and a lack. This kind of uneasy unity is reflected in the film's audience, which is fully aware at all times that this is a complex union but it still entails hope for the future. The film artfully blends utopian fantasy with reality in a process that underlines the possibility such a queer romance has, in re-imagining the nation in unity through diversity. This brings to mind the ideas of Homi Bhabha (as previously discussed in Chapter One of this work) and Sara Suleri who argued for the possibilities offered by the destabilisation of boundaries. As Bhabha argues, “Cultures can be understood to interact, transgress and transform each other in a much more complex manner than the traditional binary oppositions can allow” (*The Location of Culture* 178). What is more, Gilbert has argued that “Art [cannot] be seen simply as being in binary opposition to material forms of political activism” (*Hanif Kureishi* 213). In Kureishi's words: “You flatter yourself if you thought you could change things by a film...but perhaps you can contribute to a climate of ideas...Asking these questions [about how we live] seems to me to be the thing artists can do rather than change society in any specific way”. Such ideas reflect the ending of *My Beautiful Laundrette*, where everything still happens within the frame of the cinema but at the same time still functions away from normative strictures. Moreover, referring to *My*

Beautiful Laundrette, Ranasinha says that the “...film emphasises how issues of race and class configure personal relationships, closing not with a celebration of lovemaking that transcends race, but with Omar bathing Johnny’s wounds inflicted by racial conflict” (Moore-Gilbert 43). Ranasinha further explains that their relationship is potentially liberating in transgressing race and class boundaries, yet it does not present any facile “solution” to racism. Such a relationship, however, can offer possibilities, hopes and the intimation of promise for the future. Thus Kureishi’s work is potentially enabling in that it provides the outlines of a changed and better society. *My Beautiful Laundrette* hints at a new order, one where the constituents of relationships are not bound by dominance, but by a mutuality of desire. In any case, although Kureishi’s works cannot be taken as being precise reflections of South Asian life in Britain, they certainly are a recognisable portrait of their lives and their experiences, showing how communities such as the South Asian in Britain, struggle with a changing ideal of what it means to be British.

It should be mentioned that such a reading of the relationship between Johnny and Omar reflects the relationships in Kureishi’s subsequent work, namely the ones between Karim Amir and Charlie in *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990) and Rani and Vivia in *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid* (1987) that followed along the same path. Any examination of the non-heteronormative desires in these works points to a challenge of identity binaries. Indeed, as Huggan has argued,

The gendered performances of Kureishi’s homosexual, bisexual or sexually ambiguous characters, Karim Amir and Charlie Kay in *The Buddha of Suburbia*, Johnny and Omar in *My Beautiful Laundrette*, the lesbian lovers Rani and Vivia and the puckish cross-dresser Danny-Victoria in *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid* – all emphasise that identities are fashioned, rather than merely expressed, by corporeal activities, signs and functions (*The Postcolonial Exotic* 112).

This brings to mind Butler’s work, as all the queering of sexual identity reminds us that “substantive effect[s] of gender [are] performatively produced and compelled by the regulatory practice of gender coherence” (Butler 24). My examination of *My Beautiful Laundrette* shows that when the essential dichotomy of either/or is challenged, then the construction of social identities opens up new possibilities for hitherto fragmented identities caught in marginalised spaces of in-betweenness. Keeping in mind what Desai has argued, namely that *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985) and *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid* (1987) both “challenged the construction of national cinema as consisting of heritage films

or associated primarily with a nostalgic modern English upper class” (Beyond Bollywood 56), the thesis moves on with the discussion of Kureishi’s next script.

Multiplicity and Heterogeneity: *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid* (1987)

Once again engaging directly with Raj Revival films, Kureishi’s next script, *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid* (1987) which was directed by Stephen Frears, follows suit in dealing with the author’s favourite themes. It is a movie about an unconventional middle-class, interracial Londoner couple with open minds, sexually, whose lives are turned upside down when Sammy’s father, Rafi, a former Indian government minister, visits them in London. Although not as commercially successful as his first film, *Sammy and Rosie* is the second example of Kureishi’s use of hedonistic prose to confront serious political issues in the U.K. at the time. Kureishi is, once again, preoccupied with controversial themes adulterous love, sex, politics and racial violence. The two protagonists have an openly adulterous marriage, while their social circle included just about everyone, from radical leftists to street philosophers, in a microcosm of hip British society.

The movie starts with the police accidentally shooting a 50-year old cleaning woman, mistaking her for a 20-year old trumpeter, which is evident of Kureishi’s sense of humour. These riots are justified by the couple, who refer to the riots as an “affirmation of the human spirit” (*Sammy and Rosie Get Laid*). So racial violence breaks out just as Rafi, Sammy’s father, enters the scene, fleeing from General Zulfikar’s Pakistan on charges of corruption. He is a complex character, “... a murderer and a man eager to be loved, a populist and an elitist” (*Sammy and Rosie Get Laid*). Nahem Yousaf argues that Rafi serves as an example of Kureishi’s critique of the Left’s liberal hegemony, straining to break free of “safe” characterisations, discovering as he does a space for enunciation that critiques the Right but does not fail to interrogate the failings of the Left (“The Brown Man’s Burden” 21). While Rafi tries to meddle in his son’s life, he flirts with Alice, a British lady whom he left many decades ago when he was studying in England. All of the protagonists engage in a swivel of desire which brings about bile and hatred and makes up a puzzling mix of desire, violence and hatred that reflect the confused and confusing society in which they live. There is also a direct link with *Gandhi*, as the violence against the protesters during Gandhi’s salt march returns in the image of the uniforms of the Met

Police which behaves like an occupying army in immigrant-populated areas (Moore-Gilbert 77).

It is interesting to note that the opening and closing scenes of the movie are accompanied by the voice of Margaret Thatcher, setting up the grey political context of the times, which Kureishi describes as such:

England seems to have become a squalid, ugly and uncomfortable place. For some reason, I am starting to feel that it is an intolerant, racist, homophobic, narrow-minded authoritarian rat-hole run by vicious, suburban-minded, materialistic philistines who think democracy is constituted by the selling of a few council houses and shares ("England, Bloody England" 24).

Within the cinematic space defined by the frames of Thatcher's words, adulterous sexuality and illicit desire are abundant, not only mocking the imposed boundaries imposed by social norms, but also engulfing desire in politics, showing that they coexist, albeit in a comic way. It is all about the freedom that can be empowered by sexuality and the liberated human spirit, directed against political and social constraints, at the same time rejecting boundaries that have a direct relation to the colonial past. Alice, the old love of Rafi, is the character that serves as a link between the idealised past of the empire and the chaotic, anarchist, multiethnic British present.

Moore-Gilbert argues that "Kureishi's insistence on the importance of recognising continuities between the colonial past and the neo-colonial present is further evident in his films' engagement with contemporary Pakistan, notably in *Sammy and Rosie*" (Hanif Kureishi 77). Indeed, the final scene in *My Beautiful Laundrette*, which situates Johnny and Omar inside the laundrette with Nasser and Rachel outside of it, reminds us of a parallel scene in *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid*. In this scene, three couples (Sammy and Rosie, Rani and Vivia, Rafi and Alice) are shown having sex simultaneously on a screen which is split as a column divided in thirds, separated by frames, in what Kureishi called a "fuck sandwich" ("England, Bloody England" 25). This is a scene that follows a series of shots showing urban decay, street performers and gloomy streets, which nevertheless lead all three couples to bed. Desai argues that this is a combination of slapstick and melodrama, as it renders multiplicity and heterogeneity (*Beyond Bollywood* 58) as these adjacent pictures are juxtaposing, combining desire and violence. As they come together, they allude to the crossing of boundaries imposed by the screen, while carrying the message that they can all coexist within the same cinematic frame. This split scene is also a marker of diasporic intimacy, since the protagonists find pleasure in back rooms and

hidden spaces, similar to the laundrette in *My Beautiful Laundrette*, only in the former scene, characters are separated and connected at the same time by the director's points of view. By the end of the film, the colonial past and Rafi's wrongdoings catch up with him, and, crushed by the weight of his bad choices, he hangs himself. His death also marks a new beginning as for the first time in the film, Sammy and Rosie come into intimate, physical contact. The rejection of the regretted histories of the colonial past, reflected in Rafi's atrocities during the British colonial era in India, and with which Rosie confronts Rafi, marks the dawn of a new era, in which the interracial, estranged couple is brought together, with the multicultural, multiethnic, and sexually charged space of London serving as the background. Indeed, in both films, the city of London remains a site of both oppression and possibilities. Indeed, it is in "...the interstitial spaces of the city that Kureishi locates the successful and failed resistances to exploitation, racism, marginalization, and state violence, both of the "postcolonial nation-state and the metropolitan nation-state" (Desai 57). In effect, *Sammy and Rosie* is a moving story that traces a geographic and cultural arc from the original home of the immigrant, to London, and back, travelling through the sexual space and time of the postcolonial.

Sammy and Rosie Get Laid is unconventional in terms of film-making, in the sense that it is chaotic. Anarchy is everywhere, from the streets of London, the neighbourhood Sammy and Rosie live in, to the state of Pakistan from where Rafi comes and even on the level of characters who seem to be indulging in self-contained pleasures. This sometimes creates confusion for the audience, left to struggle to keep up with the erratic narration, imagery and notions being rapidly thrown at them. The film's plot might also be considered too fragmented and anarchistic, which also points to a possible reason why the movie did not appeal to audiences as much as *My Beautiful Laundrette*. What is more, the cost was much higher than *My Beautiful Laundrette* and it did not make a profit. Nevertheless, the fact that *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid* was not as successful as *My Beautiful Laundrette* does not stop us from reading its importance pertaining to transgressive sexual practices, which become, as Desai argues, a possible strategy of "...resistance that challenges dominant social mores and power structures. In other words, the films frame sexual encounters as spaces of social and political contact that negotiate gender, class, and race" (*Beyond Bollywood* 57). What is more, Kureishi's early cinematic work showed that the British South Asian diaspora was not suspended between two cultures, trapped in a Manichean binary of East and West but, rather,

...complexly rendered the heterogeneous and hybrid subjects of postcolonial Britain and specifically of global London. These films produced a space for the emerging identities of British and diasporic subjects to be articulated. They presented complex, nonessentialist, and nontransparent subjectivities that did not attempt to represent British Asian identity as singular and static (Desai 57).

Thus, Kureishi's first two films went a long way in changing the disposition of its audience and putting forward new ideas characterising issue of "belonging" for the South Asian diaspora in the U.K. This, in turn, leads us to a need to examine the extent to which cinema, as part of visual culture, enables social change, pleasure and fantasy. The examination of desire in Kureishi's earlier work points to a possible answer to the question posed by Max Kirsch in *Queer Theory and Social Change* (2000), namely, can queerness actually effect social change? Kirsch argues that despite the failure of social movements of the 1960s to integrate diverse segments of the population, their usefulness is not to be denied, as they analysed issues such as identity, culture, inclusion, the importance of communities and contemporary social conditions, which are, of course, the very same issues that Kureishi's early work draws upon, based on queer desire. Gilbert argues that Kureishi's first three films suggest that an "ethnically-grounded monoculturalism as the principal guarantee of a common national identity plays a major role in fostering conflict and exclusion in contemporary Britain" (*Hanif Kureishi* 81). Kureishi himself worded it as such: "I like to think of myself as one of a number of writers who are describing the immigrant experience, and the contemporary results of it. I hope that there'll be a flowering of new black and Asian writers to bring new life to British writing" (*The Late Show*). Loyal to this statement, Kureishi's preoccupation with interracial, interethnic and interclass non-heteronormative sexuality continues to permeate the works that immediately followed *My Beautiful Laundrette*, such as the one that is generally considered to be the prime example of his literary peak: *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990).

Andreas Athanasiades

Chapter IV

Sexual Experimentation in *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990)

As I sat there I began to recognise that this was one of the first times in my life I'd been aware of having a moral dilemma. Before, I'd done exactly what I wanted; desire was my guide and I was inhibited by nothing but fear. But now, at the beginning of my twenties, something was growing in me [...] Now I was developing a sense of guilt, a sense not only of how I appeared to others, but of how I appeared to myself, especially in violating self-imposed restrictions (*The Buddha of Suburbia* 186-187).

With *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990), a contemporary socio-cultural reference to human relations and sexuality in 1970s Britain, Kureishi continued to inscribe hybridity and multiplicity in seemingly homogeneous spaces such as British society in the 1980s, at the same time subverting traditional understandings of nation and history. Kureishi works with themes he examined in his previous scripts and revisits them in a novelistic form, full of colourful characters and sexual encounters, as these works seem to share a common breadth of sexual codes. Within this context, I propose that even though *The Buddha of Suburbia* follows the same thematics as his previous work –i.e., *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985) and *Sammie and Rosie Get Laid* (1987)– in that the sexual experimentation of characters points to new ways of examining the politics of representation, culture and identity, Kureishi introduces some new perspectives on contemporary Britain in this novel. Through comic irony, the author revisits the sexual revolution of the 1960s and the hopes it had created; the novel ends as Margaret Thatcher rises to power. As a retrospect of the years leading to the Thatcher era, the novel examines the fetishisation of the cultural commodification of the sexual experimentations of the 1960s which, subsequently, lost its political power, and led to the creation of a new symbolic order in the 1980s. Kureishi himself, in an interview for the New York Times, labelled *The Buddha of Suburbia* a critique of the notion of the limitless pleasure of the 1960s as well as a re-examination of the sexual revolution:

Is this what we thought we would be in the '60s when we were dancing around with flowers in our hair wanting a more erotic and a more sexual

life?...If the society doesn't install the values anymore, your happiness and your pleasure is entirely up to you; you have to work and earn it and install your own moral values (Donadio).

This is a moment of realisation for Kureishi, as he seems to be re-thinking self-indulgent pleasure, hinting at a different manifestation of desire. Even though he grew up in the 1960s and 1970s and he was immersed in the sexual revolution of the time, he seems to be re-valuating the impact this revolution had on social change. On the other hand, through the examination of the various performativities of the characters in the novel which, in effect, are based on the assuming of various identities by each of them, the deconstructive presence of the aesthetic pleasures in the text ironically points to the challenging of the symbolic order. What is more, *The Buddha of Suburbia* hints at the author's change in thematics in his later work, as the re-imagining of desire and sexuality pertains to a shift towards more mature and introverted expressions, evident in the psychological growth of the protagonist, Karim, both as a social actor and as a staged one, which also reflects the development of Kureishi as an author. This change marks the end of Kureishi's early work and the beginning of the second part of his career, in which his interest and thematics, as well as the sense of desire, change.

This change was also facilitated by the fact that with *The Buddha of Suburbia*, Kureishi reached his literary peak. It won the Whitbread Award for best first novel, and has been translated into 20 languages. In 1993, *The Buddha of Suburbia* was filmed for television by the BBC, with music by David Bowie, a persona that inspired many characters in Kureishi's later work. Moore-Gilbert has argued that there is continuity between Kureishi's novel and his earlier work, as gender-role and sexual experimentation remain important avenues of liberation from the often "coercive effects of traditional discourses of gender and sexuality" (Hanif Kureishi 112-113). Indeed, in *The Buddha of Suburbia*, Kureishi explores the interconnections of race, class and sexuality, in a comic satire that nevertheless has a serious agenda: to challenge national, racial, and sexual boundaries in order to re-imagine the meaning of each. In that, *The Buddha of Suburbia* is a funny satire of the political situation, and especially race relations, in Britain, which enables one to re-think desire and sexuality.

The Buddha of Suburbia is first and foremost a Bildungsroman novel, as it narrates the psychological and moral growth of Karim as an artist and a person from youth to adulthood, and from obscurity to fame, focusing, as the story unfolds, on change. This growth is –more often than not– painful, taking the protagonist through a range of

“conflicts and dilemmas, social, sexual and political” (Moore-Gilbert 113). Kureishi is able to incorporate the dilemmas faced by the protagonist into a multifaceted identity by infusing socio-political anxieties with sexual experimentation and by changing the workings of desire, offering, in the process, a new way to navigate “belonging” in Britain. Nahem Yousaf argues that Kureishi himself perceives his work as located firmly within a British context, where establishing a British identity that incorporates ethnic and cultural differences is an ultimate aim (“The Brown Man’s Burden” 21). Indeed, Kureishi draws attention to serious social problems such as racism and issues of belonging, while “strategically deploy[ing] writerly and cinematographic techniques that consider multiple issues simultaneously that help to deconstruct hegemonic codes around subject positions through the content” (Yousaf 22). Kureishi offers a comic satire of those aspects of postcolonial British society which influence sexuality, ethnicity and identity. With London as the background, and the sexual, drug and music subcultures as a leitmotif, *The Buddha of Suburbia* functions as a multicultural account of how various forms of the affective disrupt the symbolic order of the time, while underlining the implications behind what shapes one’s identity in a postcolonial environment. Kureishi says: “If contemporary writing which emerges from oppressed groups ignores the central concerns and major conflicts of the larger society, it will automatically designate itself as minor, as a sub-genre. And it must not allow itself to be rendered invisible and marginalised in this way” (“Dirty Washing” 36).

Karim and Hanif: A Sexual Autobiography

Despite the fact that the novel is set in the 1970s and its plot ends as the Thatcher era was beginning, it was written in the 1980s, under its direct influence, and published in 1990, the year when Margaret Thatcher stepped down as Prime Minister. So reading the novel and having in mind the political context that came after the events portrayed in it, one can clearly see the first traces of a conservative, neoliberal agenda and its ensuing problems. Moore-Gilbert argues that “Kureishi’s films endorse the politics of...social movements which had their origins in the 1960s ‘counter-culture’, especially feminism, gay-rights activism and new forms of mobilisation around the issue of race” (Hanif Kureishi 90). So, *The Buddha of Suburbia*, written in the early aftermath of the Thatcher era, offers an insightful look into what led to such changes, as well as how the decade

influenced significant issues found in Kureishi's work, creating thus the context to study the interplay and the influence of the affective and the political.

As a second-generation immigrant who lives in suburban London, Karim is known as "Creamy" to his friends. The nickname is meant to be a play on the pronunciation of his name but, at the same time, the nickname refers to Karim as a product of two races: one dark and one white. Karim embarks alongside his father, Haroon, on a sexual and spatial quest from the suburbs to London, in an attempt for Karim to find himself through sexual experimentations, while Haroon attempts to re-discover his own self; both of them employ desire and sexuality to reach their "full potential as human beings" (*The Buddha of Suburbia* 13). In the process of this self-realisation quest, Karim engages in interracial and bisexual relations as he tries to defy prohibitions and limitations set by the socio-political milieu. The first lines of the novel sum up the character's uneasiness about the impossible situation of either being totally identified with the British nation or being totally excluded from it; and this is a theme repeated throughout the novel:

My name is Karim Amir, and I am an Englishman born and bred, almost. I am often considered to be a funny kind of Englishman, a new breed as it were, having emerged from two old histories, But I don't care – Englishman I am (though not proud of it), from the South London suburbs and going somewhere. Perhaps, it is the odd mixture of continents and blood, of here and there, of belonging and not, that makes me restless and easily bored (*The Buddha of Suburbia* 3).

In this opening paragraph, Karim tries to define himself three times as "almost English", "a new breed" and "Englishman... (though) not proud of it". This statement is the only part of the novel narrated in the first person, whereas the narration turns to the third person until the end of the novel. This distance put between narration and first-person narrator is the first hint of the deconstruction process evident in the novel, as it alludes to a breaking down of boundaries on a textual level. Doyle argues that this distance between "*enonce* and *enunciation* provides much of the novel's reflection about ethnicity and identity" (110). Indeed, Karim's inability – or unwillingness – to define himself provides the context of the novel, where he and the other characters of the novel fluctuate between identities and performativities. Kureishi challenges fixed identities in the novel, in that the sexual experimentation of his characters, their mobility and their oscillation between identities, enable identity and otherness to be engaged in an interplay that constitutes a challenge to the symbolic order as well as a deconstruction of fixed boundaries, in that a space is

created in which pleasure is fundamental. It is precisely through this temporary space that characters acquire a seductive charm, stemming from their indecipherability, which allows them to play out their desires and derive pleasure through them.

What is more, young Karim resembles the young Kureishi, with an English mother, a Pakistani father, and an aversion to being defined by others. In that, and given that Kureishi and Karim are both artists, the novel is a “portrait of the artist as a young man” to borrow Wilde’s words, narrating the perplexity and the discontentment that accompanies a search for identity, particularly addressing the issue of belonging. Karim, like Kureishi, embarks on a quest to discover his own self through his played out desires; I argue that by the end of the novel, Karim’s self-realisation reflects Kureishi’s own change as an author, which will be evident in his subsequent creations. As argued in the first chapter of this thesis, reading Kureishi’s texts alongside his personal development provides significant insight into a postcolonial subject performing his racialised identity in the post-imperial space of London. *The Buddha of Suburbia* is highly autobiographical and its impact, as an art form, and as a change agent, continues to influence audiences. As Kureishi says, “...the fact is, the place writers and artists hold in the public imagination exists beyond their work” (“My Ear at His Heart” 20). The shifts in the protagonist’s sexuality allow him to transgress any sort of social and political boundaries which also allude to a solution to Kureishi’s own difficulty in associating himself entirely with Britain and its colonialist history, ideas of nationhood and hegemonic discourse. So Karim’s sexual indecisiveness may be read as a carrier of possibilities as it allows him to avoid choosing between cultures, sexualities and countries. It is Karim’s pursuit of desires and the re-imagining of desire that allow him to transgress social and political boundaries as he is not bound by any sort of sexual categorisation, in that he does not claim a resolutely homosexual or heterosexual identity any more than he claims a Pakistani or a British identity. His escaping of categorisation helps Karim rethink issues such as race, sexual orientation and nationality. This is not, by any means, an easy process, as Karim is constantly put in positions where he must choose between binaries. He is, however, able to escape without taking an either/or position. As I will argue later on, his sense of not belonging anywhere, his sense of being part of England and at the same time remaining outside of it, will change by the end of the text and the way in which this change comes about is worthy of exploration.

The first moment of realisation for Karim, echoing Kureishi’s previously mentioned frustration about the 1960s’ notion of limitless pleasure, comes very early in the

novel. On his way back from work Haroon, Karim's father, tells Margaret, his British wife to come to an event at the house of Eva Kay, Charlie's mother, as he has been invited to give a speech on Oriental philosophy. She declines and Karim goes with him instead. Eva greets Haroon very warmly, a sign that something is going on or will go on between them. Bored by Haroon's lesson, Charlie and Karim go up to Charlie's room where they do drugs. While doing so, Karim sees his father and Eva having sex in the garden:

As I crawled closer there was enough moonlight for me to see that Eva was on the bench? She was pulling her kaftan up over her head. If I strained my eyes I could see her chest...Eva had only one breast. Where the other traditionally was, there was nothing, so far as I could see...Eva released her hand from his mouth. He started to laugh. The happy fucker laughed and laughed. It was the exhilaration of someone I didn't know, full of greedy pleasure and self (*The Buddha of Suburbia* 15-16).

With that feeling of sexual desire, he returns to the room where he masturbates Charlie, feeling great for providing pleasure to someone else: "My flags flew, my trumpets blew" (*The Buddha of Suburbia* 17). This kind of metaphysical experience and the feelings it creates to Karim establishes new norms of sexual behaviour and even though such a homosexual relationship would be frowned upon by society, it appears to be not only a basic step to Karim's sexual coming of age, but also a valuable process of cognition. This is a very important scene as it marks the beginning of the character's change in character. The fact that he has felt great because he pleased someone else points to a revelatory moment where the character understands that desire can be fulfilling, even if it is not directed to the self. This realisation marks the beginning of the psychological growth of the protagonist, which will lead to an open-ended subjectivity by the end of the novel.

Not only is Karim's first sexual experimentation with Charlie triggered by watching his father having sex, but he also becomes an accomplice in his father's sexual escapades as he keeps the affair a secret from his mother. This is something that drew criticism against Kureishi who was deemed a misogynist as his male characters are engaged in an alliance against a woman, which some read as a literal affront to women in general. Such criticism is unwarranted however, considering Karim's performed identities and his materialisation of his coming-of-age process, and subsequent distancing of himself from his father's ways. Indeed, Karim expresses sorrow for his mother and guilt, as he describes his father.

I felt ashamed and incomplete at the same time, as if half of me were missing, and as if I'd been colluding with my enemies. . . [Dad] was always honest about this: he preferred England in every way. Things worked; it wasn't hot; you didn't see terrible things on the street that you could do nothing about. He wasn't proud of his past, but he wasn't unproud of it either; it just existed, and there wasn't any point in fetishising it, as some liberals and Asian radicals liked to do (*The Buddha of Suburbia* 212)

Haroon thinks that he is certain about his identity, whereas Karim's indecisiveness and attraction coming from his various assumed identities through desire as he flirts with everyone, lead him down a different path. Karim's growth and his self-realisation which will be clear by the end of the novel, also reflects the development of the author himself as Kureishi believed that he created his own identity just like his characters in the novel created theirs. This process of psychological growth is what will allow him to differentiate himself from his father by the end of the novel. Undoubtedly, Karim and Haroon have an initial connection, as what triggers Karim's first sexual encounter with Charlie is the sight of his father cheating on his mother. Moreover, Haroon says to Karim, "We're growing up together, we are" (*The Buddha of Suburbia* 22). Karim also says that his dad has taught him to flirt "...with everyone I met, girls and boys alike, and I came to see charm rather than courtesy or honesty, or even decency as the primary social grace" (*The Buddha of Suburbia* 7). This is something that points to a seductive charm, as he accommodates the needs of others. He performs different identities to fulfil his desires and becomes, consequently, difficult to pin down, and therefore attractive and elusive. Thus, the pleasure Karim derives from his interaction with the people he experiments with is inextricably linked to his ever-changing identities. These identities allow him to adapt to each situation and move freely from persona to persona, increasing his chances of fulfilling his desires. The interplay of desire and identity is a leitmotiv throughout the novel, as the characters seem to derive pleasure not despite of, but, because of, their changing subjectivities which opens up a space where anything is possible. What is more, Doyle argues that Karim is seductive not only to other characters but to the reader as well, as "...our desire to know his identity can never be fully satisfied" ("The Space between Identity and Otherness" 111). Looking at the interplays of seduction, desire and identity, as well as how the characters function in the novel, the way in which they assume identities, the way in which their sexual experimentation affect their identities, as well as how the cultural space of the 1960s was relentlessly commodified, are paramount to the

argument put forward, namely that the growth of the protagonist reflects a deeper understanding of desire which transgresses the idea of “pleasure for pleasure’s sake”.

Cultural Commodification and Identity Disorder

Kureishi’s protagonists such as Karim and Haroon employ and commodify Eastern spirituality to construct and shape the diasporic subject. Eva is fascinated by Karim and Haroon alike, as not only does she have an affair with Haroon, but when she first sees Karim she treats him as something exotic: “Then, holding me at arm’s length as if I were a coat she was about to try on, she looked me all over and said, ‘Karim Amir, you are so exotic, so original! It’s such a contribution! It’s so you’” (*The Buddha of Suburbia* 9). This appeal illustrates the way in which Karim is realised into the imagination of the British, being driven and transformed according to Eva’s desires. Haroon is transformed by pretending to be a Buddhist, even though he is a Muslim, selling a false Eastern spirituality to groups of “accounting executives” (*The Buddha of Suburbia* 18), who are drawn to the alluring nature of eastern spirituality and long for an “original” exoticism and mysticism. Such an identity disorder underlines the fact that Haroon strives to imitate, to be someone else, after spending “years trying to be more of an Englishman, to be less risibly conspicuous” (*The Buddha of Suburbia* 21), he begins to find a new, “Oriental” identity, an Oriental “Other”, in order to escape boring Suburbia. Haroon’s assumed identities range from trying to be an Englishman, to his childhood identity as a Muslim immigrant, to the newfound, albeit false identity of being an Oriental guru. He is, at the same time, a fraud but also compassionate, Buddha-like and wise (Doyle 112), as his connection with Karim, enables the latter to look beyond Haroon’s behaviour: “Beneath all the Chinese bluster was Dad’s loneliness and desire for internal advancement [...] He wanted to talk of obtaining a quiet mind, of being true to yourself, of self-understanding” (*The Buddha of Suburbia* 28)

The fact that Haroon is a Muslim, who pretends to be a Buddhist, is indicative of the comic irony employed by Kureishi to critique this trend in 1970s England, which pointed to a western fascination with oriental remnants. The white audience is so captivated by Haroon in the first gathering at Eva’s house that he “seemed to know he had their attention and that they’d do as he asked” (*The Buddha of Suburbia* 13). So in a sense, Haroon has power over these people, and becomes the coloniser of bored, depressed, white

people, who long for an escape from their life's difficulties. Such a "reverse colonialism" of the mind is indicative of Kureishi's ironic disposition towards the fascination of the time with the "exotic Orient" which seemed to be returning to the British imaginary. Bart-Moore Gilbert also commented on such a reversal of power relations, arguing that Kureishi "parodies the narrative of Empire [...] and reverses the power relations embodied in colonial proselytism. Instead of Indian natives compliantly absorbing the religious wisdom of the West, the native British seek deliverance from their ersatz immigrant guru" (*Hanif Kureishi* 123). This ironic reversal of power relations is indicative of Kureishi, who seems to be critiquing not only the colonial mentality of "bringing knowledge" to a naïve East, but also the reversed situation where the naïve Western white audiences are ready to believe anything, within the spirit of the times. Such a reversal of roles is also evident in the character of Eleanor, who lives in London and is culturally cultivated and sophisticated. She is in the same play as Karim, who feels awed in her presence due to her upper middle class background in contrast to his suburban upbringing, evident in his accent. Karim, like any other male colonised subject, wants to possess the female representative of the colonisers, explaining why women such as Eleanor are attracted to him and his Asian friends: "we pursued English roses as we pursued England; by possessing these prizes, this kindness and beauty, we stared defiantly into the eye of the Empire and all its self-regard... We became part of England and yet proudly stood outside it" (*The Buddha of Suburbia* 227). So through sexual possession, the transfer of identity can be accomplished, as since the marginalised cannot be members of the elite, they want to possess someone who is (Childs 104). Haroon's object of desire, Eva, is an interior designer who longs to climb the social ladder being surrounded by artists and intellectuals: "Eva was planning her assault on London... [and] was climbing ever higher, day by day" (*The Buddha of Suburbia* 23). Eva is immersed in the culture of the time as her life is filled with "mysticism, sexual promise, clever people and drugs" (*The Buddha of Suburbia* 15), which conspicuously demonstrates a void she is trying to fill. She plays an important role in Haroon's various performativities, as she persuaded him to wear his "Nehru jacket, collarless and buttoned up to the throat, like a Beatle jacket" (*The Buddha of Suburbia* 282).

It would be interesting here to note that the character of Jamila functions, on a textual level, as the opposite of Karim. Indeed, more often than not, as with the case of Jamila in *Buddha*, Kureishi situates a contrapuntal character opposite the primary narrator or focaliser (such as Karim), to show the author's willingness to test the purported

radicalism of so-called subversive sexual behaviour and its propensity to be commodified by the very socio-economic system it attempted to oppose. Indeed, as one looks into Jamila's character, one understands the complexity of her character afforded to her through her subversive sexual behaviour and her fulfilled desires, which seemingly allows her to escape the limitations of the system. Jamila is Karim's friend, a political activist and the victim of an arranged marriage. She, too, enjoys a life of fulfilled desire, as she casually engages in sex –not only with Karim– but with other men and women too. Her behaviour marks a change in the social ethos of the time as she is not limited by any boundaries; she even manages to steer through her arranged marriage with Changez, refusing to consummate their marriage. So in this case, the lack of sex is equally as empowering as the practice of it. Changez, her arranged husband, who is also physically disabled, starts visiting a Japanese prostitute and does not press Jamila anymore for sex, thus adapting to the situation. Her journey of self-awareness is torn between following the strict traditions of her conservative Muslim family and being an educated, radical feminist, very much carrying the spirit of the time. Jamila, who mentions that she wants to be Simone de Beauvoir, juggles various identities in the novel as well, as she is an activist, a mother and a lover. One should note here that, in true Kureishi form, there are no easy answers as far as the fate of the character is concerned. For some critics, such as Ranasinha, Jamila is the prime example for Kureishi's maltreatment of female characters, as she is forced into an arranged marriage and she seems, by the end of the novel, to be a failure as she is not successful or happy, as it seems. In that sense, Jamila is the contrapuntal character of Karim who on first glance seems to have completed his quest for self-awareness and, Ranasinha is right in criticising Kureishi for the manifestations of female sexuality in his work, as it seems that his female characters do not have the same chances as the male ones. This point will become clearer in my examination of Kureishi's memoir, where the origins of the author's manifestation of female and male sexuality will be analysed, based on the author's relationship with the female and male members of his family, especially his mother, his father and his uncle. On the other hand though, one cannot but note that, even though Jamila does not have the same chances as the male characters in the novel, she could also be read as a successful character. By the end of the novel and despite, or because of her seemingly free nature, Jamila ends up with a baby, sharing a house with many people, and in a lesbian relationship. Her complex situation makes it difficult for the reader to decide whether or not she is where she wants to be, and the answer might be somewhere in between. It seems though, that she has managed to

escape the constraints of her arranged marriage and be a subversive character in that she has a child out of wedlock and is engaged in a lesbian relationship; in that, she is as radical as any male character in the novel, like Charlie. Still, one must admit that the exploration of female sexuality is not as prominent as male sexuality in *The Buddha* or in any work by Kureishi for that matter, which is something that will feature much more prominently in his 2004 memoir, *My Ear at His Heart*.

Of course, it is not only the female characters that are in search of identity in the novel. Indeed, just like Haroon and Karim, Charlie also transforms to someone else, in an attempt to appeal, and harvest both sexual and material success (Doyle 112). As characters transform into “Others” in the novel, they create a space of possibilities as they include what fixed notions of identity, by definition, exclude. This inclusion of the repressed element is what enables the seductive charm of these characters which leads to pleasure and accomplishment, each in his or her own way: Charlie becomes a punk superstar, Haroon a successful guru and Karim an actor. Charlie also experiments with his identity, first by becoming a singer at school and then by becoming a punk musician, wearing a slashed leather jacket and trousers with pins and needles. His music begins to gain popularity and he eventually changes his name to Charlie Zero and moves to New York as he becomes a punk superstar. Charlie is the object of Karim’s desire for most of the book although for a period this fixation is transferred to Eleanor, another actor. Both represent an ideal for Karim, as both are quintessentially English. Charlie is, as after attending a concert, mesmerised by punk music and excitedly argues in favour of change:

“That’s it, that’s it,” he said as we strolled. ... “They’re the fucking future.”

“Yeah, maybe, but we can’t follow them,” I said casually.

“Why not?”

“Obviously we can’t wear rubber and safety-pins and all that. What would we look like?”

“Sure, Charlie”.

“Why not, Karim? Why not, man?”

“It’s not us”.

“We got to change. What are you saying? We shouldn’t keep up? That suburban boys like us always know where it’s at?”

“It would be artificial,” I said, “We’re not like them. We don’t hate the way they do. We’ve got no reason to. We’re not from the estates. We haven’t been through what they have”

He turned on me with one of his nastiest looks.

“You are not going anywhere, Karim” (*The Buddha of Suburbia* 131).

Charlie seems to have grasped the power of movement and transformation in the road for success, starting from the change of names. Of course, it has to be argued that Charlie’s fixation on success underlines the seductive nature of money and fame. The irony is evident as Charlie says to Karim: “You are not going anywhere, Karim. You’re not doing anything with your life because as usual you’re facing in the wrong direction and going the wrong way” (*The Buddha of Suburbia* 132).

Ironically, the course of the novel will prove Charlie wrong. After Charlie moves to New York and Karim briefly joins him, he returns to England as Charlie is absorbed in the vortex of celebrity life. Charlie sells himself for fame, “selling Englishness” (*The Buddha of Suburbia* 245). Charlie’s “selling of” of himself, hints at the beginning of an era where Englishness became a commodity, more so on the other side of the Atlantic where Americans were drawn to the glorious, colonial past of Britain, a trend that would boost the Raj Revival series of films a few years later. Charlie sells his Englishness on the other side of the Atlantic, in the belief that “It’s only by pushing ourselves, the limits that we learn about ourselves. That’s where I’m going, to the edge. Look at Kerouac and all those guys” (*The Buddha of Suburbia* 252). The irony lies in the fact that Charlie is commodifying an aspect of himself which he tried very hard to eliminate in high school: “I walked down the street, laughing, amused that here in America, Charlie had acquired his Cockney accent, when my first memory of him at school was that he’d cried after being mocked by the stinking Gypsy kids for talking so posh...He was selling Englishness, and getting a lot of money for it” (*The Buddha of Suburbia* 247). Thus, it seems that identities can be commodified very easily, as characters such as Charlie seem to be doing everything in their power to rise to fame, while Karim has also learnt to speak with an Indian accent for his play. Charlie, however, desperately needs Karim to reflect his own (Charlie’s) success. Karim states: “He liked having me there as a witness, I suspected...It was as if, without me to celebrate it all, Charlie’s progress had little meaning. In other words, I was a full-length mirror, but a mirror that could remember” (*The Buddha of Suburbia* 250-251). When Karim sees Charlie, once his idol, turning his identities into a commodity, there is a pronounced realisation on Karim’s part. Karim decides to leave Charlie and New York and

returns to London. Looking back, Karim is disgusted by Charlie's behaviour and extreme experimentation with sadomasochism and drugs, which, Karim sees as having gone too far: "It wasn't Charlie: It was a body with a sack over its head, half of humanity gone, ready for execution" (*The Buddha of Suburbia* 254).

Prior to this realisation and in order to interact with all these characters, Karim's quest primarily involves movement between London and the suburbs. Such movements, on the one hand, enable Karim's interaction with the characters and on the other hand, reflect the movements and changes in his identity. Such spatial and cultural mobility is not at all easy. The range of social, sexual and political conflicts he goes through are reflected not only in his interaction with the and the aftermath of these dialectical processes, but also in his uneasiness and unwillingness to settle into, or settle with, one cultural space, be it the suburbs or the city. It is precisely through this constant movement between spaces and the simultaneous sexual escapades with the characters inhabiting such spaces that Karim's growth comes about, as out of chaos comes order.

Sex and the City: Mobility of Characters

By the end of the novel, Karim realises his impossible position as an artist. I will argue that although Karim acquires a fragmented identity, this can, nevertheless, be read in a positive light, in that it entails multiplicity and undecidability, unravelling the problematic nature of monolithic identities. What leads to such a sense of identity is the displacement and mobility of Karim to and from the cultural landscapes that are the suburbs and the city. His physical mobility, from the suburbs to the city as well as his mobility in assuming identities, creates a space that can be filled by the subject through desire. It is precisely amidst the clashes and disorder of this space that Kureishi puts forward his sense of comic irony within the social world he evokes. It seems that such a fragmented space is no longer "abnormal", nor does it carry a negative meaning. It has, rather, become a kind of cultural norm, entailing multiplicity of meaning and possibilities. Such a fragmented space is evident in the movement of the characters in *The Buddha of Suburbia* through the cultural spaces that are the suburbs and the city and the cultural connections they entail. Karim's longing for movement is clear from the beginning of the novel, as he states that he was asking for trouble, "...any kind of movement, action and sexual interest I could find, perhaps because things were so gloomy, so slow and heavy, in our family, I don't know why" (*The Buddha of Suburbia* 3). Such movement, however, is

not limited to Karim. Many characters in the novel change houses (e.g., Charlie), accents (e.g., Charlie, the characters in Pyke's play) and appearances, all of which challenge a fixed identity of Englishness, and of class, and point to a social and sexual mobility, based on the fluidity of desire. The novel, thus, participates in discussions of what it means to be British. Jamel Oubechou argues that "These constant changes point to the volatile nature of the British urban and modern identity in the 60s" (102). Adding to this point is of course Karim's fluid sexuality, because even though he sexually engages with both men and women, he does not define himself (i.e., label himself) as homosexual, bisexual or anything else, any more that he defines himself as British or Indian. Further, according to Waddick Doyle, this indecisiveness is clearly connected with sexuality as it is a part of the seductive charm of the narrator, who plays with his identity to seduce others ("The Space between Identity and Otherness" 112). Karim's identity is more about the indeterminacy of promise and possibility than about definition. It is precisely the readers' inability to pin him down as "homosexual or heterosexual, as English or Indian, as true or false that creates the pleasure, attractiveness and enticement of both the novel and the character [...]. Karim is not only seductive to various characters...but also to the reader as our desire to know his identity can never be fully satisfied" (Doyle 111). Desire is then manifested in the space created when the characters move between identity and the seductive "Otherness".

The novel is divided into two parts entitled "In the Suburbs" and "In the City". At the beginning, the reader feels for Karim in that staying in the suburbs means succumbing to imposed limits whereas leaving them to live a (sexual) dream in London seems to be liberating. Even Haroon is boring when in the suburbs, and exotic when in the city. Leaving though, is not at all an easy task, hence the painfulness seen in the various sexual disappointments of the characters and even in sexual violence. Karim's idealised view of London comes out in his thoughts when pondering whether or not to leave suburbia:

In bed, before I went to sleep, I fantasised about London and what I'd do there when the city belonged to me. There was a sound that London had. It was, I'm afraid, people in Hyde Park playing bongos with their hands; there was also the keyboard on the Doors's 'Light My Fire'. There were kids dressed in velvet cloaks who lived free lives; there were thousands of black people everywhere, so I wouldn't feel exposed; there were bookshops with racks of magazines printed without capital letters or the bourgeois disturbance of full stops; there

were shops selling all the records you could desire; there were parties where girls and boys you didn't know took you upstairs and fucked you; there were all the drugs you could use. You see, I didn't ask much of life; this was the extent of my longing. But at least my goals were clear and I knew what I wanted. I was twenty. I was ready for anything (*The Buddha of Suburbia* 121).

The cultural landscape here becomes sonically and visually vivid, while the comment on language used in magazines is a direct critique of the system, portrayed in a sort of "oppressive grammar" and its unbending rules.

It is Karim's sexual connections with the characters that allow him to start enjoying, even "owning" London: "So this was London at last, and nothing gave me more pleasure than strolling around my new possession all day" (*The Buddha of Suburbia* 126). Karim believes that the sexual metropolis of London enables him to do anything he wants: "The city blew the windows of my brain wide open...London seemed like a house with five thousand rooms, all different" (*The Buddha of Suburbia* 126). This view about London is also articulated by Kureishi in *Some Time with Stephen*, where he wrote about his love and fascination for London: "Here there is fluidity and possibilities unlimited" (23). Similarly, Karim echoes the author when he expresses his views on the city: "London, where life [is] bottomless in its temptations" (*The Buddha of Suburbia* 8). Despite his initial rejection of the suburbs, Karim's identity will include them once again, as London and the suburbs come together, informing the protagonist's growth and marking his identity as multi-layered, uneven and open-ended. On closer reflection, Kureishi's suburbs (and Karim's identity) do not necessarily seem as appalling as they did in the beginning of the novel, as they entail variety and multiplicity, which is reflected in the heterogeneity of the inhabitants and the community:

All the houses have been "done up". One had a new porch, another double-glazing, "Georgian" windows or a new door with brass fittings. Kitchens have been extended, lofts converted, walls removed, garages inserted [...] Here lived Mr Whitman, the policeman, and his young wife, Noleen; next door were a retired couple, Mr and Mrs Holub. They were socialists in exile from Czechoslovakia ... Opposite them were another retired couple, a teacher and his wife, the Gothards. An East End family of birdseed dealers, the Lovelaces, were next to them ... Further up the street lived a Fleet Street reporter, Mr Nokes,

his wife and their overweight kids, with the Scoffields – Mrs Scoffield was an architect, next door to them (*The Buddha of Suburbia* 74-75).

Karim becomes aware of this multiplicity and heterogeneity, regardless of his initial attempt to reject the suburbs as dull and boring. The remodelling of the houses reflects the “piecing together” of Karim’s identity which builds up towards the end of the novel. In that, *The Buddha of Suburbia* presents itself as a (sub)urban novel where the streets are not only dangerous but also a site of heterogeneity that permeates everything, from the social to the political. Such a reading also reflects Karim’s self-realisation by the end of the novel, as his diverse identity, as I will argue, resembles the coming together of the cultural spaces that enable Karim’s mobility and inform his character.

Moore-Gilbert has argued that such a space is “... a site in which new forms of both individual and community identity can be worked out and a space in which the dispiriting realities of ‘domestic colonialism’ together with the breakdown of traditional notions of national community, are all too manifest” (*Hanif Kureishi* 115). Karim’s indecisiveness goes hand in hand with Kureishi’s view of his work as located in a British context where “establishing a *conceptually* British identity that incorporates ethnic and cultural differences is an ultimate aim” (Yousaf 36). Moore-Gilbert, discussing the sense of optimism in *The Buddha of Suburbia*, said that it “provides a sobering perspective on the optimism expressed both in Said’s *Culture and Imperialism* and Bhabha’s *Location of Culture* about the possibilities of a new, non-conflictual and non-hierarchical inter- and intra-cultural dispensation” (*Hanif Kureishi* 205). Indeed, *The Buddha of Suburbia* celebrates optimism but it does so from a more sombre point of view, as the issues it preoccupies itself with are serious. Even though the suburbs seem to come into direct opposition with the city and the clash between them is more than evident, in the end, I argue, they come together in Karim’s consciousness and reflect his growth. The constant movement in the novel which entails possibilities and informs the protagonist’s psychological growth is also a kind of performativity, as a culturally heterogeneous phenomenon, which informs the new space that is created in Karim’s mind. Indeed, the artistic production at the time –and especially theatre and music– was largely informed by a spirit of resistance to the oppressive political agenda, and informs Karim’s artistic identity to a great extent, revealing the way in which such cultural resistance intervened in the dialectic between past and present, pertaining to issues of violence and performativity. *The Buddha of Suburbia* thus engages in an exploration of the role and possibilities of popular culture.

Performativity: A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man

One of the leitmotifs in the novel is the issue of performativity which goes on to highlight the problem of “colonised false identities, of longing for borrowed selves in a post-colonial context where recovering a dignified and authentic identity requires a constant battle with wrong perceptions, racial clichés, and imitating behaviour” (Carey 121). As an actor and as a diasporic subject, Karim performs different identities, risking commodification as he is drawn by the superficial allure of becoming famous. He is fluid and limited at the same time, but, by the end of the novel, his acquired, multifaceted identity empowers him to evade such limits. The issue of performativity goes hand in hand with the theme of identity disorder as it reflects the desire to be, or act as, someone else. Naturally, being someone else involves mimicry which, as Fanon has argued, in a colonial environment leads to violence, more often than not of a sexual nature, as dominance and exploitation –as tropes of the colonial– are transformed into rape or brutality (*White Skins, Black Masks*). It is my belief, though, that in *The Buddha of Suburbia*, Kureishi explores the issue of violence through a re-imagining of desire (as does Fanon), so that traditional systems of colonial mentality are challenged. For instance, Anwar, Haroon’s brother, is one of the characters that defend tradition. By going on a hunger strike, he forces his daughter to marry Changez, a move that could be read as an allusion to Gandhi’s anti-violence fasting practices, except that in the family, these practices turn into sheer manipulation and passive aggression. When Jamila tries to persuade her uncle Haroon to change her father’s mind, he says: “We old Indians come to like this England less and less and we return to an imagined India” (*The Buddha of Suburbia* 122). In a sentence, that (i.e., the character’s line) seems to be challenging the way in which the old generation of immigrants were sticking to the past. Anwar clearly represents the old India, tradition and familial ties: he says that Haroon has been mesmerised by the West (*The Buddha of Suburbia* 221). These traditional views function as an opposing force to the sexually charged youth, such as Karim, marking a tension between new and old generations. In the end, Anwar is one of the characters who remain unchanged, showing the rigidity of tradition and the past, as opposed to the fluidity of Karim’s new, multiple-layered identity which is enabled by the characters’ performativity. Cynthia Carey argues that *The Buddha of Suburbia* is a “rich, profane, carnivalesque novel which relentlessly challenges orthodoxy on every level” (120). Karim’s sexual experimentation and performativity enables him to challenge boundaries, more often than not referring to vulgar sexual acts:

It was unusual, I knew, the way I wanted to sleep with boys as well as girls. I liked strong bodies and the backs of boys' necks. I liked being handled by men, their fists pulling me; and I liked objects – the ends of brushes, pens, fingers – up my arse. But I liked cunts and breasts, all of women's softness, long smooth legs and the way women dressed. I felt it would be heart-breaking to have to choose one or the other, like having to decide between the Beatles and the Rolling Stones (*The Buddha of Suburbia* 55).

Such unconventional sexual acts threaten the symbolic order and violate bourgeois notions of decency, as their extravagant comic appeal overturn normative orders, which points to the pleasure of the unsettled and unsettling subjectivities. It is this carnivalesque physicality that entails a liberating force. For Karim, this experimentation points to his sexual indecisiveness which, by the end of the novel, will help him attain self-realisation.

Given the previous discussion on the way desire produces reality based on the ideas of Deleuze and Guattari, I argue that Kureishi's work can be seen as an agent of social change through the various manifestations of desire and sexuality within the social realm, to the extent that they mark a transgression of and a challenge to the orthodox epistemology of sexuality that served as the cornerstone for the creation of a postcolonial, British sense of nationhood, much like it did many centuries ago in the formation of the Empire. The abstract categories of identity and culture need to be reconsidered towards this change, as there is a need for discussion of the importance of diasporic communities and the function of the social trajectories of sexuality and desire. Indeed, one of the ways in which Kureishi manages to comically exploit the use of violence and "iconoclastically destroy old systems of orthodoxy" (Carey 121) in the novel is evident in a scene with Anwar where past and present come together through sexuality which coexists with violence. After an argument, Anwar throws a bunch of bananas at his son-in-law who, in turn, throws a carrot and hits him on the head with a vibrator, in a way reminding us of slapstick comedy. Changez has bought the sex toy for his encounters with the Japanese prostitute Shinko, but when he fights with his father-in-law in the street, he uses it as a sexual weapon:

As Anwar smacked downwards with his stick, Changez lumbered to one side...withdrew the knobbly dildo...and with a Muslim warrior shout...whacked my uncle smartly over the head with it. Uncle Anwar, who'd come from India to the Old Kent Road...could never have

guessed...that...he would be knocked unconscious by a sex-aid (*The Buddha of Suburbia* 210-211).

This mixture of sexuality and violence here is extremely interesting, as it is a complete and utter reversal of family ties and normative sexualities within the context of the South Asian diaspora in Britain. The Eastern and Western world come into contact through the sex toy, a marker for sexual desire, which was repressed in the past; so it is as if the younger generation is literally using sexuality to kill off the older one, in a battle of past and present. Within these sexual encounters in *The Buddha of Suburbia*, the question that arises is: to what extent do members of the diaspora relate both to the colonial past and contemporary Britain? Since the autobiographical nature of *The Buddha of Suburbia* is strong, it can be argued that Kureishi's own persona permeates the novel, at the same time evoking and challenging an imperial heritage. It can be argued that this battle of past and present, evident in the Anwar-Changez scene, underlines the fact that *The Buddha of Suburbia* is located amidst a site of clashes and struggles of heritage, traditions and sexualities, where the performativity of characters is a vital element to their development.

The issues of performativity and identity confusion are closely connected to the persona of David Bowie, a constant in Kureishi's work. Indeed, Kureishi was fascinated by Bowie and his lifestyle, and he thought that his music was,

...very sophisticated, and knowing – it somehow encapsulated the history of music within it...I worked with him when he did the soundtrack to *The Buddha of Suburbia* TV series. He's really fantastic and very hard-working – he'd be in the studio all through the night[...]We had lunch once and passed a building site, and all of the builders ran to the front of the site and stood there, screaming and shouting. A very strange life ("Hanif Kureishi on his Musical Tastes").

Kureishi's *Intimacy* (1998) actually includes a character modelled on David Bowie, and in *The Buddha of Suburbia*, it is Charlie Hero who exhibits the same characteristics as Bowie. Bowie, a musician whose sexuality has been manifested in different ways, also wrote the original score for the television mini-series *The Buddha of Suburbia* for the BBC. The suburbia of the title of the novel is Bromley, where Bowie grew up and consequently, the protagonists of *The Buddha of Suburbia* pay homage to this famous guru of suburban English pop numerous times. Karim, for instance, makes his father stop at the *Three Tuns* Pub in Beckenham (now called The Rat and Parrot), where Bowie's career actually began ("Celebrating David Bowie"). It is not surprising, then, that Bowie's music is present

throughout the novel. Bowie, much like the Kureishi and his characters, is notorious for challenging established order, with his performativity spanning decades:

He dressed as a woman! It was really the introduction of this idea that you could make yourself up, that identities weren't fixed. That you weren't born a white working-class boy, or you weren't born a Paki, or a Scotsman or whatever. And Bowie blew all that up. He said you can do that, you can pretend to be that; identity is just a masquerade. The Bowie-like notion that you could make yourself seemed to me to be really freeing. In a way, liking Bowie was like being a Muslim, in that you have a new identity, a new identification. If you say you're a Muslim then you identify with a group and you feel strong. For me, pop was the ideology that I followed and that I loved. And not only is pop haunting and wonderful, but luckily it didn't involve killing people. It liberated me from the condition I was in, which was being a Paki on the streets of South London ("A Life Laid Bare").

Even though Charlie is the character modelled on Bowie, the latter's indecisiveness and his performativity on stage, also point to Karim as an artist in the novel. As an actor, he is asked to play Mowgli in a theatrical adaptation of Kipling's *Jungle Book*. Having been told by Pyke that his destiny is "to be a half-caste in England" (*The Buddha of Suburbia* 141) earlier on, Shadwell, the director of the play forces him to smear paint on his face and imitate an Indian accent in order to play Mowgli. This is a forceful attribution of age-old characteristics of an exotic Orient which are being reinstated in the present, even if it is for a theatrical play. In order to be accepted as an actor, Karim must visibly and audibly meet the criteria of an audience deeply drawn into stereotypes: "It turned out that on stage I would wear a loin-cloth and brown make up, so that I resembled a turd in a bikini bottom....'Please don't put this on me', I said. 'Got to...be a big boy'. And she covered me from head to toe in...brown muck" (*The Buddha of Suburbia* 146).

In playing Mowgli and just like the fictional character, Karim negotiates between identities and cultural identifications. Indeed, both characters are torn between "conformity to moral law and the promptings of nature" (Moore-Gilbert 125). The same happens regarding Karim's accent:

"A word about the accent Karim. I think it should be an authentic accent".

"What do you mean, authentic?"

"Where was our Mowgli born?"

“India”.

“Yes. Not Orpington. What accents do they have in India?”

“Indian accents”.

“Ten out of ten”.

“No Jeremy. Please no”.

“Karim you have been cast for authenticity and not experience” (*The Buddha of Suburbia* 147).

Authenticity is interpreted as what the audience believes is true. The director of *Mowgli*, Jeremy Shadwell, says to Karim: “Everyone looks at you, I’m sure, and thinks: an Indian boy, how exotic, how interesting, what stories of aunties and elephants we’ll hear from him” (*The Buddha of Suburbia* 141). Moreover, Pyke’s theory of acting was that “to be someone else successfully you must be yourself” (*The Buddha of Suburbia* 220). Karim is forcefully transformed into an exotic commodity and given an identity according to how the West expects him to be. Schoene argues that Pyke creates the “ethnic subject whose emancipation he purports to facilitate[...]The members of his Pyke’s theatre group fail to register Karim’s actual multitude of intrinsic differences” (“The Herald of Hybridity” 123). Karim is both a social actor and an actor on stage and he oscillates between assumed identities, performing various roles both in society and on stage. These performances lead Karim through his self-discovery quest and point to the end of the novel where he will experience his self-realisation moment. The better an actor is at “playing” these different personas, the better an actor he is considered to be. Therefore, Karim’s different performative actions adhere not so much to a multiplicity of selves but to a sense of malleability pertaining to a variety of social milieus, in which he could play whichever part was expected of him.

Karim’s forced performativity, to be like Western audiences expect him to be, I argue, reflects an identity confusion shared by many second-generation immigrants, pertaining to their awkward, if not impossible, position of having to choose fixed identities or cultures. Such a seemingly impossible position is shared by Kureishi as well, and its realisation comes by the end of the novel through Karim’s process of self-realisation. Violence and performativity are integral and necessary elements in Karim’s postcolonial identity, as they seem to interact and function as dynamic elements, being integrated into Karim’s identity, paradoxically working as “catalysts in a process of liberation or empowerment of the individual” (Carey 122). Through the re-imagining of desire, the sexual experimentation of his characters and his employment of irony, Kureishi is able to

challenge prevailing systems of authority, accepting Karim's (and his own) identity confusion. Indeed, it was artistic production that enabled Kureishi to escape the burden of being defined by others:

What I was interested in was the idea that other people have about you and what that does to you and what you can do to escape their definition. The way in which I did it was to write. You would walk down the street and people saw you as a Paki...*You exist under their description.* The way to make you own life is to go home, sit down and to begin to write and I called it to write back...*I began to speak, I found my own voice, I began to create my own identity. The characters in The Buddha of Suburbia are making themselves, creating identities,* I guess, in the way *I was trying to make myself by using words and writing books and stories* (World Book Club, emphasis added).

Thus, just as Kureishi began to create his own identity through artistic production, so does Karim's identity, in the end, integrate violence, performativity, displacement and desire, creating an unsettled subjectivity that nevertheless pertains to multiplicity and heterogeneity. His career as an actor allows for numerous changes and possibilities, as all personalities and identities are open for exploration and interpretation. Of course, the fact that he is an actor also entails a danger of commodification, as he is asked to sell his "authenticity", as in the case with Mowgli. Indeed, Tracey, a black woman in the cast of *The Jungle Book*, accuses him of being "what white people already think of us" (*The Buddha of Suburbia*, 180). On the contrary though, Karim tries to be successful in all new roles, whether in life or on stage, which is something that allows him to discover and occupy temporal positions. Of course, Karim does realise the danger of "selling out", after seeing Charlie in New York "selling his Englishness", which, for the first time in his life, forces Karim to face a moral dilemma. After a performance, Karim sees his mother:

I was leaving, I was getting out, when Mum came up to me. She smiled and I kissed her. 'I love you so much', she said.

'Wasn't I good, eh, Mum?'

'You weren't in a loin-cloth as usual', she said. 'At least they let you wear your own clothes. But you're not an Indian. You've never been to India. You'd get diarrhoea the minute you stepped off that plane, I know you would'

‘Why don’t you say it a bit louder’, I said. ‘Aren’t I part Indian?’

‘What about me?’ Mum said. ‘Who gave birth to you? You’re an Englishman, I’m glad to say.’

‘I don’t care,’ I said. ‘It’s a job’

‘Don’t say that,’ she said. ‘Be what you are’ (*The Buddha of Suburbia* 232)

Even though Karim tries to do his job right, being an artist is not “just a job”; it is more complex than that, as it is the artist’s goal to deconstruct this commodity. He is aware of his ambiguity as an actor and he starts feeling guilty for modelling his character on Changez, which entails a commodification of his culture. This artistic realisation comes at the end of the novel, as Karim finally faces his moral dilemma. As he accepts the role for another Asian in a soap opera, he says that the show would be watched by millions, and he would “be recognized all over the country” (*The Buddha of Suburbia* 259). His fame, however, will come with a price. In the beginning, he admits, he was driven by desire and desire alone. Karim’s feelings of guilt for the first time, not only towards others but towards himself, indicate signs of growth:

If I defied Changez, if I started work on a character based on him, if I used the bastard, it meant that I was untrustworthy, a liar. But if I didn’t use him it meant I had fuck-all to take to the group after the ‘me-as-Anwar’ fiasco. As I sat there I began to recognize that this was one of the first times in my life I’d been aware of having a moral dilemma. Before, I’d done exactly what I wanted; desire was my guide and I was inhibited by nothing but fear. But now, at the beginning of my twenties, something was growing in me. Just as my body had changed at puberty, now I was developing a sense of guilt, a sense not only of how I appeared to others, but of how I appeared to myself, especially in violating self-imposed restrictions. Perhaps no one would know I’d based my character in the play on Changez; perhaps, later, Changez himself wouldn’t mind, would be flattered. But I would always know what I had done, that I had chosen to be a liar, to deceive a friend, to use someone. What should I do? I had no idea. I ran over it again and again and could find no way out (*The Buddha of Suburbia* 186-187).

Ironically, Karim finds true meaning through his performativity in a fake world and a staged scene, which of course also includes a danger of succumbing to the allure of commodification. Karim is torn between the “selling out” of himself and his culture and the artistic choices he needs to make. As an artist who performs *Changez*, he is ambiguous, as he commodifies him and his culture for market value and at the same time he has a moral obligation towards the character he is playing as well as toward his own self. Given that Karim is Kureishi’s literary projection in that he is Hanif as a young artist growing up in the 1970s, it is safe to say that Kureishi himself was caught between the allure of commodity and the truth of the artist. Indeed, in an interview to Bart Moore-Gilbert, he says that even though ethnicity can become a commodity, it can also carry a positive meaning as it can become a fruitful cultural interchange: “Ethnicity is a commodity which is bought and sold, but you could also say in a way that it’s cultural interchange. Like Picasso taking African masks and making something else with them. You wouldn’t only say that he was exploiting Africa for images. This is how culture works” (“London in Hanif Kureishi’s Films” 11). Both Karim and Hanif come to the realisation that the artist is caught in an impossible position, torn as he is between his artistic truth which is to undermine commodification and the allure of the latter. Such an artistic realisation is what characterises Karim’s self-realisation process by the end of the novel and Kureishi’s own development as a writer, opening up the way for his later work.

End of an era

As Eva and Haroon announce their wedding, Margaret Thatcher gives her inaugural speech (after her election victory in 1979). The looming political change evident throughout the novel comes officially in the announcement of the victory of the Conservatives, marking the beginning of the Thatcher era. Haroon’s quest seems to have brought him satisfaction and a sense of completeness as he is with the woman he wants. But, the positive nature of this relationship is challenged in the end. Despite his wedding, it is not certain that Haroon will be happy. Karim thinks: “Did he love her? I wasn’t sure...Eva doesn’t look after me now. She’s too busy. I’ll never get used to this new woman business. Sometimes I hate her. I know I should say it. I can’t bear her near me, but hate it when she’s not here” (*The Buddha of Suburbia* 262, 266). Eva’s status as a lover and the object of love for Haroon is questioned by Karim, who understands the problems

of their relationship. What is more, the physical features of the ageing Haroon are described as unstable, reflecting the uneven and unpredictable relationship between father and son: “His flesh was heavy, marked, and fatty now, the upper half of his face composed of flaccid pouches sewn together under the eyes” (*The Buddha of Suburbia* 280).

The ending of the book is as complex as the protagonist’s identity. Positive feelings are mixed with negative ones, as Karim is trying to come to terms with his sense of belonging. Karim’s sense of not belonging anywhere diminishes by the end of the text, in London: “And so I sat in the centre of this old city that I loved, which itself sat at the bottom of a tiny island. I was surrounded by people I loved, and I felt happy and miserable at the same time. I thought what a mess everything had been, but that it wouldn’t always be that way” (*The Buddha of Suburbia* 284). There is both happiness and misery in this statement but hope is created for the future. This open-endedness of the novel allows for a number of interpretations regarding the protagonist’s disposition. On the one hand, the text seems to resist the imposition of an ordered and happy ending, where everything falls into place, as Karim says that he feels miserable. On the other hand, it cannot be argued that Karim has simply failed in his quest. He is just happy in that he does not have to choose one way or another. In fact, the textual complexity evident in the open-endedness of the novel alludes to the complexity of identities as well. Karim is not someone who can fit in an established order; rather, the identity he acquires constitutes a never-ending process. This kind of fragmentation is reflected in the space of London he currently occupies: “I walked around Central London and saw that the town was being ripped apart; the rotten has been replaced by the new, and the new was ugly [...] The ugliness was in the people too. Londoners seem to hate each other” (*The Buddha of Suburbia* 258). Karim’s identity is indeed a process, one that is made up from notions, connections and initiatives. This is evident in his re-imagined sense of desire which now includes love: “One idea pulled another behind it, like conjuror’s handkerchiefs. I uncovered notions, connections, initiatives I didn’t know were present in my mind [...] I saw that creation was an accretive process which couldn’t be hurried, and which involved patience and, primarily, love” (*The Buddha of Suburbia* 217). Hall argued that identities are “never completed, never finished [...] they are always as subjectivity itself is, in process” (“Old and New Identities 41). If Karim’s identity is in process, then, and all of these notions, connections and initiatives create a fragmented character, in that light, fragmentation should be seen in a positive way, one that includes a coming together of everything that has defined him as a character, as well as a moving on, a dynamic—not a completion.

The ending is, in essence, a non-ending, as Karim exists through the tensions between the cultural spaces of the suburbs, London and New York, realising his impossible position as an artist. Despite his mobility to and from these places, he has not managed to find a stable centre as there does not seem to be one. Having reached what he thought was the centre, both spatially and socially, which has been his desire all along, Doyle argues, Karim discovers that, actually, there is no centre. It was his “desire, this *telos* which gave him an identity in his own narrative. It was this desire which gave the centre consistency and reality. With this fulfilment, Karim begins to detach himself from the desiring subject which has provided the propulsive force to the story” (117). Kureishi has realised too, that desire is what gave him his own centre, reality and coherence, as he understands the impossibility of being an artist and the fact that just as there is no centre, there is no solution to this impossibility. However, such a position does entail challenge, which he gladly takes on in his subsequent work.

However, the journey has been worth the effort: “I could think about the past and what I’d been through as I’d struggled to locate myself and learn what the heart is” (*The Buddha of Suburbia* 284). Such a reading shows that there is not one centre, one perspective, one way of looking at people, nor is there a fixed sense of identity, but rather, a multiplicity of meanings. This change in Karim and the inability to pin him down is, indeed, among the best achievements of Kureishi. Berthold Schoene argues that the protagonist becomes a “radically deconstructive presence in a world obsessed with clear-cut definitions of cultural or ethnic identity” (“Herald of Hybridity 17). Such a deconstructive presence, evident through his mobility, his performances and his artistic potential, marks a multiple Karim, hailing from two different worlds, two different cultures, two different spaces, and this presence signifies someone who is content with this multiplicity. He does not acquire a “pure” identity of any sorts, nor is his contradiction resolved. What we are left with is a continuous movement of desire “between identity and otherness which can be exploited to seduce” (Doyle 112). He is, in fact, re-invented into a subject carrying a multiplicity of meanings, which does not necessarily imply anarchy. This is also something that reflects on the novel and the author itself, as Kureishi refuses to provide his readers with easy answers pertaining to questions of belonging. What he does, instead, is to bring into existence, through Karim, a narrative that challenges established and traditional notions of order, both on a textual and a cultural level. Karim’s displaced self manages to escape the either/or position and he does not fit decisively into one or the other culture (Cacquearay 178). He understands that if he wanted “an additional

personality bonus [of an Asian past], [he] would have to create it" (*The Buddha of Suburbia* 212-213). So Karim frustrates social categorisation defined by nationality, race, religion or sexual orientation. By the end, he realises that the identity that best suits him, providing him –at the same time –with freedom, is that of a process in constant movement. He is, indeed, a “herald of hybridity [...] a carrier of cultural potential based on intercommunal negotiation [and] individual being-in-flux” (Schoene 17-18). Karim’s identity is continuously changing in the novel and the open-endedness of the ending suggests that Karim’s identity will undergo further changes. In fact, Karim comes to terms with the notion that there is no ending to his journey, no clear-cut solution to his moral dilemmas, nor an easy answer to his impossible position.

The deconstruction of a “stable” sense of identity and its synthetic reconfiguration through his mobility and his sexual experimentations is reflected in Karim’s newfound sense of desire that has informed such a revelation, as it is now associated with feelings. When he buys his family dinner, he thinks: “I began to enjoy my own generosity... I felt the pleasure of pleasing others” (*The Buddha of Suburbia* 283). This is the end of a process we also saw earlier in the novel, in his relationship with Eleanor, when, for the first time, he feels: “I’d never had such a strong emotional and physical feeling before” (*The Buddha of Suburbia* 187). Sex becomes emotional for the first time as opposed to a “pleasure for pleasure’s sake” approach. There is no easy place in the protagonist’s quest, but it is certain that he has learned to locate himself amidst a site of clashes pertaining to identity, spatial and cultural mobility. In that sense, the end of *The Buddha of Suburbia* reflects the discovery of a self-knowledge based on the fact that desire does not consume characters but, rather, informs their decisions. *The Buddha of Suburbia* is the peak of Kureishi’s early period and his almost obsessive preoccupation with race.

At the same time, desire is re-imagined in a way that reflects the more inward Kureishi, a trait which grows more obvious in his subsequent work. At the end of the novel, Karim’s self-realisation, as well as his artistic realisation, true to the Bildungsroman genre, reflects Kureishi’s own development as a writer, and the realisation of the impossible position artists find themselves in, in that they cannot accommodate the fetishisation of commodity and their artistic obligation to deconstruct it. Indeed, as Givanni has argued, the links between the artists and their works within the Asian diaspora category are, more often than not, fragile (Givanni 2). This realisation points to the change of theme evident in Kureishi’s later work. Indeed, *The Black Album* (1995) marks the start of a thematic shift towards issues such as love and familial relationships. This shift will be

made even clearer in his short story, *My Son the Fanatic* (1994), which was made into a film in 1997, with its preoccupation with Muslim fundamentalism and father-son issues. Similarly, *Intimacy* (1998) is regarded as one of the best “male testimonials” about mid-life masculinity and its often accompanying discontentment. Such a change in Kureishi’s work, I argue, comes as the natural outcome of a reading of the re-imagining of desire in *The Buddha of Suburbia* pertaining to a cultural critique of the pre-Thatcher years. His next work leads us to the post-Thatcher years, so this retrospective analysis of what preceded the change and the unravelling of the implications behind issues such as the commodification of cultural artefacts of the 1960s that led to Thatcher, also reflects on a critical realisation on behalf of Kureishi as a novelist. Indeed, he presents us with a conundrum as, much like Karim in the novel, we do not know where this kind of sexual experimentation might lead us. By definition, desire and sexuality do not present solutions; they open up imaginative possibilities. They are, however, also liable to commodification, as the characters in *The Buddha of Suburbia* show. Such a moving away from Kureishi’s earlier exploration of desire and sexuality and the realisation that their interaction is more complex than seemed so initially drove the author to different paths, which, consequently, drew negative criticism. Some critics went as far as to lament Kureishi’s “decline” as a writer (Sandhu 183). The following chapters examine Kureishi’s most important, post-1990 work, by analysing what he presents as significant issues and their socio-political trajectories, and by continuing to scrutinise Kureishi’s treatment of desire and sexuality.

Chapter V

Sexuality and Religion: Kureishi's Later Work

The Buddha of Suburbia was published in 1990, the year Margaret Thatcher stepped down as Prime Minister, ending an 11-year administration. At the same time, it appeared Britain was also leaving the troubled 1980s behind and it seemed to be moving toward a multicultural, more tolerant and therefore more hopeful future. Predictably, cultural works directly opposing the previous administration changed their focus and Hanif Kureishi, whose earlier work thrived on criticising the political strictness of the Thatcherite years, followed suit. The self-realisation of the impossible position of the artist by Karim and Kureishi, as well as the realisation that desire does not present solutions by definition, even though it can open up imaginative possibilities, made Kureishi change his focus and explore sexuality in a different way in his later work. This re-imagining of sexuality points to a different examination of the issue of race, one seen through an increasing awareness pertaining to religious violence in Islamic fundamentalism, as the author's thematics and scope changed. Such a preoccupation points to a re-thinking of the diasporic experience in Britain as well as to what constitutes "British identity", which helps us understand the shifts in individual subjectivity apropos collective consciousness, which followed the political change in 1990s Britain. Kureishi's shift of focus, however, did not please certain critics, such as Mahmood Jamal, who claimed that given the lack of political conflict to spur him on, Kureishi's later work did not have the linguistic brilliance found in *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985) and *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990), challenging his status as a predominantly political writer at the same time. On the contrary, I argue that Kureishi still puts social and political issues under scrutiny through the manifestations of desire in the social sphere. Indeed, Kureishi engages with new issues, examining new complexities that have emerged such as religious violence through the manifestation of liberated sexuality in his characters, which clashes with the sexual abstinence and repressed sexuality that Islamic fundamentalism advocates. This interaction of sexuality and religious violence in the texts presents itself in a complex manner and, as Massumi argues, we need to "rethink body, subjectivity, and social change in terms of movement, affect, force, and violence" (66). I examine the interaction of the two, given that there is no easy solution to the dilemma faced by Kureishi's characters in the two texts, namely *My Son the Fanatic* (1994) and *The Black Album* (1995). In unravelling the complexities behind the

interaction of the two, I argue that given the breaking down of the symbolic order that was the Thatcher administration in the 1980s, Kureishi's later work is more preoccupied with a supra-racial stance towards identity politics, whose complexity is revealed through the aftermath of this interaction between sexuality and religious fundamentalism. To the extent that a novel is a perspective that narrates real-life experiences, then the need to revisit the implications behind this process, as well as his characters' post-racial "normalities", is more imperative than ever.

Indeed, in Kureishi's later work, the issue of identity is approached as a polycultural and complex entity that moves beyond race, even though one should keep in mind that Kureishi is still a racialised subject working in post-imperial London. Insofar as imagination can function as a medium of learning and emotional growth and given that the religious violence Britain experienced in the mid-2000s was carried out by British Muslims, one could say that Kureishi's call for political action through the novel in his later work points to what John McLeod has termed "a contemporary black writing" that no longer pertains exclusively to race. On the contrary, I follow John McLeod here, who has argued that the articulation of the nation is distinctly polycultural, and the affective and political concerns of a particular racial community, such as the British South Asian diaspora, apply to all British subjects ("Extra Dimensions, New Routines"). Kureishi's preoccupation with themes such as Islamic fundamentalism might not be translated into "better work" and might be deemed as less "revolutionary", as his critics have argued, but that does not diminish the importance of his work. The apparent shift from his earlier, explicitly radical, period does not mean that the nature of Kureishi's work became less relevant to social issues or issues of belonging. Based on what Bart Moore-Gilbert has coined as the "third way out", which entails a mode of belonging for the members of the South Asian diaspora to avoid the impossible binarism of either being assimilated into British society or being totally disidentified from it, the way sexuality is manifested in his later work, offers an alternative to this otherwise impossible situation.

Violence and Sexuality in *My Son the Fanatic* (1997)

This chapter begins the examination of Kureishi's later period, focusing on his short story, *My Son the Fanatic*, published in 1994 and made into a film in 1997, as well as the novel *The Black Album* (1995). Apart from his development as a writer, which was closely connected to the political ethos of the time, what urged Kureishi's change of focus

in his later career was the Rushdie Affair, the fatwa against Salman Rushdie who was a close friend of the author. That triggered Kureishi to write *The Black Album* focusing on Islamic fundamentalism:

It changed the direction of my writing. Unlike Salman, I had never taken a real interest in Islam. I come from a Muslim family. But they were middle-class – intellectuals, journalists, writers– very anti-clerical. I was an atheist, like Salman, like many Asians of our generation were. I was interested in race, in identity, in mixture, but never in Islam. The fatwa changed all that. I started researching fundamentalism. I started visiting mosques, talking to Islamists (Malik).

What he found amazed him. He could not understand why these people, born and raised in the West, hated their country so much. Such youth, he reasoned, had “everything” and race seemed to no longer be the main identification for identity formation:

It seemed to me that these younger kids would be interested in what I was interested in: bhangra music, pop culture, all that stuff. But they had completely rejected all of that, and I was really shocked, because those kids were as English as me. They were born and raised in England, yet they rejected the West. They hated it. Boys from Birmingham were burning books by Muslim writers who were making fun of Islam. This wasn't some ancient tradition. I mean, there are all kinds of liberal ideas in the Muslim tradition, anyway. Pretending that this fundamentalism was the only Islam was definitely a modern thing. A kind of repossession of Islam (“A Bang and a Whimper” 127-128).

Moreover, in an interview to Mick Brown, he expresses his disgust at what he found, labelling the people there as:

...fascists. Vile. Horrible. You'd want to have a bath afterwards. And the hatred of the West, unspeakable. I mean I hated the West, too, I hated imperialism and all the bad things. But this was a vicious hatred and a deep feeling of violence that was unspeakable. And it's an attack on everything I love – liberal values, free speech, the whole thing (“A Life Laid Bare”).

It is understandable then, that this more concerned Kureishi, as far as religion is concerned, started considering issues that would possibly have a tremendous effect on British society in the future. Such strong feelings created by his research, then, informed his later work. Kureishi knew that touching upon religious issues was not at all an easy undertaking, but it

was a battle he was prepared to fight. Indeed, he believed that his examination of fundamentalism in Britain would create tension, but it was an argument worth having. In an interview with MacGabe, he says: “I don’t like fundamentalists, and fundamentalists don’t like writers. So you know, there is going to be a kind of animosity between us from the start. But it’s an argument worth having and it’s worth engaging with the fundamentalists. And I would want them to engage with me too. But it’s difficult. But I try” (“Hanif Kureishi on London”).

Such a preoccupation with the contemporary realities of Britain in the 1990s, led Bart Moore-Gilbert to argue that Kureishi’s work can be located particularly within “the condition of England” genre (*Hanif Kureishi* 110). Indeed, both *My Son the Fanatic* and *The Black Album* offer a new perspective on the South Asian diaspora in Britain, as they examine a part of the diaspora hitherto hidden: the rise of religious fundamentalism, which, in 2005, would culminate in the 7/7 bombings in London. Kureishi has always been interested in the relationship between the real nature of people and their ideologies, cultural, political or religious, which are props in the identity game, as they all require a measure of conformity. Fundamentalism, with its narrow, monocultural worldview, is nothing if not an extreme ideology. Kureishi looked into it from a political perspective, as he thought that “Islam is rather like Thatcherism. It’s an intoxicating force to test yourself against” (“Rebel, Rebel”, qtd in Eberstadt 118). This goes on to testify to the fact that Kureishi shifted his focus after the loss of the political conflict of the 1980s which inspired him and informed his work, towards this new order that was created in the post-Thatcherite years, contextualised by religion. In that, a new space was created, in which conflicts were still created and Kureishi manifested sexuality in a way so as to compensate for the limiting perspective of Islamic fundamentalism. It is important to note, however, that Kureishi’s critique was not directed at religions in general. Rather, he was more preoccupied with the extreme version of religions, which affected the identity formation process in Britain. Indeed, even though he believes that religions are, in reality, illusions, he recognises at the same time their importance:

You can’t ask people to give up their religion; that would be absurd. Religions may be illusions, but these are important and profound illusions. But they will modify as they come into contact with other ideas. This is what an effective multiculturalism is: not a superficial exchange of festivals and food, but a robust and committed exchange

of ideas – a conflict which is worth enduring, rather than a war” (Hanif Kureishi, *The Word and the Bomb* 100).

What is more, Robert Young has argued that Rushdie’s perspective of multicultural mixture was endorsed “by other ethnic minority writers, such as Hanif Kureishi, and also by the media. There is a deep split between celebratory multiculturalism and the real situation of many minorities who experience oppression in their everyday lives” (*Postcolonialism* 24). In effect then, Kureishi reads multiculturalism not in the way it has been celebrated but closest to its true nature, while he sees possibilities in religions but only when they come into contact with other ideas, something that hardcore fundamentalism, by definition, rejects. One such idea is the manifestation of sexuality in his characters in the two pieces of work of the early 1990s, which are explicitly preoccupied with such issues. This is something that begs the question: In an age of global terrorism, which is largely infected by religious fundamentalism, is it possible that such a reading of sexuality in Kureishi’s later work can encourage a cross-communal and transcultural understanding in Britain?

Within three years of its publication in 1994, *My Son the Fanatic*, became a film directed by Udayan Prasad (1997). The plot blatantly underlines Kureishi’s preoccupation with religion. It is a short story exploring contradictory notions of several aspects of society: British identity, racial and ethnic tensions, Islamic fundamentalism, as well as generational, class and religious differences among characters. The story’s protagonist is Parvez, a Pakistani immigrant with a fondness for the 1960s and the music of Nat King Cole and Louis Armstrong, characteristics that form a complex identity that Islam rejects, but which also point to a rich and varied nature of artistic sensibility possible in contemporary culture. Parvez works hard as a taxi driver to provide for his family, particularly his disapproving wife, Minoo, and his son, Farid, who is at university. Farid drops out of school (because to him, Western education cultivates an anti-religious attitude), joins a group of Islamic fundamentalists and convinces his father to let a holy man live with them. His actions conflict with Parvez’s secret wandering with a prostitute, Bettina. The tension rises as Parvez’s family breaks down and social conflict ensues. What is interesting is that the entire story unravels through the eyes of the father, not the son. Further, the wife/mother character is minor and not defined much in the short story, nor does she have much screen time in the subsequently created film. Another character, Schitz, a German businessman, enters the story. He is plainly racist. Another character is Fizzy, Parvez’s friend, who represents the wealthy businessman whose loyalty is torn

between money and tradition. The film was moderately successful with nominations for Best Screenplay at the 1998 British Independent Film Festival as well as a 2000 Best Foreign Film at the Independent Spirit Award. Om Puri, the actor playing Parvez, won a Best Actor award at the 1998 Brussels International Film Festival.

There are notable differences between the short story and the film, even though it was adapted for the screen by Kureishi himself. For the purposes of this chapter, the film, rather than the story is discussed, mainly because of the complexity of the on-screen characters and because it is more feasible for the reader to juxtapose Kureishi's later work with his earlier cinematic work such as *My Beautiful Laundrette*. The name Ali changes to Farid for the movie, the setting moves from South London to the North of England, while new characters in the film are introduced, such as the maulvi (a religious scholar) from India, Fizzy, the successful businessman, and Schitz, the German businessman. Parvez inadvertently mocks Schitz by writing "Mr SHITs" on a piece of paper while picking him up from the airport. Moreover, in the short story, the true nature of Parvez and Bettina's relationship is never revealed, although it is alluded to; they "take care of each other" (*My Son the Fanatic*). In the film however, this relationship is made much more explicit, as they are lovers. Bart-Moore Gilbert argues that this happens to underscore the way in which Farid leads his father to despair (*Hanif Kureishi* 164). This sexual dimension, then, comes into direct contrast with fundamentalism, as it is the latter that drives Parvez to commit adultery. Bart-Moore Gilbert argues that compared to the character portrayed in the short story, Minoo, the wife, is a more complex character in the film where she develops from a loving and supportive mother in the opening scenes to a "servant in her own home after the cleric's arrival, even being required to eat apart from her husband" (*Hanif Kureishi* 166).

When Parvez is hired by a German businessman to show him the "true" aspects of city life, he hires a prostitute for him. When Parvez takes Schitz to a bar, the businessman asks Parvez what he enjoys in life, as "respect is not a substitute for pleasure", answering to a previous comment on how Parvez respects women too much to pay for sex with them. Parvez doesn't answer and Schitz asks him if he misses his family, adding that he had left his. Parvez says that that is not a nice thing, to which Schitz says: "What do you know about it?" revealing a leitmotiv found in many of Kureishi's works, namely the discontentment of marriage. However, Schitz treats both Parvez and Bettina badly, which

serves to bring Parvez and Bettina closer³. The obnoxious Schitz is not only someone who brings the two together and causes their sexual proximity, but he can also be seen in comparison with Parvez, as a reminder of the different kinds of immigrants, whose reception depends on the host society, and which pertains to national origin, class and ethnic identity (*Hanif Kureishi* 165). Bart Moore-Gilbert argues that Schitz represents continental Europe in its industrial power, the reunified Germany and “the growing influence of Europe on Britain, in which a newly united Germany is the economic dynamo and, as such, a potentially oppressive force” (*Hanif Kureishi* 166). This is made clear in the scene where Schitz kicks Parvez while telling him to get him drinks. What is more, Schitz represents the direct opposite of Farid’s world, as Farid abstains from alcohol, drugs and sex, while Schitz indulges himself in them. Farid resists the assimilation process, as he had an “English girlfriend from whom he has parted”, as well as by retreating to the traditional values of Islam, the extreme version of which prohibited any mixing with other societies. Lastly, one should mention that in the film, Farid is represented as more radical than in the text, as in the film he attacks the prostitutes with Molotov cocktails while he spits at Bettina, something that is not present in the text.

The fundamentalist theme of *My Son the Fanatic* is set up early in the film as Parvez watches his son selling his electric guitar after having just broken up with his girlfriend. “Where is that going?” the father asks. He continues, “You used to love making a terrible noise with these instruments”. His son replies: “You always said there were more important things than *Stairway to Heaven*...You couldn’t have been more right”. This refers to the Led Zeppelin song and alludes to the promised heaven for the martyrs of Islam. Farid and his father, just like Farid and Schitz, have different notions of what Britain and “Britishness” actually mean: for Parvez, Britain is an ideal and he works countless hours to satisfy that dream. Moreover, he wants to be not only a good father, but a brother to his son: “We were not father and son – we were brothers! Where has he gone?” His son is, at first, an accessory in this pursuit for the perfect British life, as he excels in school and sports alike, and he is already planning to marry him with a suitable partner; his purpose is to “... get a good job...marry the right girl and start a family”. Parvez tries really hard to “fit in” as he not only eats pork, drinks alcohol and sees a prostitute, but he also orders his wife to cook pork: “You’re not in the village now. This is England. We have to fit in!” As opposed to his wife, Bettina is the only woman that understands him: “He could talk to her

³ In the film Parvez and Bettina have a sexual relationship, which is hinted to, but not clearly depicted, in the original story.

about things he'd never be able to discuss with his own wife". Parvez seems to have substituted religion with sexuality, as he rejects the former due to his harsh childhood training when he was disciplined by a maulvi for falling asleep, as well as for asking religious questions the teacher did not like: "Naturally I also annoyed him by asking why my best friend, a Hindu, would go to Kaffir, hell, when he was such a good chap...He would clip my arms and legs with a cane until blood came... After such treatment, I said goodbye permanently to next life". After having this conversation with Bettina, she kisses him saying "I don't know when I last kissed a man". In effect, then, his expressed sexuality seems to have a liberating effect on Parvez.

On the other hand, Farid rejects the very same Western attitude regarding sexual expression, as he believes that it promotes "pornography and filth...a society soaked in sex" oppressing Muslims around the world. He does not accept his father's way of life, urging him to "mend his ways". Ultimately, Parvez thinks that his son is lost: "I feel as if I've lost my son". These fractured relationships between the characters and these clashes between different identities constitute conflicts that peak at the end of the film, as not only the prostitutes' house is attacked, but there is also a physical confrontation of Parvez and his son, with the backdrop being the father's expression of sexual desire for Bettina and the son's repressed sexuality which translates into violence. Indeed, one of the things that Farid gives up is sexuality. The fact that he breaks up with his white girlfriend and scorns his father for his relationship with Bettina underlines the oppressive nature of fundamentalism pertaining to sexuality. As opposed to his son's behaviour, Parvez's embracing of pleasure reflects Kureishi, who could not reconcile himself with the harsh Islamic beliefs that rejected pleasure. Such behaviour was, for him, a failure of sense ("Rainbow Sign" 12). In effect, then, sexuality collides with the new order, which now is not racially manifested, but pertains to the religious, which keeps people and cultures apart. When Parvez confronts his son for breaking up with his girlfriend, Madelaine, Farid argues against the mixing of cultures:

Farid: Can you put Keema⁴ with strawberries? [...] In the end, our cultures [...] they cannot be mixed.

Parvez: Everything is mingling already together, this thing and the other.

Farid: Some of us are wanting something more besides muddle.

Parvez: What?

⁴ A traditional South Asian meat dish.

Farid: Belief, purity, belonging to the past. . . . I won't bring up my children in this country.

Farid does not believe that Islamic and British cultures can mix, taking the pleasure of interracial relationships completely out of the picture, echoing fascist ideologies of segregation. On the contrary, Parvez, reflecting Kureishi, who favoured integration and hybridity over singularity and monolithic definitions of identity, says to Bettina: "I'm so happy to get out of that house. Farid says the cultures cannot mix. Jesus, they can't keep apart". Talking about the mixing of cultures and the future of British society, Kureishi expresses similar views as Parvez, discussing the extent to which Britain and Pakistan have been engaged with each other:

The two countries, Britain and Pakistan, have been part of each other for years, usually to the advantage of Britain. They cannot now be wrenched apart, even if that were desirable. Their futures will be intermixed. What that intermix means, its moral quality, whether it is violently resisted by ignorant whites and characterized by inequalities and injustice, or understood, accepted and humanized, is for all of us to decide. This decision is not one about a small group of irrelevant people who can be contemptuously described as 'minorities'. It is about the direction of British society ("The Rainbow Sign 11).

During his research for the story, Kureishi discovered that, along with sexual pleasure, young British fundamentalists had also rejected other kinds of pleasures, so familiar to him, which he says was a kind of re-possession of Islam ("A Bang and a Whimper" 127-128). Parvez's secular notions clash with his son's religious ones, as the former believes in pleasure: "While I am here on earth, I want to make the best of it. And I want you to as well". This pleasure-seeking reflects Parvez's liberal sentiments and enables his relationship with Bettina, while on the other hand, Farid's fanaticism prohibits him from connecting with them, as the attack scene on the prostitutes' house shows, where he spits in Bettina's face. Parvez condemns his son in one of Kureishi's strongest lines in the film: "There is nothing of God in spitting on a woman's face!" This clash between the worlds that Parvez (and Schitz) and Farid represent is a part of the wider context within which *My Son the Fanatic* examines different notions of British identity through sexuality. Their final confrontation comes after the attack on the prostitutes' house, as Parvez beats up his son in their house. This behaviour can be linked to Kureishi's fears about Islamic fundamentalism in Britain, coming from within, which would manifest itself 11 years later

in the 2005 London bombings. Society's inability to comprehend the beliefs and behaviours of British Muslims is reflected in the film in the angry, violent reaction of Parvez, the appropriated subject, towards his misfit son. Farid's inability to understand why his father beats him, leads him to read his father as the oppressive society he lives in, embodying the tyrannical behaviour towards his people; and as such, he projects onto him the fanaticism which he was charged with, and consequently hates him and British identity alike, to the death. This final scene underlines that Islamic fundamentalism is no longer something detached from British society, no longer an "other", but an integral part of 1990s Britain, as Kureishi's examination of both individual and national identity shows, seen through the relationship of father and son. In this final scene, a drunken Parvez beats up his son after the latter disapproves of his father's consumption of alcohol and his relationship with the prostitute. Farid says: "You are a pimp who organises sexual parties", to which his father responds by slapping him. Parvez's distaste towards all religions (much like Kureishi's), stemming from his childhood memories of being educated by mullahs and nuns and hating both, and his rage towards his son, drive him to physically abuse Farid, who does not defend himself. When the beating is over, Farid says: "You call me a fanatic, dirty man. Who's the fanatic now?" spitting on his father's face. At the same time, his wife, Minoo, confronts Parvez about his relationship with Bettina and calls him "a filthy old man". Farid leaves the house and goes to his Muslim brotherhood, while Minoo leaves for Pakistan, saying to her husband that he has done only one thing wrong: "... put self, before family", to which Parvez answers: "Yes. The first but not the last". After that, Parvez meets Bettina and he says: "I have managed to destroy everything. I have not felt worse, or better". Parvez's position is a complex one, as despite his family being torn apart, he also feels great, due to the possibility of his relationship with Bettina. This conflicting position reveals not only the contradictory nature of the character but of Kureishi's literary self, as it reflects his own state of mind, which was revealed in his numerous interviews. This seemingly impossible situation will repeat itself in *Intimacy* (1998), when Jay, the protagonist, says, "You don't stop loving someone just because you hate them" (*Intimacy* 76). Such conflicts are very much present in Kureishi's later work, which brings to mind the coming-of-age moment at the end of *The Buddha of Suburbia*, where both the author and the protagonist's artistic realisations pertain to this coexistence of antithetical realities that entail inner conflicts, which in turn leads to a different way of reading desire and sexuality. This paradoxical impossibility, namely the simultaneous

working of love and hate, desire and disgust, sexual experimentation and sexual abstinence and so on, goes on to underline the complex nature of the issue of belonging.

The final scene is an excellent summary not only of *My Son the Fanatic*, but indeed of all of Kureishi's films. Alone, Parvez wanders around in a dark, empty house while playing Percy Mayfiel's famous pop song *Please Send Me Someone to Love*. He turns on the lights in every room, until he sits on the stairs with a glass of whiskey in his hands, trying to understand what had just happened, asking, like the song, for "someone to love", which has proved, once again in a Kureishi work, its discontents and harsh nature. This turning on of the lights alludes to the way in which Kureishi has turned up all the lights on the hitherto obscure, yet complex, nature of British identity. *My Son the Fanatic* is one of Kureishi's most important films, as it marks Kureishi's shift in thematics, informing audiences (years before the 7/7 terrorist attacks in London) about the issue of Islamic fundamentalism, while examining the relationship between sexual expression and religion, an issue of prominence in Kureishi's next novel, *The Black Album*.

"Third Way Out": Sexual Expression and Identity in *The Black Album* (1995)

Issues with which Kureishi preoccupied himself in *My Son the Fanatic* informed and paved the way for *The Black Album* which was published a year after the short story. What is interesting in his new venture was the religious twist of his mixture of sexuality and violence, which started in *My Son the Fanatic* and continued in *The Black Album*. *The Black Album* engages directly with the Rushdie Affair, even though the author is not named at all. Clearly, though, the issue of Islamic fundamentalism is of grave importance, especially looked at within the context of sexuality, and as we identify the implications behind their interaction by closer examination, we realise Kureishi's significant contribution in keeping up with –or, some might argue, ahead of– the times. In an interview with James Kidd for *The Independent*, Kureishi says he was fortunate that the themes which distinguished his seminal works – immigration, Islam and multiculturalism – have so profoundly defined twenty-first-century global culture:

You are lucky if you hit it for five years. I suddenly saw that the story of my father, a Muslim man coming to Britain, was not only his story, it was the story of the West. It was gold dust. No one else was writing about it, and people didn't welcome it. "This is very good, Hanif, [said my father] but do they have to be Indian in a cornershop?" ("We Are All Mixed Race Now").

The Black Album is about the rise and fall of all kinds of political and religious systems: the fall of communism, the Berlin Wall, the rise of Islamic fundamentalism, issues that were to preoccupy the world for many years to come.

The Black Album follows Shahid Hassan's oscillating desire for Riaz, the leader of a local Islamist group, and for Deedee Osgood, his sexually liberated teacher with whom he has an affair. It narrates an intersection of the social realm and especially its rising religious fundamentalism and sexual desire. Sex, drugs and pornography are once again paraded for the audience through the relationship between Shahid and Deedee. Their relationship testifies to how Shahid accepts the fluid nature not only of his own self but of society at large, through his own erotic alteration. The conflict comes with the juxtaposition of sexual abstinence, in Riaz's group, and a hedonistic lifestyle in Deedee, with Shahid caught between them. He is drawn to both of them and the novel culminates in his final moment of decision, which comes when Riaz's group organises a burning of Rushdie's book *The Satanic Verses* on campus. In this scene, Kureishi shows the final clash of sexual expression and religious violence, as I maintain that the two are, in fact, much more correlated than we thought. Abstinence from sexual pleasure, advocated by fundamentalists, can lead the repressed to violence while sexual expression can be seen as an alternative system to religious, limiting views of the world. What is more, this blending of pleasure and pain brings to mind Aristotle's definition of the affect, as a force embodied through pleasure and pain which shifts our condition and our judgement (qtd in Shepard, "Affect"). And it seems that the burning of the book is a failure of imagination instead of a triumph of religion in that it is not Islam that emerges victorious from that scene; rather it is a testimony to the complex nature between violence and sexuality as well as to the affective forces of violence.

The manifestation of pleasure in *The Black Album* is not limited to sexual freedom manifested in the relationship between Shahid and Deede. In true Kureishi form, music, a pleasure in itself, informs the first meeting between the two lovers which will eventually lead to their sexual encounters. During their first meeting, she asks Shahid what it is that he finds appealing about the singer Prince, whose picture is on her wall, suggesting that he is "half black and half white, half man, half woman, half size, feminine but macho, too. His work contains and extends the history of black American music, Little Richard, James Brown, Sly Stone, Hendrix", to which Shahid answers: "He's a river of talent" (*The Black Album* 28). Interestingly enough, it should be noted here that Prince published a record called *The Black Album* in 1987. What is more, Shahid's cross-dressing, his use of makeup

and his sado-masochistic tendencies also point to Prince, a pop icon that is a constant in Kureishi's work, who blurs gender boundaries and is able to escape rigid constructs. These pleasures are enabled once more by the sexually charged space of London, which becomes the stage on which these cross-gender sexual performances by Shahid and his partners enable them to re-imagine their desires and their bodies. The space of London serves as the stage for Shahid's transformative theatrical performances as he re-invents his body, his desires, his sexual passion, his self and society. At first, Shahid is torn, trying to find his identity between the pleasures afforded to him by the culture he lives in, embodied in the sexually adventurous relationship with Deedee, and the religious fervour and denial of pleasure by the charismatic and fundamentalist Riaz, all in the wake of the Rushdie Affair. Riaz Al-Hussain, the strong leader of the Islamic student group, fascinates Shahid, as he has a new sense of identity to offer to the troubled young man: "These days everyone was insisting on their identity, coming out as a man, woman, gay, black, Jew – brandishing whichever features they could claim, as if without a tag they wouldn't be human. Shahid, too, wanted to belong to his people" (*The Black Album* 34). In sharp contrast to the strict Islamic way of life, Kureishi positions the hedonistic and fetishist Deedee, whose sexual connection with her student comes into clash with Islamic beliefs. There are two contrasting definitions of ideology here, a "coherent body of ideas that legitimates political rule... [and] a form of thought or identity springing not from the ruling elite, but rather from a section of the populace" ("A Question of Black or White"). Sara Upstone argues that what unites them is their need for defining a context within which individuals locate themselves and their relationship to society. Much like in *My Son the Fanatic*, religion denies pleasure to its disciples, in exchange for a perceived stable sense of identity. Kureishi believed that Islamisation did not build any hospitals, schools, houses, nor did it clean water and installed electricity. But it entailed a sense of direction and identity: "Moral mission[s] and the over-emphasis on dogma and punishment resulted in the kind of strengthening of the repressive, militaristic and nationalistically aggressive state seen all over the world in the authoritarian 1980s" (Kureishi, *My Ear at His Heart* 26). Consequently, this strong sense of identity the Islamic fundamentalists believed they had found and the strengthening of the repressive stance of the state collided and led to religious violence a few years later.

The two worlds then clash in the book, reflecting Kureishi's views on the burden of the past on the present. For Kureishi, tradition seems to create a sense of false intimacy:

I compared the collective hierarchy of the family and the performance of my family's circle with my feckless, rather rootless life in London, in what was called the "inner city". There I lived alone, and lacked any long connection with anything...People came and went. There was much false intimacy and forced friendship. People didn't take responsibility for each other. Many of my friends...didn't merely want to reproduce the old patterns of living. The future was to be determined by choice and reason, not by custom ("The Rainbow Sign" 38).

Indeed, for him, the burden of the past disguised as tradition is responsible for people's current view of society, which, in turn, can bring about a new wave of essentialist choices. Deedee introduces Shahid to rave parties, drugs, alcohol and sex:

Deedee held up the bottle once more. Shahid shook his head.

'You're slurring your words. Why are you always trying to make me take things?'

'Alcohol is one of the great pleasures'.

'Is life just for pleasure, then?'

'What else is there?'

'I'm not sure. I know you're trying to provoke me. But pleasure isn't enough, is it?'

'It's a start' (*The Black Album* 123).

In a way, sexual pleasure works in *The Black Album* as the element that enables his characters to avoid their entanglement into the age-old either-or position and shows that there is another way in their quest for a place in society, in that it enables them to escape the burden of tradition, even though pleasure may not be enough. Kureishi rejects the old views in favour of a view of a future for Britain without imposed limitations and without allowing the past to be a burden to the present. It is important to connect the Rushdie Affair with this burden of the past on the present, as it constituted a coming-of-age experience for many young Muslim radicals in Britain at the time, some of whom have become today's leaders of the British Muslim community. And this was an issue that troubled Kureishi:

It perplexed me that young people, brought up in secular Britain, would turn to a form of belief that denied them the pleasures of the society in which they lived...Why did they wish to maintain such a tantalizing relation to their own enjoyment, keeping it so fervently in mind, only to deny it? Or

was this Puritanism a kind of rebellion, a brave refusal of the order of the age – an oversexualized but sterile society? (*The Word and the Bomb* 23).

This relationship between past and present, read within the context of pleasure, seems to inform the ending of *The Black Album*. By the end of the book, Shahid is able to dictate the path towards his own future, escaping essentialist choices, as Kureishi grants his character, and indeed his audience, with the freedom of a third way out of such binaries, a path that Moore-Gilbert positions as being “between apoliticism and militancy” (*Hanif Kureishi* 115). The value of this “solution” to questions of being will be made clear by the end of the book, as choices for the future must be made by the protagonist. Indeed, worrying about the future is a significant aspect of *The Black Album*: “To get to the future, one has to live through the present” (*The Black Album* 15). As he is being translated from one culture to the other, Shahid wants recognition and acceptance from South Asians and British alike. In the end it all comes down to a sense of choice of where to belong. Shahid does not accept the traditional mentality as this would automatically impose restrictions and limitations to his life, as he would have to adhere to the essentialist binaries that come with it. This refusal has a twofold meaning, the first of which is the uneasiness of the members of the South Asian diasporic community in Britain with succumbing to limitations passed down from their colonial past. Secondly, it reveals Kureishi’s vision for a future society which comprises all polycultural aspects of its population. In the end, Shahid’s choice is a rejection of traditional thinking based on race or nationality, in exchange for his sexual life with Deedee. In that, it is his sexuality that enables him to escape this impossible position. Not entirely though, since he says that he will be with his teacher, only until “... it stops being fun” (*The Black Album* 15).

One could argue that Kureishi does not explore Shahid as such; rather, he re-inscribes him and the sexual manifestations of his identity, pointing to a new generation of immigrants who were not bound by tradition as much as the first generation, and as someone who – not despite of, but– because of his impossible position between cultures and identities, is able to dictate his own terms of belonging. Shahid’s choice culminates in embracing his sexual expression, but in a similar manner seen in the final scene of *The Buddha of Suburbia*, one which does not consume the protagonists, but offers a more mature and self-controlled expression:

The antidote to Puritanism isn’t licentiousness, but the recognition of what goes on inside human beings...Fundamentalism is dictatorship of the mind, but a lived culture is an exploration, and represents our endless curiosity

about our own strangeness and impossible sexuality: wisdom is more important than doctrine; doubt more important than certainty. Fundamentalism implies the failure of our most significant attribute, our imagination (The Black Album 283).

The clash between religion and sexuality, in a manner that reminds us of the clash between Parvez and Farid in *My Son the Fanatic*, peaks when the Islamic students at the university want to burn *The Satanic Verses*, forcing Shahid to take a stance. And he does: his love of literature, life and the allure of sexuality make him reject Riaz's limiting world vision. But his decision is not final, even though he will continue his relationship with his teacher because it is fun: "'Until it stops being fun,' she said. 'Until then,' he said" (The Black Album 276). Shahid finds a temporary solution to his dilemma, as he will be with Deedee, until it stops being fun. Shahid's choice is not based on race, but passion, and, as such, it is not governed by thought, nor is it as clear-cut as Kureishi's critics argue. Massumi is brought to mind here, as he reads affect as "a suspension of affect-reaction circuits and linear temporality in a sink of what might be called passion" (*Parables for the Virtual* 29). This suspension, which Massumi talks of, constitutes a temporary solution to the impossible position of having to choose sides, as he finds himself within a temporal and liminal space. What is more, Marco Abel has argued that affect is not defined as a thought, but rather as something associated with sentiment and feeling, and as something that lacks rationality (*Violent Affect* 11). It is exactly such a notion that governs Shahid's choice as he chooses his passion based on his sentiments and feelings. However, Shahid's choice is not a simplistic one between liberalism/sexual freedom and fundamentalism, but rather, a testimony of the complexity of his identity which, in effect, enables him to move away from racial limits, while this interim nature points to the fluidity of his identity. Such a choice suggests alternative modes of belonging, defined by cultural diversity rather than cultural (or racial) uniformity:

How could anyone confine themselves to one system or creed?

Why should they feel they had to? There was no fixed self; surely your several selves melted and mutated daily? There had to be innumerable ways of being in the world. He would spread himself out, in his work and in love, following his curiosity (*The Black Album* 274).

Indeed, there are so many ways of "being" that Shahid's choice cannot be one bound by any sorts of limits.

Thus Shahid's sexual, cultural and religious experimentation and the corresponding relevant aspects of identity, go on to testify to the need of the individual to choose a fluid identity and an ever-changing self. Kureishi's choice in the end, as I will argue, is to present identity as a process, as having an unstable and ever-changing nature, which allows his characters, and indeed himself and members of the diasporic community, not to choose sides, a process that Bart Moore-Gilbert has termed as "the third way out", as Shahid chooses passion over politics. In the wake of this clash between secularism, sexuality and religion, pleasure functions as a counterbalance to the political nature of religion, as it is understood by fundamentalism, thus not only being elevated, but also enabling the characters to escape the essentialist either/or position. And it is the implications of the violent scene at the end of the book, with the burning of the book at the university campus, that transcend the primary subject matter, as the true "practice and pedagogical force" (Abel, xiv) of literary images is unveiled. Attending to the effects provoked by the reality of this violent image in literature, one has to think of these images in affective terms, as Abel argues, rather than "addressing them on the level of their representational quality, as is commonly done" (xiv). Shahid's choice of the affective part of identity, reflected in his relationship with Deedee – just as the fundamentalists burn books at the school's campus (which, in a way, is what pushed him towards his teacher) – mirrors this new way of thinking of violence in affective terms and hence, moving beyond the mere representational value. What the burning of the book signifies (which is a failure of imagination among other things) is what enables the affective sense of identity in Shahid to prevail, even if this prevalence is not without issues.

The characters of *The Black Album* seem to have different choices of identity. Riaz says to Shahid: "What do our people really have in their lives...They have lost themselves", to which Shahid replies: "We've certainly lost *something*" (*The Black Album* 122), meaning that his world vision is not as bleak as Riaz's, as he sees a way out in the fulfilment of desires and personal pleasure. But the question remains: What kind of pleasure? His experimentation with cultural, sexual, political identities in the course of the book, allows Shahid to escape the binary way in which people see the world (i.e., the liberal, hedonistic life with Deedee, as opposed to the strict Islamic way of life of Riaz) and, echoing a new era, he is able to construct a new, ever-changing self that incorporates a variety of elements. The main addition to the Bildungsroman genre by Kureishi, according to Bart Moore-Gilbert, is that identity is not a fixed entity but an unstable and shifting process (*Hanif Kureishi* 124); and both Karim in *The Buddha of Suburbia* and Shahid in

The Black Album show just that. They do not have to choose sides, even though Kureishi has been accused of repeating stereotypes in the case of Shahid. In any case, it would be safe to say that Kureishi's later work is not as preoccupied with youthful development as his earlier work, so he adds something new to the Bildungsroman genre, namely, the fluid sense of identity. Kureishi's later works highlight a new, complex British identity that, in its transcultural qualities pertains more to religious fundamentalism affecting society, than racial issues affecting society.

Reception and Criticism of *The Black Album*

The publication of *The Black Album* was not met with favourable criticism. Bart Moore-Gilbert argues that in *The Black Album*, as in *My Beautiful Laundrette*, Kureishi revisits familiar territory as he follows the affective and socio-political development of a young British Muslim moving from the suburbs to the centre. Within this framework and through the focus on the predicament of British youth, Kureishi also examines the state of the nation, post-Thatcher. It has been argued, however, that *The Black Album* lacks the standards of prose and sexual intrigue his earlier works offered. Indeed, in contrast to the *Buddha*, *The Black Album* has been seen as "... an altogether inferior achievement, both by reviewers and in the academic world....[The characters] remain fundamentally static throughout the text, representing the various cultural/political choices and perspectives in which Kureishi is interested in a way which is more consonant with a *roman à thèse*" (Hanif Kureishi 143-145), concluding by saying that, in any case, *The Black Album* rarely reaches the level of comedy achieved in *The Buddha* (Hanif Kureishi 146). What is more, this change of style picked up by Gilbert was criticised by others, such as Anthony Appiah, for whom *The Black Album* fails in comparison to *The Buddha of Suburbia*, as he says that Kureishi does not realise that

...his characters are schematic and, one feels, unloved even by their author. The raunchiness that some, at least, admired in the earlier book has been replaced by routinised descriptions of the hydraulics of moderately unroutine sex ("Identity Crisis").

Moreover, there is a reference on Kureishi's limitations in his representation of women and the working-classes. Ruvani Ranasinha criticises Kureishi for using simplistic and stereotypical representations (Hanif Kureishi 92) to represent ethnic minorities, as opposed to the range of "heterogeneous positions and diversified representations" in *My Beautiful*

Laundrette (Hanif Kureishi 82). The inclination of the novel and of Kureishi for that matter, for political meanings, has been seen as negatively affecting the author's literary importance. It should be noted however, that it is unfair for Kureishi to be judged in his contemporary form, using older paradigms better suited to his work in the 1980s. What is more, Kureishi himself says in the preface to *My Son the Fanatic*, "Muslim fundamentalism has always seemed to me to be profoundly wrong, unnecessarily restrictive and frequently cruel. But there are reasons for its revival...it is...degrading to be a victim in your own country. If you feel excluded, it might be tempting to exclude others" (*My Son the Fanatic* xi-xii). And this is what he went against in *The Black Album*, focusing more on such issues rather than racial ones, for which he was accused of reinforcing stereotypes.

What is more, one could attribute such a "decline" to the change in scope, as his work became more didactic rather than imaginative. Additionally, such a change in style and thematics in Kureishi, as is evident in this novel, can be read as a natural outcome of a process characterised by several factors: the author's artistic self-realisation, the passing of time, the change of political settings in the post-Thatcher era, all signs of an ever-changing world and his own literary development. Even though *The Black Album* might be less acclaimed than Kureishi's early work, one should take into account the way it represents sexuality vis-à-vis religion and the social symptoms of such a manifestation. In its dealings with the interaction between sexuality and religion in 1990s Britain, *The Black Album* is indeed a text that narrates the condition of England, focusing on religion and more explicitly confronting the political challenges of "multiculturalism" (*The Black Album* 146). Defending such a scope of the text and talking about the role of the artist, Shahid asks: "But don't writers try to explain genocide and that kind of thing? Novels are like a picture of life" (*The Black Album* 21). In comparing prose found in *The Black Album* with *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985) and *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990) most critics note the lack of linguistic brilliance found in the earlier works. This, however, is offset to a point by the fact that it is indeed a "Zeitgeist" text, a novel about the spirit of the times, engaging directly with very serious, contemporary problems such as Islamic fundamentalism. The ending of the book reflects a choice Kureishi himself made, namely to write against Islamic fundamentalism, but not forgetting the complexity of his characters, explored through their sexual choices, which is something that was made clear ever since the publication of *My Son the Fanatic*, a year earlier.

In light of these thoughts, Ruvani Ranasinha's accusations that, in contrast to *My Beautiful Laundrette*, Kureishi's "monolithic portrait of Islamic believers does not articulate a range of heterogeneous voices on its central issues" (*Hanif Kureishi* 89) should be revisited. Kureishi was not referring to a generalised trend in Muslim devotion that inevitably led to fundamentalism. If we can claim that Kureishi's characters in *My Beautiful Laundrette*, such as Omar, which Ranasinha compares to Shahid in *The Black Album*, cannot be considered as a symbol for all members of the South Asian diaspora, then how can one claim that Riaz can be read as a representation of all devoted British Muslims? Neither *My Son the Fanatic* nor *The Black Album* were written to describe the entire Muslim experience in Britain. The work, however, does constitute a nod on behalf of Kureishi towards issues that would preoccupy British society in the years to come, notably, fundamentalist violence which was somewhat lurking in the shadows still in 1990s Britain, yet erupted in the 2000s. As far as this issue is concerned, Kureishi was not brought up in a practicing Muslim home, as he himself admits. His embrace of secularism and the manifestation of sexuality should not be read as a belief that liberalism is the cure for fundamentalism, but rather, that the examination of the way the two interact, is much more complex than first seems, which is precisely what Kureishi signifies with Shahid's temporal solution and the rethinking of violent images in affective terms.

Sara Upstone argues that even though Kureishi's later work for the stage and screen continues to challenge polar oppositions such as Asian/British, traditional/modern, culture/religion, arguing at the same time that such values need to be re-thought, it is made clear that the scope of this work has changed; through the re-imagining of desire and sexuality, the nature of a new struggle is underlined, which has more to do with a shift directly on race to its manifestations through religion. In the wake of recent socio-political developments pertaining to religious fundamentalism and the economic crisis, such an examination of Kureishi's 1990s work and the way sexuality and desire are manifested within the political and the social, has a renewed relevance. What is more, John McLeod talks about a recent shift in black fiction in Britain which moves beyond affective and political concerns towards a different racial preoccupation with identity, namely through religion, while pointing to the decreasing popularity of the British Bildungsroman genre ("Extra Dimensions, New Routines" 47), of which Kureishi's earlier work had been a part. Kureishi's later work, especially since *My Son the Fanatic*, marks this shift, which nevertheless became evident as early as from the last pages of *The Buddha of Suburbia*, as I have argued in the previous chapter. This shift from a focus directly on race to the focus

of the manifestations of race through religion is evident as identity is negotiated taking into account not only racial terms but also “exogenic” factors such as religion, which seems to have an impact on identity formation as, for instance, Islamic fundamentalism offers a seemingly stable identity to its followers. Such a shift pertains both in defining “Britishness” and in lived experiences, and points to the didactic nature of such a writing which is more prominent than the imaginative one. Even though, then, Kureishi’s status as a political writer has been challenged based on his later work, I argue that he still is “an important contributor to a broad series of debates about the identity of the nation in an international context, one that shadows a set of concerns much wider than solipsistic and exclusivist diasporic matters about ‘myself’” (McLeod 51). Within this frame, one could argue that the manifestations of sexuality in Kureishi’s post-1990 work constitute a quest for a British identity which is supra-racial and polycultural. In that, Kureishi’s later work calls upon us to understand contemporary nation as a “post-racial space of linkages, synchronicities and equivalences that far surpasses the solipsism of cultural diversity, racial difference or narrow national exclusivity” (“Extra Dimensions, New Routines” 48).

Thus, it might be true that Kureishi’s later work did not have the same allure as the aesthetic levels of *The Buddha of Suburbia*; but he did address the issue of religious violence in manifesting sexuality within the social realm in a way that his later work needs to be read in light of such a re-examination of desire and its potential for social change. In the wake of the interaction between sexuality and religion, the racial preoccupations of Kureishi’s early work seem to have changed, without signifying that race is obsolete as it does not stop to exist. It seems, however, that race was fundamental in the 1980s as a marker for identity, which was not the case in the 1990s when religion grew increasingly important in questions of belonging. It has to be noted that racial definitions cannot be easily put aside, as Kureishi’s work after *The Black Album* shows. Indeed, Kureishi’s later works, primarily *Intimacy* (1998), *Gabriel’s Gift* (2001) and his memoir, *My Ear at His Heart* (2004), which primarily deal with personal issues such as father-son relationships, the discontentment of marriage and extended familial relationships, raised a lot of protests from his own family, which accused the author of putting their family secrets out in the open, commodifying and capitalising on their difference, which in fact, is race. What is more, these later works, in the late 1990s and the early 2000s, also point to the autobiographical elements first seen in *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990). Indeed, Jay, the protagonist of *Intimacy* exhibits a lot of similarities with Kureishi (e.g., they both left their partners with whom they had two children for a younger woman), as he reflects the

author's beliefs on the institution of marriage and the pleasure derived from infidelity. In addition, Gabriel can be read as a young Kureishi as an artist, as his gift of art is used in a way to awaken people who are trapped in their everyday lives. Lastly, *My Ear at His Heart*, or "dad's little story" as Kureishi has termed it, concerns desire and the "humiliation that follows it" (13). It is made clear, then, that the way desire and sexuality are re-imagined in the works of Kureishi that followed *The Black Album* is manifested in a highly personal and autobiographical way, dealing with intimate family issues, as the writer matures and continues to come to terms with his own life circumstances and history.

Chapter VI

A “Failed” Sense of Intimacy: Re-thinking Desire

There are some fucks for which a person would have their partner and children drown in a freezing sea (*Intimacy* 12).

As argued in the previous chapter, in his 1990s work, Kureishi shifted his focus from race to religion, engaging it through the various manifestations of sexuality within the social and political realms. In that, even though his status as a political writer has been challenged, the examination in his later work of the interaction between sexual liberation and sexual abstinence and repression advocated by religious violence, a very serious problem that would manifest itself in British society a few years later, underline Kureishi's prominence as first and foremost a writer who puts serious social and political issues under scrutiny. The two primary pieces of work that deal with the issue of religion are *My Son the Fanatic* (1994) and *The Black Album* (1995). Hanif Kureishi's next novel, *Intimacy* (1998) is among his last major works in the 1990s [other titles of that period include the story collections *Love in a Blue Time* (1997) and *Midnight All Day* (1999) and the script for the play *Sleep With Me* (1999), which once again marks a shift in Kureishi's thematics. Even though the underlining themes are once more desire, love and sexuality, the publication of *Intimacy* reflects a more inward-thinking Kureishi, as he focuses on the exploration of the discontents of marriage, the nature of masculine sexuality and the complicated nature of adult relationships. What is more, since the publication of *Intimacy* and onwards to his 2000s work, which also includes *Gabriel's Gift* (2001), a novel which deals with the discontents of contemporary family life, Kureishi continues being highly autobiographical. The actions of his protagonists in the two novels, Jay in *Intimacy* and Gabriel in *Gabriel's Gift*, reflect the choices the author made in his life, both as a young artist, in the case of Gabriel, and as an adult in a relationship, in the case of Jay. This introspective nature of this period in Kureishi's career will culminate in the publication of his memoir, *My Ear at His Heart* (2004) where he explores the complex relationships between fathers and sons through his own experience.

In this chapter, I argue that these pieces of work mark a shift in the manifestations of desire and sexuality, as what is re-visited is also the nature of Kureishi as a person who became more introspective, re-thinking desire which he finds to be inextricably intertwined

with pain. His characters seem to be doing everything to satisfy their own selves, longing for their freer past. However, they are unsuccessful as they are trying to battle middle-age crises and the complexities of marriage through adultery and –what seems at first– egoistical sexual behaviour, which became the focal point of negative criticism raised against the author. On deeper reflection though, the portrayal of characters such as Jay in *Intimacy* as sexually-absorbed and narcissistic also includes a sense of self-awareness, revealed upon closer examination of the stories. These later works, then, are not merely justification or rationalisation stories for sexual promiscuities, but they constitute insightful portraits of the discontents of modern-day relationships. Indeed, it seems that desire is associated with failure and punishment: “To be lured, enticed by desire [...] is to will not only failure and dissatisfaction, but punishment” (Kureishi, *My Ear at His Heart* 29). This is how his characters (e.g., Jay) in his later work experience desire and pleasure as being closely connected to dissatisfaction and pain. Indeed, the majority of his protagonists in this later work can be said to portray sad lives. On the other hand, such a “failure” of desire, which, in fact, underlines its complex nature, points to a process of maturity and self-awareness on behalf of the author himself, as well as on behalf of his characters. This self-awareness in Kureishi will lead to the publication of his memoir, in which he engages the reader directly with the author’s relationship with his father. I argue that it is imperative to examine Kureishi’s material history, then, as well as his work, as the way he lives and imagines and the way the two narratives interact with each other can offer useful insights to the behaviour of his characters, the reasoning behind their actions and the implications of these actions, which also reflect the choices Kureishi made both as an artist and as a person. Such a close interaction between the two, as well as the fact that Kureishi fictionalised his personal life, raised concerns on behalf of his family, especially coming from his sister, Yasmin, who accused him of putting family secrets out in the open and of using their family’s stories for personal gains. Thus, to contextualise the discussion in this chapter, a great deal of attention is given to the interviews given by Kureishi, in which he gives an insight into his thoughts and ideas that shaped this later work, while he also answers the accusations raised against him by his family.

It is true that this more inward-thinking Kureishi and his exploration of masculine sexuality and the difficulties of adult relationships were very much shaped by his own personal circumstances. In 1991, just a few years prior to the publication of *The Black Album*, his father died. Two years later, and just a year before the publication of the novel, his twin sons were born. Kureishi then broke up with the mother of his children (the editor

of *The Black Album*, Tracey Scoffield) in the same year as the publication of the novel. These major changes in his life, concerning fatherhood, prompted Kureishi to embark on a path of nihilistic drinking and drug taking that affected his work, textually addressing the issue with his father with the publication of *My Ear at His Heart* (2004). As far as parenthood is concerned, Kureishi believes that compared to and since the time when he was a teenager, being young in London has become much easier:

The whole world now exists almost entirely to serve kids. My teenage boys are never really bored. They've got fake IDs for 50 quid, they go to clubs. I say, "What's it like in there?" They say, "Oh, everyone's 15 in there". They have a fantastically privileged life in London. They're online, they go to parties, they see bands, they can do whatever they want. They live lives of extreme excitement almost all the time [...] The world has rejigged itself in order to make the life of a teenager as accommodating as possible, it seems to me. They have a great time, it's enviable ("My Era is Over").

Losing interest in his own self as he became a parent, Kureishi became interested in other people, a change which brings to mind the self-realisation we saw in *The Buddha of Suburbia*. Thus, since the publication of *Intimacy*, Kureishi turned to the potential that youth culture oozed as opposed to the dry lives of husbands and fathers. In that, Kureishi shifts his interests from events to characters that become sadder, just like Jay. Such characters often look back to a much more exciting past when they were young, trying to relive such times and seeking redemption through the fulfilment of their desires, no matter the cost, which is not enough to solve their problems. Their actions reflect Kureishi's but, like them, he seems to realise that the pursuit of pleasure at that age is not liberating by definition, but the consequences of their actions point to its complex nature.

"Failure" of Desire: Past and Present in *Intimacy* (1998)

Published in 1998, *Intimacy* is a male testimonial about middle-age masculinity, dealing as it does with what happens when falling out of love. The first sentence uttered by Jay, a self-absorbed character, sets the tone: "It is the saddest night, for I am leaving and not coming back" (*Intimacy* 1). It is the night before leaving his partner and their two sons, and he considers his decision once more, signifying that this is an act to which he has given a lot of thought:

I have contemplated this rupture from all sides...I perch on the edge of the bath and watch my sons, aged 5 and 3, one at each end...They are ebullient and fierce, and people say what happy and affectionate children they are...Tomorrow I will do something that will damage and scar them (*Intimacy* 10).

While contemplating his life, he recalls the past and the meaning of love in the process, separating his present self with the past one. What is more, in pursuit of his past lover, Nina, Jay goes into a disco where he realises that he has grown old. He yearns for his lost passion but Kureishi refuses to grant his character or the reader with a happy ending, as he underlines Jay's failings, the consequent failure of intimacy, the discontents of marriage and lost love. Jay has a negative opinion especially regarding marriage and family: "Not marrying was a necessary rebellion. The family seemed no more than a machine for the suppression and distortion of free individuals" (*Intimacy* 60). Kureishi's breaking up with his partner at the time for a younger woman is a biographical element that should not be disregarded since it informed the novel to a great extent. To what extent, then, do Jay's rationalisations about his actions regarding his desires – which hurt people – reflect Kureishi's? Moreover, could such a view, that Jay's rationalisation coincide, in fact, with Kureishi's, be one of the reasons that his later work has been the subject of harsh criticism? In an interview to Robert McCrum published in *The Guardian* Kureishi gives his own answer:

The central character of the book certainly feels cruel and behaves cruelly and couples do certainly behave very cruelly towards one another when they are in that position. I wanted to write a book that seemed to reproduce that [...] I think they were furious because the subject is infuriating. I might be being disingenuous about that, but I do think the subject of leaving someone, or of being left, of being abandoned and the cruelty and your dislike of them is very painful for everybody. I wrote a book that was intentionally horrible. I didn't want to write a book that smoothes things over ("I Got Out of the Suburbs").

Intimacy is, more than anything, a male perspective of love, desire that leads to punishment, the failure of intimacy, mid-life masculinity and its discontents. It is a narrative of painful analysis of past and present, of love, confusion and fear, and as Kenan Malik says, it points towards what seems to be an unsustainable anomaly of the modern heterosexual relationship ("Review of Hanif Kureishi's *Intimacy*").

Jay, who works as a bartender, is a confused man, having been brought up in the 1970s and experiencing a different era now that he is middle-aged. This confusion is evident in his thoughts and desires. He wants to break free from the responsibilities and realities of marriage, as he feels oppressed by work, life and relationships. Within one night's expression of his thoughts, we witness the events of his life, pondering the meaning of love, desire, responsibility, parenting, and sexuality: "I am in at least three minds about all questions" (*Intimacy* 12). Being apolitical and agnostic, having lived a life full of sex and drugs, Jay hopes to find fulfilment in expressed desire; by the end though, his perceived notion of sexual intimacy as a way to understand the world fails. Kenan Malik says that *Intimacy* speaks to, and for, a lost generation of men: those shaped by the sixties, disoriented by the eighties and bereft of a personal and political map in the nineties ("Review of Hanif Kureishi's *Intimacy*"). Even though he and his partner, Susan, have seemingly satisfying lives in London, Jay no longer loves her and he seeks to rekindle his passion with Nina, a young hippie, believing he has to explore "the possibilities of intimacy" (*Intimacy* 23). He believes that his life story is similar to each of his two friends who, ironically, each have, and live by, completely different, one might say opposing, philosophies on life: Asif, who believes in the institution of marriage and Victor, who has already left his wife for a young lover, and who is now living alone in a flat. Even so, he is envious of Victor's actions, as a life without commitments, full of sex "in a Bohemian part of town", alongside a gorgeous, young woman, is appealing. He is seduced by an unsettling desire, which is a "... devil that does not sleep or keep still [and] does not conform to our ideals" (*Intimacy* 45). And he eventually succumbs to his desire.

Jay thinks that intimacy is everywhere. Even the act of leaving Susan entails a sense of intimacy: "Hurting someone is an act of reluctant intimacy" (*Intimacy* 10). This brings to mind the aforementioned association Kureishi made between desire and punishment. The way intimacy, both sexual and emotional, is treated is very interesting, as it is based on a paradox: "You don't stop loving someone just because you hate them" (*Intimacy* 76). The complex nature of intimacy is underlined in this quote. Jay says: "to move is an infidelity...to others, to the past, to old notions of oneself" (*Intimacy* 11). Anguish and pain follow Jay's decision to leave his wife and children, as he gradually realises his own ageing. The issues of love and desire are thus explained after deep reflection on behalf of the protagonist, resembling existential questions and possessing disrupting qualities, which points to a more introspective quest on behalf of the author. Indeed, the quality of intimacy, as desire, is different in *Intimacy*; it is not reduced to a

mere sexual desire for another woman (which exists nevertheless) but it is accompanied by a desire to break free, to change. It is almost as if Jay (and Kureishi for that matter) is looking for a sexual desire which, at the same time, includes an intellectual element. It is, then, a sense of desire that pertains to many things, from the sexual to the intellectual and is, therefore, a “process, purely operative, rather than object-oriented” (*Parables for the Virtual* 113). Indeed, there is no clear object of desire in the novel, as Jay no longer feels attracted to Susan and there is no clear suggestion of what happens to his relationship with Nina by the end of the novel. As he goes into the club looking for her, he finds himself fantasising about going home with her: “I imagine going home with her. If she says yes, I will go” (*Intimacy* 112). He had also seemed reluctant to give himself totally to her: “I overwhelmed her at times. There was too much of me, I know that. We want love but we don’t want to lose ourselves” (*Intimacy* 95). Jay also seems to be keeping Nina at arm’s length. Thus the manifestation of desire in *Intimacy*, pertains to a general idea which alludes to freedom from constraints, be it of marriage, fatherhood or middle-age. However, it may also let us down and lead to despair and humiliation. There is a wonderful passage about desire in *Intimacy* that sums everything up:

People don’t want you to have too much pleasure. They think it’s bad for you. You might start wanting it all the time. How unsettling is desire! That devil never sleeps or keeps still... Desire is naughty and doesn’t conform to our ideals, which is why we have such a need of them. Desire mocks all human endeavours and makes it worthwhile. Desire is the original anarchist and undercover agent - no wonder people want it arrested and kept in a safe place. And just when we think we’ve got desire under control it lets us down or fills us with hope. Desire makes me laugh because it makes fools of us all. Still, rather a fool than a fascist (*Intimacy* 40).

The complex nature of desire as it is re-imagined in Kureishi’s later work, then, is revealed, as it can offer a potentially liberating or damaging quality, given the lack of rational thought that characterises it.

Of course, on first sight, Jay seems shallow as a character and Kureishi was accused of rationalising adultery and sexual promiscuity in the heterosexual realm through his characters. *Intimacy* as sexual desire in the novel is present and its manifestations, especially in the words of Jay, make the reader believe that he is superficial. There is a quote in the novel which relates to the omnipresence of desire as well as the impossibility of manipulating it and in which desire is connected with love and affection which are

always within you: “Sexual release is the most mysticism most people can manage [...] You can protect and encourage the most delicate gifts –love, affection, creativity, sexual desire, inspiration– but you cannot requisition them. You cannot will love, but only ask why you have put it aside for the time being” (*Intimacy* 78). Jay also says: “Love is the best pornography...” (*Intimacy* 88), he says, without which, “...most of life remains concealed. Nothing is as fascinating as love, unfortunately” (*Intimacy* 10). And moreover: “I am of a generation that believes in the necessity of satisfying oneself” (*Intimacy* 60). Lastly, the readers are exposed to the controversial sentence in the epigraph of this chapter: “There are some fucks for which a person would have their partner and children drown in a freezing sea”, which is followed by a joke: “My kingdom for a come” (*Intimacy* 12). Indeed, this is how Jay feels, failing to explore the true complexity of desire, even though he recognises its disruptive nature. In his case, then, desire becomes a failure, as he does not find real love and he recognises the failed sense of intimacy. Indeed, the ending of *Intimacy* comes into contrast with the hope the endings of Kureishi’s earlier pieces of work offered audiences. Consequently, Jay becomes an obnoxious character because of his lustful accounts of sexual adventures. He boasts that he was with a lover just as his partner was giving birth to one of their babies, highlighting the inconsiderate, sexually maniac traits of his personality.

However, looking beyond these shallow character traits of Jay, one could read him as the symbol of the discontent of a generation, raised in the sexually free 1960s, with different ways of seeing the world from the previous generations, who could not bear to be “tied down”, and were entangled in their own failed heterosexual relationships. Jay says: “I think I have become the adults in *The Catcher in the Rye*. Why do I envy these people? In the late sixties and seventies, I did feel that I belonged to something, to other young people, and to some sort of oppositional movement” (*Intimacy* 46). This confusion is evident in his thoughts, his words, his desires and his recollections of his past, which put forward a desperate feeling of someone who wants the fire in his life back. The agony of failed love life between Jay and his partner, reveal a man in search of love: “She always comes late, cooks supper, washes up and then asks what kind of ice-cream he would prefer, while he would rather be making love with her on the floor. But it’s been weeks since we’ve fucked” (*Intimacy* 3). On the contrary, Nina, his past lover, seems to be rekindling his passion: “Suddenly I had the feeling that everything was as it should be and nothing could add to this happiness or contentment...It could only have been love” (*Intimacy* 14).

However, as he goes into the disco to find her, he realises that he has grown old and that his pursuit for passion may be futile, as he cannot escape the burden of his past.

Indeed, in *Intimacy* the connection between past and present is revisited as Kureishi re-inscribes his characters' sense of intimacy as a desire which allows them to connect with their past. On numerous occasions, Jay speaks of the intertwining of the past and the present: "How utterly the past suffuses us. We live in all our days at once" (*Intimacy* 47). This is a reference to the way in which the past lives in the present and to the inability to totally neglect and obliterate your own past. This is a moment of self-realisation for Jay, who has been trying to re-live his past, but he understands that it is impossible and he consequently fails. On the other hand, one cannot escape the past altogether, which also reflects a self-realisation on behalf of Kureishi about the return of his own past, which will be materialised in his memoir, as I will argue later on. In *Intimacy*, Jay knows that he cannot completely write off Susan and his past: "Soon we will be strangers. *No, we can never be that* [...] We will be dangerous acquaintances, with a history" (*Intimacy* 58, emphasis added). It is their shared intimacy which prevents them from being total strangers, as the past will always be there. But one does not have to erase the past to move to the future. This complex way in which characters experience the relationship between past and present can help us comprehend the way culture functions in Kureishi's work at the end of the twentieth century. This interaction of past and present through love and desire is read through a similar relationship between distance and proximity: "Love is dark work; you have to get your hands dirty. If you hold back, nothing interesting happens. At the same time, you have to find the right distance between people. Too close, and they overwhelm you; too far, and they abandon you. How to hold them in the right relation?" (*Intimacy* 56). Jay talks about his lover, Nina, as he explains why he is reluctant to totally give in to her, which marks his failed sense of intimacy given the seemingly passionate relationship they had shared. Moreover, in this passage, love is associated with distance which translates into an imaginary distance between different consciousnesses, a distance between the past and the present; but there is love and association throughout these relations so as to create equilibrium: "We want love but we don't want to lose ourselves" (*Intimacy* 95). Still, desire is inseparable from heartache and Jay experiences its harsh face. Moore-Gilbert argues that Jay's "desire for intimacy is...called into question by the fact that he has chosen for his soul-mate someone who is evidently not his equal" (*Hanif Kureishi* 177). Indeed, Kureishi does not grant the reader with the happiness of an easy,

ready-made answer; he only underlines Jay's failings and the consequent failure of his elusive possibility of intimacy and love, despite their potentials.

As was the case with the publication of almost every piece of Kureishi's work after *The Buddha of Suburbia*, the publication of *Intimacy* was met with harsh criticism. Just as they had with *The Black Album*, critics negatively reviewed *Intimacy*, especially regarding its thematics, style and the way in which Kureishi had supposedly lost his literary touch. Kenan Malik, said that *Intimacy* "... is much staler, more downbeat, even plodding, especially when Kureishi's writing descends into pop sociology" (Hanif Kureishi's *Intimacy*). It has also been described as "repugnant" ("Ambassador for the Bad Bloke"), "misogynistic" ("Hanif and the Spurned Woman"), with examples provided including Jay's words about Susan having a "... fat, red, weeping face [and a] terrifying account of male inhumanity" (*Intimacy* 75). Moreover, a point of criticism that has been voiced against Kureishi –and rightly so, in many cases– is that he always tells his stories from a male point of view. Many reviewers, especially women, felt that *Intimacy* does not offer any sort of in-depth analysis of the reasons behind the breaking down of a marriage. On the contrary, it has been seen more as a self-justification of a lustful man who totally disregards the female point of view, as Susan is practically non-existent in the novel. Jay says about Susan that "She thinks that she's a feminist but is only in a bad mood" (*Intimacy* 56). Such a view is not attributed solely to the protagonist, but to Kureishi himself, not only due to the author's reputation for being too masculinist in his work, but also because of his own personal life at the time. Reflecting on his parents' marriage, for instance, Jay says that "both he [the father] and mother were frustrated, neither being able to find a way to get what they wanted, whatever that was. Nevertheless they were loyal and faithful to one another. Disloyal and unfaithful to themselves" (*Intimacy* 77). Talking about marriage, Jay's friend Victor advises him that "Marriage is a battle, a terrible journey, a season in hell, and a reason for living" (*Intimacy* 121), while Jay wonders "...why do people who are good at families have to be smug and assume it is the only way to live? [...] Why can't they be blamed for being bad at promiscuity?" (*Intimacy* 121). Such views reflect Kureishi's ideas on the same subject, as he considered the institution of marriage as a remnant of Victorian society: "The notions of duty and obligation barely had positive meanings...they were loaded, Victorian words, redolent of constraint and grandfather clocks, the antithesis of generosity in love, the new hugging and the transcendence of the family" (*My Ear at His Heart* 38).

Kureishi answers such criticisms by saying that he is just the messenger and that the book is not misogynistic. Echoing his self-realisation as an artist, evident in *The Buddha of Suburbia*, Kureishi tries to explain the impossible position of the artist who is torn between his moral obligation and the danger of hurting others. Indeed, art, says Kureishi, is “dangerous”:

Why would you vilify me? I’m just the messenger. I’m writing a book about divorce –an experience that many people have had– or separation, children, all that. I don’t imagine that my children will get married at 20 and still be married when they’re 70. They’ll have numerous relationships and numerous separations, and these separations will be painful and awful. They’ll be hated and they’ll hate other people. That book was a record of that experience. I don’t see why I should be vilified for writing an account of it...But if you’re an artist, your job is to represent the world as you see it – that’s what you do. Art’s got to feel dangerous to you and to other people; that’s when it’s working. You write a book and you think, some people are going to like this book and some people are going to say this is a really shitty, awful person; am I prepared to read about that in the newspapers or to have people say that? And that’s what I do (“A Life Laid Bare”).

What is more, what most people and critics have failed to do is to look beyond the seeming portrayal of Jay as a selfish, self-absorbed, narcissistic and flawed individual; thus, a reading of Jay as a villain and a superficial character is an oversimplification, while at the same time points to the irony used by Kureishi in the portrayal of his character. In the end, is *Intimacy* a way of rationalising sexual promiscuity, or is it an insightful portrait of the discontents of modern-day relationships? I argue that it treads both areas but what is more important is that the reader should look beyond the surface in understanding Jay’s character and actions as well as what these actually signify.

The criticism against *Intimacy* also touches upon Kureishi’s status as a political writer, as the language he uses is seemingly less overtly political language. This does not mean, however, that it is not present at all. In dealing with old family constructs in a modern society as well as sexual versus intellectual desires, Kureishi tries to decode his own generation which he labels as particularly privileged and spoilt, taking advantage of the freedom of the 1960s, just before the “cruelties of the eighties”. He also talks about the political disenfranchisement of his generation, which negates desire as it is, as he says that it entails a sense of dissatisfaction without end which contradicts happiness:

We were dismissive and contemptuous of Thatcherism, but so captivated by our own ideological obsessions that we couldn't see its appeal [...] We were left enervated and confused. Soon we didn't know what we believed. Some remained on the left; others retreated into sexual politics; some became Thatcherites. We were the kind of people who held the Labour Party back. Still, I never understood the elevation of greed as a political credo. Why would anyone want to base a political programme on bottomless dissatisfaction and the impossibility of happiness? Perhaps that was its appeal: the promise of luxury that in fact promoted endless work (*Intimacy* 134-135).

At first, it seems that Jay may be seen as the representative of a generation that "...abandoned the Thatcherite values of the 1980s" (Buchanan 26) and instead attempted to rationalise this generation's pursuit for happiness and pleasure. But in this same quote, a kind of dismissal of this self-fulfilling, leftist ideology is also present: "We were the kind of people who held the Labour party back" he says, thus negating this leftist turn. It is these contradictory elements in Jay's political beliefs which pertain to desire that have led many critics to argue that Kureishi's later work became less and less political which, in turn, led to an aesthetic decline since *The Buddha of Suburbia*, criticism we have addressed previously. In this case too, his later work seems more didactic than imaginative, but it is also true that Kureishi deals with new complexities that preoccupy him as he and his work develop. What is certain is that *Intimacy* and its protagonist are too complex for both to be superficially rejected as dishonest and misogynistic. I would read it, instead, precisely because of these characteristics, as a portrait of the complexity of contemporary masculinity, as well as an attempt to paint a political portrait of his generation through desire.

A Young Kureishi: *Gabriel's Gift* (2001)

Gabriel's Gift (2001) is a deeply personal novel as the relationship between fathers and sons explored in the book reflects the one between the author and his father, a theme which Kureishi will address more directly three years later with the publication of *My Ear at His Heart*. The story is about a 15-year-old boy who puts his gift, namely his artistic skills, to work, which is something that helps him overcome his parents' divorce, while serving to encourage his estranged musician father to regain his self-respect. To the extent

that Gabriel helps his father, then, *Gabriel's Gift* is more affirmative than *Intimacy*. In an interview to Tim Adams for *The Observer*, Kureishi talks about how *Gabriel's Gift* is about the relationships between fathers and sons, reflecting on their nature: "It's about fathers and sons, which is something that's always interested me, and also about sons being perhaps more talented than their fathers. It's about separation between mothers and fathers, which is always traumatic. It's about people being able to change their lives" (Adams, emphasis added). The part about sons being more talented than their fathers is of course a nod to his own literary value as opposed to that of his father, which he will deal with in *My Ear at His Heart*. In the novel, Gabriel's attempts to reconcile his parents underline the complex state of contemporary family life. Classic Kureishi's leitmotifs are evident in the book, such as the desire to start anew. The struggles of the protagonists of *Gabriel's Gift* strongly remind us of other Kureishi characters, such as Johnny and Omar in *My Beautiful Laundrette* as well as Karim and Haroon in *The Buddha of Suburbia*. They all try to get a fresh start and earn the lives they believe they deserve. The plot is simple and familiar as yet another father leaves his family. Rex, a former rock star of the 1960s, is now a lost case since he is too attached to the past and is thrown out of Gabriel's house by his mother, Catherine: "His father spoke of the sixties with reverence in the way other spoke of 'the war': as a time of great deeds and unrepeatable excitement...Gabriel thought he might make a film about his father entitled *One Day in the Sixties*" (*Gabriel's Gift* 29). Gabriel deals with this domestic triangle consisting of a broken home, separation and two parents fighting for his love, by drawing, smoking pot and talking to this dead brother, Archie, asking him for help. The use of names is quite interesting since the name of Gabriel, who seems to be in possession of supernatural powers, could be read as an allusion to Archangel Gabriel, as well as to the protagonist of Salman Rushdie's seminal *Satanic Verses*. Moreover, Gabriel talks to the dead and one of them, Archie, serves as a guiding, even angelic voice. His relationship with Archie is very close, to the point where he confuses the two: "Gabriel wondered whether they had been permanently mixed up. Perhaps he was Archie and Gabriel was dead. Certainly he was always aware of his brother's absence and whenever he saw a pair of twins he wanted to rush over and tell them or their mother that there were two of him too; it was just that one of them was a shadow" (*Gabriel's Gift* 20). It seems that Gabriel is a young Kureishi, an artist, who reflects on the past and on the way it can be liberating or constraining. This fragmented life seems to be counterbalanced by the gift of art that Gabriel seems to possess. After receiving encouragement regarding his gift from rock star Lester Jones (another character

modelled on David Bowie), Gabriel sees his art as the only thing that can help him hold together everything and everyone in his life, while his parents see it, opportunistically, as a way out of their miserable lives. Art references in the novel are plentiful (i.e., mentioning the director Andrei Tarkovsky and the comic duo Laurel and Hardy), while the healing powers of the arts are emphasised as they serve to mend the relationship between Gabriel's parents. It is not solely Gabriel, though, who finds solace through art: Rex's own gift (playing the guitar) helps him become something of a guru (much like Haroon in *The Buddha of Suburbia*), as he teaches over-privileged youngsters. At the same time, his anxieties are defused, bringing to surface an impulse to reconstruct everything that the 1960s taught him to destroy, as Gabriel, as a 15-year old Buddha of suburbia himself, helps in the solving of his parents' existential problems before trying to do the same with his own.

Past and present conflicts are also evident throughout the book and Rex's conflicts occupy centre stage, since he is the one who longs for the past. His rock-star past clashes with his poverty-stricken present in a clash between time and place articulated in Kureishi's sharp prose. The past is even referred to in reference to Raj films as Gabriel gets a role in "that big film with all that sand" (*Gabriel's Gift* 122), as Kureishi toys with imperial nostalgia as the film is produced by one of Gabriel's mentors, gesturing towards Raj films, a huge commodity at the time, as well as towards alternative cultural expressions. As the past interacts with the present, however, it seems that the future is more promising as it not based on a rejection of the past, which can function as a way to predict the future rather than merely being a burden:

A better idea was for a shop where you could pop in to have your dreams interpreted and be told your future. Mum had said this wasn't entirely vapid: if you saw the present or the past in a dream, you could predict the future, since for most people the present was merely the past with a later date. Gabriel wasn't sure how lucrative this would be, even if dreams, like pyjamas, were something that everyone had to have (*Gabriel's Gift* 5).

London is once again the background to hope for the future, as it seems to be a site that accommodates everything and everyone, including the au-pair, Hannah, the eastern European immigrant, who comes from a country called "Bronchitis" (*Gabriel's Gift* 9). London signifies the space that matters for the author precisely because the sense of a "national" culture as coherent ethnic entity can no longer be: "What a bright place London was...Here anything could be achieved! You only had to wish high enough! [...] A lot of

people wanted to be someone, but who had the tenacity, the commitment, the steely determination? For how many people was it a necessity, a matter of life as opposed to death? He was too young to be careful. He was full of hope and the ambition of uncontainable wishes” (*Gabriel’s Gift* 154). Moore-Gilbert argues that similar to many “contemporary cultural commentators, Kureishi is concerned to demonstrate how the modern inner city is an easier ‘England’ to identify with for diasporic populations than the rural, industrial and suburban ‘Englands’ which Priestley [in his *English Journey*] anatomized” (*Gabriel’s Gift* 12). Indeed, in the novel, London is also a “school of life”: “School was the last place where anyone could get an education. But outside, if your eyes were open, there were teachers everywhere” (*Gabriel’s Gift* 12). Once again, then, Kureishi explores the connection between the confused and adverse state of modern family life with the changing status and nature of Britain in the 1980s, with London as his backdrop. True to his belief that being British has changed, Kureishi understands that the workings of race in defining an identity, have changed:

The city was no longer home to immigrants only from the former colonies, plus a few others: every race was present, living side by side without, most of the time, killing one another. It held together, this international city called London – just about – without being unnecessarily anarchic or corrupt [...] the last time I visited the barber’s I came out with a bowl of couscous, half a gram of Charlie and a number two crop. I only went in for a shave! (*Gabriel’s Gift* 2).

In *Gabriel’s Gift*, art and sexuality are associated in many instances in the book (i.e., the scene where Gabriel masturbates over a Degas painting) and his female protagonist now reminds him of Degas’ dancers. The ending also suggests a turning of imagination into talent and hands-on results. Sexuality is often connected to music in the novel: “All pop comes straight up from the gay underground” (*Gabriel’s Gift* 152). Art was connected with sexuality quite clearly even earlier in the book in a scene that testifies to the highly complex relationship between Hanif and his father: “He thought about painting, and about Degas, and then Degas’s girls. He couldn’t sleep with an erection. He masturbated quickly – taking care not to splash his father – and slipped from the bed” (*Gabriel’s Gift* 2). This is a very interesting aspect that adheres to sexuality as it touches upon the borders of a homosocial nature of the relationship between father and son. Indeed, given the strong sense of autobiographical elements in all of Kureishi’s works, Gabriel can be seen as a young Hanif, first receiving the gift of art which awakens people trapped in their mundane

lives. Kureishi's preference to scripts and films is overpowering, given the ending of the book itself: Gabriel's parents get back together and the last scene is him behind a camera shooting his first film while young women start to admire him because he is a director. And his dead brother was eventually put to rest: "Archie was calm within...This was the only kind of magic Gabriel wanted, a shared dream, turning stories into pictures. Soon the images would be on film; not long afterwards, others would be able to see what he had been having in his mind, these past few months, and he wouldn't be alone any more. He checked that everyone around him was ready and raised his arm. 'Turn over!' He said. 'Turn over! And – action!'" (*Gabriel's Gift* 178). This preoccupation with the dead and the ghosts of the past is extremely important as, even though it seems that Kureishi believed that, like Gabriel, he has put the ghosts of his own past to rest, the publication of his memoir, *My Ear at His Heart* (1995), shows that he is still haunted by the dead, especially his father, as he engages in a process of reading and writing his self alongside his father, a process that is not without problems, as I will argue later on. In any case, the examination of the complex nature of this kind of relationship along with the personal relationship of Kureishi with his father which he refers to extensively in his memoir, can testify to his own development as a writer. This powerful, at times destructive and even homoerotic nature between Gabriel and his father is explored in a more personal tone in Kureishi's memoir, *My Ear at His Heart* (2004), while one could also acquire useful insights as to how and why male and female sexuality are manifested in Kureishi's work, addressing at the same time criticisms raised against him both by critics and by his family. Indeed, *My Ear at His Heart* is Kureishi's most important piece of work during the last 20 years, as all of the issues that preoccupied his entire oeuvre are present and are examined in a different way, from a personal point of view.

Identity, Desire and Postmemory: Writing the Self in *My Ear at His Heart* (2004)

Identity must be seen as contingent and forever incomplete, continually changing as it generates and regenerates itself. Thus, to write an autobiography means, in essence, to write one's own identity. (Steiner and Yang, *Writing Identity* 16)

In 2004, Hanif Kureishi published his memoir, entitled *My Ear at His Heart*, a piece of work that, in his own words, tried to "bring everything together" (218). It is "dad's

little story [which] concerns desire and the humiliation which follows it” (Kureishi, *My Ear at His Heart* 29). Indeed, one could read Kureishi’s memoir as an attempt on behalf of the author not only to come to terms with his own past but also to satisfy a need to reconcile both his own ambivalent identity and position as a writer and as an individual, as he looks back at the course of his oeuvre, trying to construct a sense of self through the process of reading and writing his father’s memories. The memoir turns into a fascinating account of Kureishi’s own development as a writer, elucidating challenges related to the issue of “father and son”, the theme found in *Gabriel’s Gift* (2001) which would also emerge later in *Something to Tell You* (2008). To the extent that texts that represent the self can be read as a search for “truth” as well as a means of understanding the complexities of identity, and, insofar as any autobiographical venture involves a self-conscious approach as well as a deliberate textualisation of the author’s self, one could argue that the sense of selfhood put forward in *My Ear at His Heart* involves certain ambiguities embedded in the process of constructing an identity. It is the purpose of this paper to explore these ambiguities, unravelling the implications behind their interaction with leitmotifs found in Kureishi’s work such as identity, desire and the relationship between the past and the present, as these are imagined by the author, all the while grounding such discussion in the realisation that such a construct of the self entails certain problematic processes pertaining to the issues at hand.

With *My Ear at His Heart*, Kureishi tries to come to terms with his inheritance as it constitutes, in the author’s words, “a quest, for my place in father’s history and fantasy, and for the reasons my father lived the semi-broken life he did” (29). The memoir is based on Kureishi’s reading of two of his father’s unpublished novels, *An Indian Adolescence* and *The Redundant Man*, which are read as “a legacy of words, a protracted will” (*My Ear at His Heart* 1). This legacy is both a burden, just like his father’s long illness had been a burden (Kureishi says: “How can you live your life when your father is failing to live his?” (12)) and a gift: “... as I spin my words out of his words, stories out of other stories” (94). *My Ear at His Heart* is about, in Kureishi’s words, “...the 1960s and the 1970s, set alongside the present [having] objective access to the past. I [...] seem to be opening a door on the past” (12, 16). The discovery of the manuscripts pushes Kureishi to re-examine his past through the process of reading and writing his father, visiting at the same time the Indian space through his father’s memories, as these are revealed in his unpublished works. Given that the engagement of Kureishi with his past selves was triggered by the discovery of his dad’s manuscripts, it can be argued that the author attributes the various

transformations of himself –and his characters– to his being able to “read” and “write” his own past through the reading and writing of his father and his fatherland. Indeed, in examining Kureishi’s relationship with his father, with whom he admits as being obsessed, the author insistently questions and comments on ghosts of the past. Kureishi says:

Unknowable though they might be, where do the dead go and what do they do? Where is my father? Ghosts take up residence within the living, of course – you can hear them speaking, the voices within – but in what way? How are these voices liberating, and how constraining? And, as time passes, how does their tone and force alter? What do they come to mean? What are the limits for the child in terms of the parent’s wishes, and how does the child move beyond them? (*My Ear at His Heart* 241).

The very questions themselves seem to gesture towards what one might call an archaeology of subjectivity; a process whereby the contemporary subject’s constitution owes something significant to those who came before. In other words, the ancestors continue to haunt the present and maintain a voice that impacts the subject’s existence. Of course, Kureishi’s questioning goes further with this idea, suggesting that the residues and legacies that affect the author’s thinking processes determine certain boundaries that are themselves elusive. It seems that Kureishi is finally able to acknowledge that the various transformations of his artistic and lived selves owe a great deal to this “excavation” that he is finally able to face. In writing his memoir, Kureishi seems to be successful in writing a self; a self that is useful in creating an image of a postcolonial, racialised, sexual subject with agency to carry on becoming. What is more, to the extent that *My Ear at His Heart* is about the birth of a writer, one could also argue that this apparent success to write a self, can trigger a retrospective re-examination of his characters and their connection to their past and their legacy. That also reflects the disposition of the members of the Indian diaspora who seemed to have “understood themselves” through Kureishi’s work. And, in fact, it seems that the general idea prevalent in the media at the time as well as in criticisms raised against him, namely that, unlike Salman Rushdie, Kureishi’s characters are indifferent to their Pakistani legacy, is challenged by such a reading of his memoir. Indeed, it seems that in his work Kureishi drew a portrait of the members of the Indian diaspora whose selves were as complex as any other member of British society, hoping that some sort of humanity would emerge.

But, one could ask, what about his memoir and what about himself? Given the complex nature of his legacy as both a burden and a gift, one could question whether

Kureishi's compelling, yet ambiguous attempt to define his self and his origins, as he engages with both past and present, exploring the multiplicity of journeys that brought him where he is, is trouble-free or whether it might be an oversimplification to argue that in the end, everything just falls into place. On the contrary, it would be safe to argue that various ambiguities and questions arise as one tracks the development of the process. It seems that Kureishi does not "find" a ready-made identity but he tries to construct one through identification with a similarly constructed notion of home. Such a home is, in the end, an imagined "other" of England that is constructed through postmemory and imagination and, given the unreliability of such notions one is drawn towards a need for exploration of the implications behind such a process, as Kureishi seems to be redefining his postcolonial self and his nationhood from within. For instance, this revisiting of the past, and consequently of the space of India, operates as an oxymoron and it becomes Kureishi's "strong weakness", precisely because as a colonised space, the Indian subcontinent has been subjugated and defined against its will, very much like the racialised subject in London, and is, therefore, vulnerable. At the same time, though, the same space emerges powerfully in *My Ear at His Heart* as signifier and as an imagined space of great possibilities. So in a sense, one could say that Kureishi is complicit with a trend he directly engaged in his early work, namely the Raj Revival genre. Kureishi hated the suburbs he grew up in and he tried to get away from them, looking at and constructing London in his work as a sexual metropolis and a space of possibilities and indeed, there are numerous occasions in his oeuvre where his characters proclaim their love for London while their transformations are enabled by that space. Of course, one should also note here that in Kureishi's work, and especially in *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990), the space of the suburbs is recognised in the end by the protagonist as an essential part of himself. Still though, the space of the sexual metropolis of London has more allure than Bromley. One could pose the question though of how is this romance with a different space than the one that one is born into and raised in, any different than the romance the British proclaimed for the British Raj? Such a reading of these displacements points not only to the problematic nature of the constructed self of Kureishi, but also marks a returning to hitherto excluded past selves, as the author realises that these selves, and the space of India for that matter, have always been there and that the repressed will come back to haunt subjectivities.

By his own admission, when his father died in 1991, Kureishi embarked on what he called a "nihilist" period of drug taking and drinking while he started seeing a psychoanalyst, and he wrote *My Ear at His Heart* 15 years later as part of a "healing"

process that would supposedly lead to his coming to terms with his past and his father's death. However, despite the fact that psychoanalysis is a dialogical process which probes into an individual's past, his past selves and his memories, the fact that Kureishi tries to construct his self through a process of "postmemory", presents itself with certain problems. I read the concept of postmemory here as the transmission of memory from one generation to another. Marianne Hirsch has defined it as "the relationship of the second generation to powerful, often traumatic, experiences that preceded their births but were nevertheless transmitted to them so deeply as to constitute memories in their own right" (1). Postmemory could be said to portray the relationship that exists between two consecutive generations, adhering to the individual, collective and cultural trauma of the older generation. This trauma is "remembered" through the stories narrated from the older generation to the younger one, which are powerful enough so as the recipients of these stories create images of the past which is then appropriated as if they were their own. The younger generation is then overwhelmed by the imaginative power and projection of these stories rather than by the actual process of remembering, and they are dominated by narratives that existed before their birth. This process entails a risk: to have the –more often than not– traumatic memories of someone else displace and replace your own. In other words, even though certain events happened in the past, their effects continue in a powerful way into the present. These ideas are clearly reflected in *My Ear at His Heart*, and especially in the way in which Kureishi reads his relationship with his father and their past. The psychological processes he is engaged in are examined through familial postmemory, namely the direct communication of memory to the child from the parent, which points to what Hirsch labels as "transgenerational transmission of trauma", where gender serves as an idiom of remembrance.

However, it should be noted that in the case of Kureishi, this process is different. It is not Rafiushan, his father, who directly imparts memory of the Indian subcontinent to his son but it is the son who forcibly extracts these memories from his dead father's manuscripts. This differentiation has a twofold meaning. Firstly, it points to a construction of the self that entails a realisation on behalf of the author that the various transformations of himself are finally attributed to his ability to come to terms with his own past. On the other hand though, even if one can argue that the memoir is a non-nostalgic treatment of his origins in that Kureishi critically engages with his past, the very fact that he tries to read his Indianness through his father, paired with the unreliability of memory and the competing and complicated versions of family myths, given that the discovery of his

father's texts directed the focus of his narrative on the myths and stories that constitute a family, creates certain problems. So Kureishi, both as a member of a Muslim family living in India and as a child of a failed novelist who left the subcontinent, inherits his father's troubled histories not through direct recollection but through haunting postmemories, multiplied mediated images, objects, stories and behaviours. Consequently, there are two created selves that are inextricably interconnected: that of Kureishi and that of his father. The extent of this interconnection remains to be seen. To add to this complexity, the issue of the relation between life and the narratives that explore it is added to the mix. What is the relationship between these constructed selves and their lived experiences? As Kureishi says,

Although dad's book is written in the third person, switching occasionally, by 'mistake', into the first, I have to say it seems inevitable that I will read his stories as personal truths, if not in the detail then in the feeling. It annoys me, as it might any novelist, to have my own work reduced to autobiography, as though you've just written down what happened. Often, writing isn't always a reflection of experience so much as a substitute for it, an 'instead of' rather than a 'reliving', a kind of daydreaming. *The relation between a life and the telling of it is impossible to unravel*. Still, whatever my father has made, I will be reconstructing him from these fragments or traces, attempting to locate his 'self' in the imaginings or scatterings (*My Ear at His Heart* 15, emphasis added).

How can, then, such a multiple quest of selfhood, bringing together as it does characters, past and present selves, memories and imaginations be honest, given the inextricable relationship between the artistic and the individual selves evident in Kureishi's work? Kureishi himself was caught up in an impossible position as he tried to differentiate himself from the text by saying: "I am not the text" (Yousaf, 2002, p. 25). At the same time he also recognised the impossibility of discerning the author from his text: "The fact is, the place writers and artists hold in the public imagination exists beyond their work (16). So, to what extent is he justified in insisting that his fictions should not be read autobiographically? Kureishi frequently mentions writers that have identified him: "I would look at, for instance, Kerouac, Dostoevsky, Salinger, Orwell, Hesse, Ian Fleming and Wilde again, in order to see whether I could re-inhabit the worlds they once made in my head, and identify myself in them. Each book, I hoped, would revive memories of the circumstances in which it was read" (5). And it was Oscar Wilde who, in "The Critic as

Artist”, said: ‘Man is least himself when he talks in his own person. Give him a mask and he will tell you the truth’ (389). Consequently, a difficulty of distinguishing between auto/biography and fiction arises within such a process. Sue Thomas says that any biography or autobiography is inevitably selective, shaped, subjective and therefore fictional. Kureishi adds to that: “...a good deal of what I “know” must be supposition and fantasy, I guess that that is all it ever could be. Therefore, this free-form work of mine is probably closer to fiction than I would like to think. But this research, I hope, will take me much further” (16).

One of the ways in which he tries to move further than the text and fiction, is the fact that *My Ear at His Heart* is organised as a photo album. Pictures of the author with his sons, his father and his uncle (and interestingly only two of his mother, one with the author’s father and one with his grandfather) are spread throughout the book, which is as if Kureishi is inviting the reader to read him as an embodiment of his work, just like Oscar Wilde who wanted to live his life as art. This combination of text and images, along with the numerous references to pop music, television programs and films, gestures towards a multiple and complex narrative that underlines the way in which the very act of narrating life is interconnected with the lives of other people, other media and other narratives. Such a view, in turn, reflects the multifaceted nature of the writer’s identity, as well as an attempt to provide evidence for his claimed experiences. Apart from photos, the memoir is filled with performative acts such as references to music and dancing, as Kureishi seems to paint an image of himself and London that is both sonic and visual, showing us the origin of his cultural milieu by mythologising it. It has to be noted, however, that Kureishi never actually contextualises the pictures and leaves their interpretation to the reader who becomes aware of the text’s gaps and spaces created by the insertion of these non-textual elements. In that, the reader partakes in the making of the text –and consequently of the self– through interpreting these spaces. The attempt to construct a self out of these fragments which inevitably means that there are as many outcomes as there are readers, challenges conventions of the traditional autobiographical genre, whereby the writer is the sole master of the text which results into a coherent and unified identity, as film, music and the photos included in *My Ear at His Heart* as well as the realisation of what the text owes to those who came before, gesture towards textual multimodality which in turn functions towards a different understanding of “lived histories” that transgresses textual limits and defies the notion of a unified text and, given the intertwining of the literary and lived selves of the author, the idea of autonomy in identity.

The close relationship between the artistic and personal selves is made clear from the very beginning of *My Ear at His Heart*, where Kureishi quotes Henry James' *Portrait of a Lady*: "There's no such thing as an isolated man or woman; we're each of us made up of some cluster of appurtenances. What shall we call our 'self'? Where does it begin? Where does it end? It overflows into everything that belongs to us – and then it flows back again" (18). Kureishi seems to understand that he is made up of others and as he exposes these others, he exposes himself. This quote about identity and its borders gestures towards the permeability of the artist's boundaries and the circular current (in and out) that characterises the artist's relationship with his environment. Indeed, even though he was not comfortable with having his work reduced to autobiography, Kureishi still recognises the fragility of the borders of identity, and the ones between artist and man.

It is true then that the links between the artist and his work become extremely fragile. Kureishi does not narrate his stories based on his own life experiences; rather, this exploration constitutes a re-reading and re-writing of his own self, in an attempt to come to terms with issues that formed his personal and artistic life. Such issues include his relationship with his father and the manifestation of his artistic gifts as it is made clear that Kureishi's focus on the exploration of masculine sexuality and the discontents of heterosexual relationships in his later work, which were influenced by his own personal circumstances, informed the processes which culminated in the publication of his memoir. In exploring the limits of such relationships between artist and individual, past and present selves and the pain that desire involves, then, Kureishi's quest for selfhood becomes a complex process, to say the very least, as he tries to come to terms with his imagined India, just like he tried to come to terms with his lived England. Speaking about his complex identity, Kureishi himself worded it as such:

It is still difficult to answer the question, where do you come from? I have never wanted to identify with England [...] But [...] some kind of identification with England remains. It is strange to go away to the land of your ancestors, to find out how much you have in common with people there, yet at the same time to realize how British you are [...] You think often of England and what it means to you - and you think often of what it means to be British (*My Ear at His Heart* 53).

The question then becomes: Can one presume that it is possible to write the self? By finding some way of incorporating the past into his present could Kureishi ever come to terms with his past? I argue that the subject can be a complex, impossible entity in a world

where the self can exist only if it is faltering and contingent. Such a nature pertains to textual strategies that evoke fragmented subjectivities that provoke discontinuity and displacement. Indeed, *My Ear at His Heart* is a ghost memoir, with the son broken and haunted, trying to write a story about meeting his dead father who he still dreams about. Sue Thomas argues that part of Kureishi's purpose in writing *My Ear at His Heart* may very well have been an attempt to lay his father's ghost to rest but he discovers that a "dead father is even more potent than an existing one". It seems then that Kureishi realises that he cannot escape the past, as he quotes Ibsen: "'We travel with a corpse in our cargo'. Ibsen is saying here that the dead –dead fathers, the living dead, in effect – are as potent, even more potent, than actually existing ones [...] How do you kill a dead father then" (*Something to Tell You* 7)? Such a reading of Kureishi's memoir can underline both the frailty and the possibilities of the human condition, evident in the reading and writing of the various selves present in the book, functioning as they do within the social and cultural realms of both past and present.

The examination of the father figure and the exploration of the family's past in such a deeply personal work stirred negative emotions with some members of Kureishi's family who accused him of using them for personal gains. *My Ear at His Heart* was not seen by his family as an attempt on behalf of Kureishi to come to terms with his past but, rather, as an exploitation of their personal circumstances for money and fame, which of course brings to mind the previously discussed dilemma of Karim in *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990), and whether to model his character on his uncle, Changez. The author, himself, has not denied that, but he has defended himself by saying in an interview to Mick Brown that that a writer's job is not to be liked, but to be confrontational and adversarial: "I've never had any desire to be good. I don't like goodness particularly. I like passion... Artists should be terrorists, not masseurs" (Brown). However, Kureishi's sister, Yasmin, said that he had portrayed their father as "...a dismal failure, a pathetic, sickly man who sat around in his pyjamas all day. It's not a portrait that I recognise at all" (Brown). She wrote to *The Guardian* that Kureishi had fabricated her family's life for the "entertainment of the public or for Hanif's profit" ("A Chronicle of Life and Pleasure"). She also wrote that their father was angry because Hanif had depicted him as a bitter old man, and he felt that Hanif had robbed him of his dignity. His mother also said that Hanif had made the family "sound like the dregs of society because it suits his image and his career. I suppose it's trendy nowadays for an author to pretend they had a working-class background, but Hanif had everything he wanted as a child" (Brown). To date, Kureishi is still not on speaking terms

with his sister, while he was only recently reconciled with his mother. However, Kureishi believes that *My Ear at His Heart* was full of love and respect as he recognises the effect his father has on him. Kureishi expressed his thoughts regarding this in an interview: “I honestly don’t believe I’ve traduced my father in any way. I thought [*My Ear at His Heart*] was affectionate and respectful. But, of course, in families, everybody has a different idea of who’s doing what” (Brown). In the same interview, Kureishi says:

I do feel really guilty about my life,’ he says. ‘My dad would get up at six in the morning, put a suit on, get on the train, come home knackered, lie on the sofa – and I’m sitting around writing deep words. Shameful. It was also shocking that it was so easy for me. I began to write, my books were published, and quite soon my films were made. I wrote *My Beautiful Laundrette* and I went to Hollywood, and it was no trouble at all. And I think that was rather humiliating for Dad. We had to perpetuate this line that his books were always better than mine, that I basically wrote about rubbish, sex and drugs and parties and stuff, and Dad wrote about the deep things. That had to be the line. Because you couldn’t humiliate your father, you had to keep your father up. So it was a bit tricky. I felt rather ashamed, that it had been so easy for me and so hard for him (Brown).

It is made clear, then, that their relationship was extremely multi-layered and complex, both on the level of text and writing, as well as in life. Consequently, the search for the various selves is deemed as highly problematic.

The quote I used as an epigraph involves a paradox. “Identity must be seen as contingent and forever incomplete, continually changing”, which means that when you write your own identity what you are producing is not a solid and stable construct but one that reflects this constant instability that is identity. This issue brings to mind Derrida’s critique of essential identity which carries an authoritarian notion, as it creates a number of hierarchical binary relationships. Past and present is one of them and Kureishi tries to come to terms with his past through postmemory. So the question is whether he manages to –subconsciously even– deconstruct this violent hierarchy in which the present is subordinated to the past. Obviously, in answering this question, one should look into the different binarisms present in *My Ear at His Heart* which the past and present relationship engulfs, such as the relationship between father and son. Jacques Derrida has argued that the binarism of speech and writing can be attributed to what he termed as logocentrism; in that binarism, the presence of speech (or, the logos) dominates over writing. However, the

absence of the suppressed element continuously jeopardises the dominant constituent, simply because the latter needs the former in order to be formed. In other words, the dominant term needs what it suppresses and excludes, in order to form an identity. It can be argued, then, that what enables Kureishi in this quest of selfhood is the realisation of the inability to totally identify with a home and an identity, or, to once more gesture towards Derrida, the creation of a space between presence and absence, between narrating and narrated selves which are engaged in a hierarchical relationship. This brings to mind Dylan Thomas's words here, since the dead father's manuscripts had never been published and he was, therefore, absent and could not speak: "death has no dominion" ("And Death Shall Have No Dominion"). But Kureishi does give voice to his father through the very act of the publication of *My Ear at His Heart* in which he discusses his father's unpublished manuscripts. His father's work, and at the same time his memories and imaginations, are published as part of his son's memoir which makes it a part of his son's life at the same time. So, in a way, the text seems to privilege a sense of collective imagination rather than an individual perspective of it, which has a twofold meaning. On the one hand, such a realisation points to the impossibility of an autonomous text and an autonomous self which, in turn, underlines the polyvalent nature of selfhood. Such a reading of the text also points to a kind of life writing that is concentrated on somebody else's story, in this case the father. In a way then, Kureishi's autobiography of the self is, at the same time, the biography of (an)other. In his own words: "Among other things, this has been a story of generations, told through the males, from my grandfather Colonel Murad/Kureishi, via my own father, his brothers, myself and my own sons, three British boys called Kureishi. Out of my reading and others' writing I have made a story of the past, imagining around their imaginations" (238). In *My Ear at His Heart*, Kureishi's autobiographical self is engaged in an ongoing discourse with his own and his father's selves. Such a realisation pays homage to the author's acknowledgement that the multifaceted transformations of his artistic and lived selves have realised because of this excavation vis-à-vis his subjectivity that he is finally able to make and that he is who he is not despite but because of his past. One could not help but notice, however, the predominantly male element that seems to govern such realisations.

It should be noted that Kureishi is the sole master of his father's voice and he can do whatever he wants with it. In the violent hierarchy between father and son, then, with the two poles representing past and present as they try to come together, it would seem that the son governs the father. But is it so, given the fact that Kureishi admitted to being

haunted by his past, and his father? In his quest for selfhood, Kureishi reads his past, which has been repressed for so long, which consequently is being re-translated into the present and assumes the dominant position vis-à-vis the present, in the form of tradition. An achieved sense of identity that brings together past and present, then, can be nothing if not fragmented and anarchic. Reading identity in such a way that points to a chaotic nature and constant mobility of the self and identity and given that the process of writing the self in *My Ear at His Heart* is embedded in expressed desires which pertain to knowing your ghosts, the concept of affect comes to mind, as has been put forward by Brian Massumi in *Parables for the Virtual* (2002). Affect, according to Massumi, is not defined as a thought, but rather as something associated with sentiment and feeling, and, consequently, as something that lacks rationality. I read affect, following Massumi, as “a non-conscious experience of intensity, a moment of unformed and unstructured potential that has the power to move subjectivity beyond political exigencies” (*Parables for the Virtual* 30). Focusing on how desire manifests itself in Kureishi’s memoir, then, can lead us to new ways to “rethink body, subjectivity, and social change in terms of movement, affect, force, and violence” (Massumi 66) as he puts forward a way in which we can think of identity in affective terms. Such an issue is closely connected to the way in which father and mother figures, which play an important role in the making of identity, are re-presented in the memoir and indeed Kureishi’s work.

The person who embodies desire and is admired by Kureishi for it, is not his father, but Omar Kureishi, his successful uncle, who is described in the book as “a boaster and show-off” (43), ruthless, pleasure-seeking and successful, the antithesis of his steady, responsible, suburban father (127–128), which brings to mind the previously mentioned need for movement and love for the space of London for Kureishi, which came into sharp contrast with his father’s love of the suburbs. This theme of the two father-figures, one “effective and pleasure-seeking” and the other one “useless” and withdrawn, with the son moving between them, will find its way into Kureishi’s first film *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985). Omar, the son in the film, becomes successful when he leaves his father’s sickbed and comes under the patronage of his morally ambiguous uncle, which is a move that the father comes to resent as rebellion and betrayal. Even Haroon and Anwar, the two brothers in *The Buddha of Suburbia*, are modelled on this Omar-Rafiushan relationship, as Haroon becomes a successful, albeit fake Buddha, who has multiple sexual experiences outside of marriage, while Anwar is confined to his home, fasting himself to death in order to make his daughter, Jamila, marry a man of his choosing. Such a portrayal of the weak and

effeminate father figure in, is juxtaposed with Kureishi's obsession with strong father figures (and consequently, masculine sexuality) and his conscious unwillingness, or inability, to deal with mother figures. The portrayal, then, of the father in *My Beautiful Laundrette* –not only because of its physical weakness but due to its broken down nature (due to the loss of the wife)– gestures not only towards a political trajectory which essentially is a critique of the failed Left which did not provide a viable alternative to Thatcherite politics, but also, and more importantly, towards a sense of melancholia for the loss of the maternal figure. Kureishi felt that loss of his father and tried to overcome this melancholia by focusing on powerful father figures and on powerful male protagonists such as Karim in *The Buddha of Suburbia*. Such a sense of loss found its way into his memoir, as the process of re-inscribing oneself as an artist, as a writer, becomes fundamental in overcoming that sense of melancholy. This effort is reflected in the different outcomes of the father figures in Kureishi's life such as his uncle, Omar Kureishi, who goes back to Pakistan and becomes successful as a journalist, while Rafiushan tries to break ties with his past. Kureishi says: "Dad never went to Pakistan, not even for a holiday. He never saw his mother again. Rejoining his family would be too difficult" (49). He wrote about Pakistan instead and he "was the boss in [the] house, where he made his own empire" (83) in the London suburbs. The memoir traces the different roles of the father within the family and how each generation tries to figure this differently and in reaction to its predecessor. Kureishi's fascination of father figures is evident in his description of his paternal grandfather as being autocratic, stern and the layer-down of the law. Such a fascination with father figures and the reading of his fatherland also gives the readers an insight, within the "birth of a writer" context, as to why he was more interested in exploring masculine sexuality in his works. This kind of realisation gestures towards certain ways in which the spaces of home, which include both the private and the public or national sphere, offer a troubling source of remembered or recreated identities, as these spheres are reflected in the portrayal of female and masculine sexualities, respectively.

The authoritative figure of the father and Kureishi's admission that he admired his grandfather, Colonel Kureishi, who was also authoritarian and cheated on his wife, underlines the fact that power seems to be linked to the male symbolic order. Thus Kureishi does not only admire the father figures in his life but he also fears them. Sue Thomas argues that *My Ear at His Heart* is not only about understanding his father, but also about Kureishi's own development as a writer as he seems to have what she calls "patrophobia". It is because Kureishi was afraid that becoming a writer would mean

becoming his father, Thomas argued, that he identified with his uncle Omar Kureishi (191-192). To have stayed under his father's influence would have condemned him to the role of the "weak, little brother" that his father had been forced to play (44). Still, even after his death, Kureishi's father's presence continues to influence and haunt him, as he admits that he thinks about him every day: "The whole time...I still want to be like him, and I still hope one day to coincide with him [...] ...sometimes, I think I go to my desk only to obey my father" (*My Ear at His Heart* 10). Kureishi's depiction and different manifestations of male sexuality were more important to him, as we must assume his relationship with his father was more ostensibly significant to him than the one with his mother, and, to date, he has deliberately chosen not to disclose details of his relationship with his mother in his work. In fact, Kureishi has said it clearly: "My mother was important in my life too. But she is important to me privately. I don't feel that I particularly want to write about her, for others to read about her" ("With Your Tongue Down My Throat"). Thus, the father figure, which is more catalytic than female figures in Kureishi's work, seems to have been much more present. This goes on to testify to his preoccupation with masculine sexuality, the manifestations of which make him a radical writer who is trying to deconstruct the past/present hierarchy. But is he successful? There are some telling moments in *My Ear at His Heart*, such as the way the male members of the Kureishi family interacted with each other (36) where the rigidity of masculine embodiment and its symbolic values are challenged and male desire and sexuality are discoursed in complex terms. However, it should be noted that, no matter how much he tried to suppress the mother figure, she is translated and proliferated through the author himself. Through her absence, the mother is present, as she is made visible through Kureishi's narration of his father's voice, as the author becomes the mother, stealing as he does the logos from his effeminate father who is, in effect, the castrated figure and an imagined father. Such a complex relationship between mothers, fathers, homes and identities in *My Ear at His Heart* points to the interim nature of the constructed self Kureishi is trying to achieve, underlines the impossibility of a coherent sense of identity and gestures towards the painful and complex nature of masculine sexuality. It seems that Kureishi's self is located within his examination of masculine sexuality, as his failed sense of intimacy in his personal life (to which he refers to in numerous occasions in the memoir) might be attributed, to a certain extent, to his relationship with his father as well as to the fact that he tried to deny aspects of his self and his past from the very beginning of his career. In "The Rainbow Sign" he says: "From the start I tried to deny my Pakistani self. I was ashamed. It was a curse and I wanted to be rid

of it. I wanted to be like everyone else” (1). Kureishi’s self-representational writing, which is also a quest for, and construction of, a sense of selfhood, gives us a clear insight as to how and why Kureishi manifested desire in his later work. While in his early work desire was manifested within a pleasure for pleasure’s sake approach, in his later work, desire is inextricably bound with pain, while pleasure seems to elude its characters. *My Ear at His Heart*, in Kureishi’s words, also concerns desire and the “humiliation that follows it” (13). Kureishi says: “To be lured, enticed by desire [...] is to will not only failure and dissatisfaction, but punishment” (Kureishi, *My Ear at His Heart* 29).

The way desire and sexuality are manifested in the memoir and indeed Kureishi’s work, its relation to the past-present hierarchy and bringing to mind the previously mentioned influence of the dead and the residence of ghosts within the living, culminate to a moment of self-realisation of the complexity of the process of looking for a self. It is a realisation that, on the one hand, recognises that the self that is, owes something to those who were and that we need to think this relationship in affective terms so as to avoid the entanglement into essential binarisms of past and present. On the other hand, such a realisation seems to be burdened by legacies that affect the thinking processes. Despite the disapproval from his immediate family, *My Ear at His Heart* is a deeply touching story, by the end of which Kureishi realises that he can never actually know his father -or himself for that matter-, reflecting on the unknowability of the parents. An unknowability that is, indeed, tied up with desire and sexuality in affective ways as its unformed and unstructured potential has the power to move subjectivity beyond social, personal and political exigencies:

However well you know your parents, children will feel the lives of their parents are a mystery, not only because the desire and sexuality of the parents is beyond them, but because the lesson here is about unknowability ... I have about father, after all this, the feeling you can only have after knowing someone for a long time: that you don’t know them at all, really. If only you could consign your history to the past and keep it there. But history is a blink away, the present in another aspect (*My Ear at His Heart* 240).

Kureishi seems to be asking here, how well can you know your parents, or your own self for that matter? Such unknowability underlines the complexity and the elusive and polyvalent nature of identities, thought of in affective terms. This is the moving conclusion towards which *My Ear at His Heart* makes its way: the recognition of the unknowable nature and the complexity of the interaction between identity, desire and the past, as well

as the ambiguities that arise as one explores such issues, especially when they are embedded within the context of a father-son relationship, like the one we bear witness to in *My Ear at His Heart*, which, in turn, is built on a sense of fantasy that is used as a retrospective substitute for actual experience. It seems that it matters less whether an event did or did not happen than what the fantasy reveals about the subjects' unconscious desires. And it is Kureishi's desire to understand his father and himself, reflecting on the fact that his name is on numerous published books, while the father is a relative failure in that respect. So the son "writes this book, trying to bring everything together" (218).

An Ageing Kureishi: Difficult Pleasures

In Kureishi's latest novel to date, *Something to Tell You* (2008), desire is manifested in a similar way as in *Intimacy*, inextricably bound with pain, while pleasure eludes its characters. *My Ear at His Heart* mentions Kureishi's experience of psychoanalysis, observing that "the blank sheet of paper is like the analyst's silence" (144); the narrator of *Something to Tell You* (2008) is also a psychoanalyst. It is the story of Jamal Khan, who has just separated from his wife, and learns that his first love Ajita, who left London abruptly 30 years ago due to the killing of her father in racial riots, has returned. Jamal, his bisexual, tattooed, pierced, socialist sister Miriam and his sexually deviant friend Henry embark on a quest to find Ajita along with exploring their youthful lust for life. However, they eventually have to deal with their age and its consequences, while the London bombings play their role in Jamal's conscience. Jamal is hiding a terrible secret while, faithful to Kureishi's leitmotifs, the novel examines the burden of the past onto the present. The past, says Jamal, "rode on my back like a devil, poking me, covering my eyes and ears for its sport" (34).

Something to Tell You (2008) explores the complex relationship between affect and politics as Kureishi explores the interaction between life and death, desire and pain, pleasure and punishment. The author translates this relationship into recognising the interconnectedness between pleasure and pain, violence and affection:

Secrets are my currency: I deal in them for a living. The secrets of desire, of what people really want, and of what they fear the most. The secrets of why love is difficult, sex complicated, living painful and death so close and yet placed far away. Why are pleasure and punishment closely related? How do

our bodies speak? Why do we make ourselves ill? Why do you want to fail?
Why is pleasure hard to bear? (*Something to Tell You* 133).

This quote is a good summary of the plot starting from the 1970s as Jamal, a psychoanalyst, was leading a carefree life in contemporary London, where everything was possible. The flashbacks in *Something to Tell You* reveal nostalgia for a long-gone hedonistic world filled with sexual promiscuity and drug experimentation. Indeed, Jamal, who has a teenage son, Rafi, is “a reader of minds and signs” (12), and he is in the process of separating from his partner, a situation similar to Jay’s in *Intimacy*. Jamal passes the days in his west London flat, which also serves as his office, as he deals with “the promiscuous, the frigid, the panicked, the vertiginous; abusers and the abused, cutters, starvers, vomiters, the trapped and the too free, the exhausted and the over-active, and those committed for life to their own foolishness” (*Something to Tell You* 23). Jamal has his secrets, of course, the biggest of which is that he has killed Ajita, a former girlfriend’s father, who had been sexually abusing her. *Something to Tell You* is a novel that includes psychoanalysis, pop music, love, the discontents of a middle-age crisis and the coexistence of desire and pain. “I guess it was turning 50”, Kureishi says. “I thought, I’ve lived through the 60s, 70s, 80s and 90s; I know about this –TV, pop, drugs– put it all in. So you make that decision; but organising the material takes time to do” (Brown). Kureishi says of the book: “It’s a more grown-up book – there is more disappointment. The boy in *The Buddha* was up for anything; he wants to have a good time; he was a rock’n’roll kid. There are pleasures in the new book but they’re harder to find” (Brown). Once again, West London, the same area where Kureishi grew up, is the setting for *Something to Tell You*. “The London I liked,” his protagonist says, “was the city of exiles, refugees and immigrants, those for whom the metropolis was extraterrestrial, the English codes unbreakable, people who didn’t have a place and didn’t know who they were” (*Something to Tell You* 112). This kind of space shows its clear connection to politics, as Jamal expresses its views on the punk movement:

I had never liked the punks...but this kind of anarchistic republican amorality appealed to me at times - I guess it was the lack of respect for authority, its destructiveness. At the same time it fitted with the liberal economics of Thatcher. Who could not be amused by the fact that the capitalism unleashed by the Conservatives under Thatcher was destroying the very social values the party espoused? (*Something to Tell You* 77).

The characters are also colourful: Jamal's sister, Miriam, is heavily tattooed with "more pictures than the Tate" (*Something to Tell You* 56) and indulges in drugs, appearances on daytime television shows about anything, "involving weight problems, drug addiction, domestic abuse, tattooing, teenagers, rape, rage, race or lesbianism – or any combination of the aforementioned" (*Something to Tell You* 57). She and Henry experiment with drugs, sex, using Ecstasy and Viagra, and frequent underground swingers (i.e., sex) clubs.

At first sight, it looks as though Kureishi has returned to the leitmotifs of his earlier work. In his own words, *Something to Tell You* contains "all the stuff I'm interested in – you know, race, sex, politics, psychoanalysis, literature, TV" (*Something to Tell You* 57). But is that the case? It seems that even if his intentions were to put forward a plot and a set of characters immersed in pleasure, it simply does not work in the same way as it might have in the past, largely due to the change of the political environment and society, from a context that enables such behaviour on behalf of characters such as Omar in *My Beautiful Laundrette* and Karim in *The Buddha of Suburbia*, to a new one in which such behaviour seems obsolete and unnecessary. In *Something to Tell You*, pleasure is approached as something you have to work hard to get, and which does not come without taking its toll: "Pleasure was hard work; not everyone, perhaps not most people, could bear to find it" (*Something to Tell You* 23). The search, of course, is one that Kureishi himself has been engaged in all his life. He seems to realise, however, like his protagonist by the end of the book, the impossibility of a solution, as well as that it might not be the goal that matters, but the journey, as an insistent motivation that makes his life interesting. What is more, Kureishi and his characters seem to realise that pleasure is inextricably intertwined with pain. Andrew Anthony, in a critique of *Something to Tell You*, says that "Kureishi seems burdened with the heavy knowledge that hedonism is inseparable from heartache" (Andrew). Just like his psychoanalyst protagonist who is ready by the end of the book –and despite everything– to see the next patient, Kureishi, in these later works, also moves beyond this almost obsessive pursuit for pleasure as he understands that desire comes at a price. His generation, the one that grew up in the 1970s and 1980s, valued pleasure more than anything else. Jamal says: "I hear of how people's desire and guilt upset and terrorise them" (*Something to Tell You* 122). Indeed, this more inward-thinking nature of Kureishi is reflected in his own thoughts in an interview, as he seems to be questioning what he terms as "too much sexual freedom":

I wanted to think about this book as thinking about the hedonism that we grew up with, where it has got us and what it has meant...There was this

belief in the 60s and through the 70s that if people could do whatever they wanted to do, the world would be a much better place; if they could have sex with whomever they wanted, whenever they wanted, and it wasn't repressed, then it would be fantastic and free. We've had all that and done all that. But has it reduced sexuality to nothing? Are we numb? Does it have any meaning now it's free and ... empty? We've created a sort of extreme capitalism where people are objects and everything is bought and sold continuously. But is that what we wanted? So the book is some attempt at assessment of some of that stuff (Brown).

In the same interview, Kureishi acknowledges that nobody embraced sexual freedom more than he did. But it is clear that in this last part of his career, he re-thinks desire:

Ageing is an education in disappointment. You learn that your pleasures are harder earned. I really believed at certain times in my life that taking drugs and going with girls and all of that... I thought I wanted to be doing that all the time. And I learnt after a time that it would lead to destruction and stupidity. And that there are other pleasures, and these other pleasures are far less to do with yourself and more to do with other people – with your children, for example, and your identification with them and the pleasure you have from being with the kids (Brown).

This shift to other people, whether he is talking about his children or his father reflect his re-imagining of desire in that pleasure directed at the self is undeniably bound to pain and punishment. Fatherhood and maturity for Kureishi led him to explore desire and pleasure in a different way, which points to a sense of failure for his characters who long for a better past. Such manifestations of desire reflect the issues Kureishi examined in these pieces of work, namely the discontents of adult relationships, the complex relationships between fathers and sons as well as the moral dilemma between self-indulgence and the responsibility towards children.

Such a self-realisation based on the burden of ageing, reflects the literary development of Hanif Kureishi. We have seen in the course of this thesis the way in which, as Kureishi develops as an artist and as a person, desire and sexuality are manifested differently in different eras, socio-political environments and contexts. Each piece of work by Hanif Kureishi engages serious issues, ranging from race and politically oppressive environments to religious violence as well as more personal themes such as marriage and adult relationships. In each case, the issues of desire and sexuality dialectically engage

such themes, challenging symbolic orders in the process as they offer hope for the future. We have been the witnesses of both personal and artistic self-realisation moments that reveal the fragile links between the artist and his work. Kureishi has unravelled the implications behind the complex nature of the workings of contemporary relationships, manifesting desire in different ways, ranging from sexual liberation to a sense of desire that entails pain and punishment. Throughout Kureishi's work there is a dialectical process between sexuality and desire and, the examining of the space created because of this process, leads to new possibilities imagining identity. The various manifestations of desire and sexuality the reader comes across, as this thesis has argued, not only do they chronicle the course of British society from the 1980s to the present time, but they also constitute accounts of Kureishi's literary and personal development. Such an examination of the trajectories of these progresses, the fact that Kureishi has managed to stay in the forefront of the British literary scene for nearly thirty years now, and the fact that his career is still ongoing, make the exploration of his work imperative, if we want to account for the sociopolitical changes British society has undergone in the last three decades. It is my view that these various manifestations of desire within the social realm, culminate to the conclusion that Hanif Kureishi has always been a political writer that strikes at the heart of oppressive symbolic orders, with his work being a paradigm of how postcolonial and post-imperial ethno-English writing can break ground from well-established hegemonic discourses, subverting traditional understandings of nation as well as ideas of belonging in Britain since the 1980s. It is this pioneering quality of Kureishi's work that has paved the way for a score of cultural production which transgresses stereotypical forms in representing Otherness, as the voice of the marginalised can be heard louder. The culmination of examining Kureishi's work, whose latest publication is *Something to Tell You* in 1998, (the author is currently working on a new novel), includes not only the pieces of work especially in British Cinema that Kureishi directly or indirectly influenced, but also a discussion of the paths followed in the present thesis, the conclusions drawn by the examination of the various manifestations of desire and sexuality within the socio-political, as well as suggestions for further research.

Chapter VII

Conclusion

In periodising Kureishi's work chronologically, the present thesis has examined how the shifting and complex manifestations of desire and sexuality irrevocably characterise the author's work. Following such an examination, the reader is able to look at the relationship between the various forms of artistic enterprise, both fictional and filmic. What is more, such an analytical scheme emphasised the importance of Kureishi's work to the general trends in the British literary and cultural landscape of the past four decades. The first of these three thematic categories, as examined in the second, third and fourth chapters, which includes cinematic works such as *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985), *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid* (1987) and the novel *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990), directly engaged the oppressive political order of the time through the queering of his characters, bringing to the forefront formerly marginalised aspects of British culture, such as racial violence. Desire and sexuality, manifested as they are through the queer, interracial relationships in these works, challenged the established order, intervening in discussions pertaining to the notion of belonging. Indeed, such a reading of desire is closely connected to affect, which is not only an intense pre-feeling but it possesses the power to move subjectivity beyond political exigencies (Massumi 30). In these early works, desire is analogous to the notion of libido, as Sedgwick has argued, as the relationships are shaped by its affective or social forces (*Between Men* 2). As argued previously in this work, such a manifestation of desire opens up a space of indeterminacy and therefore, possibilities of imagining, for the diasporic experience in 1980s Britain. It has been established that Kureishi's early works showed the ways in which the 1980s neoliberal agenda could be undermined by queer modes of belonging that transcend racial, sexual and class boundaries. His diasporic subjects dictated their own terms for belonging in transitional 1980s Britain through a re-imagining of desire that pertains to the re-articulation of the nation as being able to include hitherto marginalised collective subjectivities. At the same time, Kureishi's cinematic work in this early period engaged directly with the Raj Revival genre, re-reading the past, revising traditional romantic conventions and comically parodying imperial beliefs which were being re-translated into the present, based on a sense of nostalgia for the glorious, but long-lost past. The queer characteristics of desire and sexuality in these early works and the relationships to which they were attributed (such as the one between Johnny and Omar

in *My Beautiful Laundrette*) incite hope for the future of Britain, as Johnny's queer, racialised body becomes a site of performances and the tending of his wounds signify the coming together of past and present, sexual expression and imperial legacy, pleasure and pain, effectively reflecting the new "intercourse" between affect and the political, desire and violence. The examination of such narrative representations of desire and sexuality in the works of Hanif Kureishi highlights the way in which they opened up spaces in the British cultural landscape that could ultimately include hitherto marginalised groups such as the diasporic community. Such manifestations function on both a textual and a social level, starting from the transitional period of the 1980s and culminating in the present, mapping Kureishi's literary development. It has been established that Kureishi's work can be read as a paradigm of postcolonial and post-imperial ethno-English writing which challenges established orders, breaking ground from well-established hegemonic discourses ratified by contemporary multi-culturalist discourse and colonial mimicry. Such manifestations of desire disrupt what are supposedly uniform spaces and subvert traditional understandings of nation and ideas of belonging in Britain. Such manifestations of desire and sexuality in the socio-political realm have multiple connotations and trajectories, simultaneously touching upon social, political, sexual and personal issues.

It has also been made clear in the course of this thesis that the artistic and personal realisation we saw in the end of *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990) of the impossible position of the artist highlights the fact that the links between artists and their works become increasingly fragile. Indeed, this is something that the present work has dealt extensively with, as I believe that the author's personal circumstances and experiences inform his work, whereas it has been argued that Kureishi himself wanted audiences to read him as an embodiment of his work, something that was made clear with the form of *My Ear at His Heart* (2004). Not only does he fill his memoir to his readers as a photo album, but he also argues that the place writers and artists hold in the public imagination exists beyond their work ("My Ear at His Heart" 20). Such a realisation of the highly complex nature of balancing what an artist needs to do which might clash with the actual experiences of the self in its lived experiences, is made clear at the end of the novel and the self-realisation of Karim, which also marks an artistic self-realisation moment by Kureishi. They both realise the impossible position of the artist, who is torn between the fetishisation of commodity and his artistic responsibility to deconstruct that commodity. This interaction between the artist's imaginary and their lived experiences as well as the way and the extent to which each informs the other, which has been a constant in Kureishi's work, points to a direction

where one could examine the interaction between fantasy and reality and the way one informs the other, based on my reading of Kureishi as an artist and as a person and the consequent effects this division had on his literary work. That opens up a multitude of possibilities for further research pertaining not only to the way fantasy affects reality, but also to what extent are visual and/or textual narratives able to change the audience's perceived realities. Given this close relationship between the artist and the person, as well as the realisation of the impossible position Kureishi as well as his characters often find themselves in, the present thesis tracked his literary development, as he moves from genre to genre and from wave to wave, writing as a Bildungsroman enthusiast, a fringe theatre expert, a sexually liberated young adult, a socially troubled middle-aged man and a British contemporary author. These oscillations not only testify to the multiplicity of codes Kureishi offers his readers and viewers but they also reflect his personal development which still informs his work to a great extent.

The present thesis has established that Kureishi has always been a political writer, still engaged with social and political issues such as religious violence through the examination of the clash between sexual liberation in his characters and the sexual abstinence of Islamic fundamentalism. Within the aftermath of this clash, and given the ending of the Thatcher administration, Kureishi's later work advocates a supra-racial stance towards identity politics, being a part of what has been termed "contemporary black writing" (McLeod), as it identified at the same time the incoherency of the black community and the "failure" of race in terms of belonging, given the diversity of the South Asian experience. What is certain is that Kureishi's later work did not have the same allure or the same success to audience and readers *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985) or *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990). However, this does not take away from his work's political importance, as Kureishi shifted his focus on new complexities troubling British society in the 1990s, such as religious violence and the quest for a stable identity in fundamentalism by members of the South Asian diaspora, actions pertaining to questions of belonging in 1990s Britain. It has been established, then, that his later work does not signify a "decline" as such, as it becomes more didactic than imaginative. Finally, the stark style Kureishi used in his later work, for which he was also criticised, given the extent to which his personal experiences informed his work, reflect his strong, personal feelings against religious violence, which he made clear in various interviews, especially after the Rushdie Affair.

The publication of *Intimacy* (1998) signifies the beginning of a different kind of manifestation of desire in Kureishi's work, which continued throughout his work published in the 2000s. Specifically, these works are based on the author's personal experiences, as they examine issues such as the relationship between fathers and sons, the examination of the discontents of marriage and the pain that comes with desire. The preoccupation with such personal issues entails a different re-imagination of desire, as Kureishi probes the ways in which it is inextricably intertwined with pain and punishment. His male characters' actions, which in many cases reflect his own actions in his lived experiences, exhibit seemingly egoistical sexual behaviours as they battle middle-age crises through an attempt to relive their youthful past by having affairs with younger women, and indulging in narcissistic sexual adventures. The examination of such personal issues, though, can also be read as insightful portraits of the discontents of modern-day relationships and as a harsh realisation that desire is associated with pain and punishment, as Kureishi's characters end up sad with a failed sense of fulfilled desire. Such a manifestation of desire and the realisation of its painful side also point to the development and the self-awareness on behalf of the author which led to the publication of his memoir *My Ear at His Heart* in 2004, in which he directly engaged his relationship with his father. As argued, it has been the present work's intention to read Kureishi alongside his works. In examining his work, it has been argued that Kureishi's lived experiences and personal parameters are, more often than not, tangential with all the political, social and theoretical parameters with which his work and consequently my examination of it, are concerned. Indeed, it has been established that the ways in which Kureishi lives, works, thinks and imagines in post-imperial London is directly related to his artistic potential. This is something Kureishi himself desired, as he did not try to establish any distance between himself and his work. By historicising the personal and personalising the historical in Hanif Kureishi, the present thesis has drawn useful conclusions apropos sexual embodiment, class and race politics, theorising on desire and affect as domains of promise for personal and cultural growth. Thus, the events of his personal life were read as a manifestation of British politics regarding the South Asian diaspora in Britain. Indeed, Kureishi's artistic persona is inextricably bound to his personal life, as more often than not, especially in later work, his characters act the way he did in his life, feel the way he did in life and express the same views as him. Given that Hanif Kureishi himself wanted his audience to read him as an embodiment of his work, it is difficult to differentiate between the artist and the person. This was made clear in the examination of *In My Ear at His Heart* (2004) where Kureishi

fictionalised his own reality and life, while including autobiographical factors including pictures of himself, his sons and his father, reading his father's narratives, creating parallel lines, interweaving his fiction and his reality, his imagination and his lived experiences. Hence, *My Ear at His Heart* becomes a family album of sorts, which brings to mind Oscar Wilde and the way he wanted to live his life as art. Moreover, the issue of performativity is extremely important to Kureishi, as the memoir is filled with dancing and music, painting a sonic and visual image of the space of London, and showing us the origin of his cultural milieu by mythologising it. All of these characteristics go a long way in explaining the reasoning behind the formation and the actions of his characters in his work. In light of these thoughts, the present thesis has sought to draw a literary map of Kureishi as a subject living and imagining in post-imperial London.

As the thesis traced Kureishi's literary development, one can detect a constant preoccupation with socially sensitive issues. These developments follow and reflect the evolution of British society intervening in discussions pertaining to very serious issues such as race and queer sexuality in the 1980s, religious violence in the 1990s and the institution of marriage and heterosexual relationships in the 2000s. Kureishi remained contemporary throughout his work, developing with and helping the progress of British society. The publication of *The Buddha of Suburbia* in 1990 marks the end of Kureishi's early work, while the previously mentioned self-realisation as artists by both the protagonist and the author reflects the development of Kureishi as an artist, which leads to a different re-imagining of desire in the work that followed. Given the ending of the Thatcher era which was, among other things, a symbolic order, the criticism of which Kureishi's earlier work thrived, the author's preoccupation with race apropos what constituted "Britishness" shifted towards issues such as religious violence. What is more, the Rushdie Affair and his own research in mosques facilitated this change on behalf of Kureishi. This shift was negatively criticised as his status as a political writer was challenged. Interestingly, although he is recognised as one of the most important British authors of modern times, considerable negative criticism was raised against him from his own community. Kureishi was accused by South Asians of reproducing stereotypical characteristics in his portrayal of South Asian characters. When *My Beautiful Laundrette* was first broadcast, reception from the South Asian community was nothing if not negative, as, especially first-generation immigrants thought that the film reproduced a negative image of the members of their community as drug-dealing homosexuals, while there were also protests in the USA against the release of the film. Critics such as

Mahmood Jamal argued that given the lack of political conflict to spur him on, Kureishi's later work lost its linguistic brilliance we saw in his 1980s work. Moreover, Ruvani Ranasinha also reinforced the view expressed by the people opposing the screening of the film, as he argued that the film expressed all the prejudices and stereotypes of society for Asians, as money-grabbing, sex-crazed people (Ranasinha 46). On the contrary, it has been argued in this thesis that the representation of characters in Kureishi's work is much more complex than what his critics gave him credit for; a single character cannot be taken as a universal symbol for an entire community. On the contrary, Kureishi actually helped trigger a movement in British cinema that did not treat immigrants as helpless subjects or stereotypes. Moreover, Kureishi has defended himself saying that he is a chronicler of British society and that he cannot do public relations for special groups of people (*The Late Show*). Nevertheless, it would be interesting to trace the development of these initial protests by conservative groups and examine the extent to which their behaviour and actions played a part in the formation of Islamic fundamentalist groups in Britain a few years later.

What is more, an aspect of his work that was heavily criticised, most notably by Ruvani Ranasinha, is that Kureishi approached all the issues with which he was preoccupied in his work from a male point of view, accusing him of unfair treatment of his female characters (*Hanif Kureishi* 45). Furthermore, the discussion regarding the criticism of *Intimacy* was largely based on his treatment of female characters merely being tools for men who want to satisfy their desires. What is true is that none of Kureishi's stories is written from a woman's point of view, for which one could argue that he was influenced by a culture which does not leave space for women's independence. Moreover, Kureishi does not address female sexuality in the same depth and with the same rigor as he does male sexuality. He is, in fact, more interested in the examination of male sexuality and he is radical in his dealing with it, rather than with female sexuality. Precisely by focusing on men, he offers a subversive and radical perception on sexuality, as he brings masculinity under scrutiny in a manner that subverts heteronormativity, phallocentrism and masculine ego. This very focus subverts norms and unsettles expectations about masculine desire and its social performance in its sexual embodiment. This is made clear for the first time in *The Buddha of Suburbia*, where Karim reaches and touches Terry's crotch in a moment that is, of course, sexual, but at the same time, goes directly to the very axis of masculine power and reference, the penis:

I went to him and put my hand between his legs. I didn't think he'd allow himself to like it too much; I didn't think he'd let me take his cock out, but I reckoned you should try it on with everyone you fancied, just in case. You never knew, they might like it, and if not, so what? Attractive people were a provocation in themselves, I found, when I was in this mood (*The Buddha of Suburbia* 241).

Meanwhile, Karim glances up at Terry's face and what he sees triggers an emotional narration on behalf of Karim which underlines exactly the way in which Kureishi reads male desire and sexuality, and the way in which his characters explore the complex nature of both:

I suddenly saw such humanity in his eyes, and in the way he tried to smile – such innocence in the way he wanted to understand me, and such possibility of pain, along with the implicit assumption that he wouldn't be harmed – that I pulled away. I went to the other side of the room. I sat staring at the wall. I thought about torture and gratuitous physical pain. How could it be possible to do such things when there'd be certain looks that would cry out to you from the human depths, making you feel so much pity you could weep for a year (*The Buddha of Suburbia* 241)?

This is an extremely interesting moment, where the rigidity of masculine embodiment and its symbolic values are challenged and male desire and sexuality are engaged in complex discourse. Pain, pleasure and human nature are all intertwined within a context that underlines the frailty of masculine sexuality and of the human condition. And it is precisely this subversive manifestation of masculine sexuality that makes Kureishi radical. Thus, and despite what his critics say, he is interesting, radical and subversive exactly because he has focused on male sexuality.

In addition, given the close interaction between his artistic and personal identities, Kureishi is also embellished in his examination of male sexuality. Speaking about his father, Kureishi says his father had created his own "empire" at their home in Bromley (*My Ear at His Heart* 100). This authoritative figure of the father in their home underlines the fact that power is linked with the male symbolic order. In that, Kureishi was much more interested in exploring his father and consequently male sexuality, rather than the female characters in his work. What is more, even after his death, Kureishi's father's presence continues to influence him, as he admits that he thinks about him every day: "...sometimes, I think I go to my desk to only to obey my father" (*My Ear at His Heart*

10). Indeed, Kureishi's depiction and different manifestations of male sexuality were more important to him, as we must assume his relationship with his father was more ostensibly significant to him than the one with his mother, and, to date, he has deliberately chosen not to disclose details of his relationship with his mother in his work. In fact, Kureishi has said it clearly: "My mother was important in my life too. But she is important to me privately. I don't feel that I particularly want to write about her, for others to read about her" ("With Your Tongue Down My Throat"). Thus, the father figure in Kureishi's work seems to have been much more present which goes on to testify to his preoccupation with male sexuality. Lastly, the issue of perpetuating traditional gender roles is not as clear-cut as it seems. In the course of this thesis, I have put forward the idea that even though some of Kureishi's women are docile and passive, such as Bilquis, Nasser's wife in *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985), and Minoo, Parvez's wife in *My Son the Fanatic* (1997), this is not the case for all of Kureishi's female characters, as the analyses of Tania in *My Beautiful Laundrette* and Jamila in *The Buddha of Suburbia* show. One could go as far as to argue that female characters in Kureishi occupy the two ends of the spectrum, either being submissive or strong and over eroticised. Even if they do not occupy centre stage, such multifaceted depictions of his female characters could lead to further research, which would serve to shed more light on the complex nature of Kureishi as an author, in that gender roles in his work constitute a blurred and composite concept, which points to a new complexity that is interesting to deal with.

Such complex notions regarding gender and women's representations in Kureishi, coupled with the success he has had as an author and the number of films influenced by him, testify to the importance of the author both as a postcolonial writer, specifically, and as a contemporary artist, generally. Kureishi's interdisciplinary work, from films to novel and from plays to short stories, can be located within a highly political writing culture, which pertains to issues of diasporic experience, race and sexuality, among others. His propensity to position his work and himself not between two cultures and traditions, but occupying both spaces at the same time, as this thesis has shown, offers a new way of thinking, which pertains to issues of belonging for the South Asian diaspora. His preoccupation with blurred boundaries, destabilised identities and the various manifestations of desire and sexuality within the social realm enabled his unpredictable journey through the decades, in which he is successful in drawing a literary map of the South Asian postcolonial experience, which also serves as a mirror for British society itself. His constant battling with symbolic orders, his deconstruction of colonial paradigms

which were being translated into the present and his destabilisation of normative sexualities and established social orders, allowed him to chronicle and, more importantly, to anatomise British society and culture starting from the 1980s onwards to the 2000s. Consequently, such preoccupations allowed him to explore British culture based on the complex relationship between past and present, which inevitably touched upon issues of belonging for the South Asian diaspora. In that, he was able to offer a vision and participate in discussions pertaining to the future of British society, a future that would include hitherto marginalised identities, cultures and communities. Kureishi's personal experiences, embedded as they are in the development of his literary characters, adds to the credibility and thus reliability of his stories, while, at the same time, nodding at the impossibility of his characters' positions, namely to either be assimilated into the rubric of the nation-state, or to be totally disidentified from it. He has managed to bring to light this impossible position, as his characters are not comfortable with fully identifying with England and its practices, given its colonial past, nor are they willing to fully revert and succumb to tradition.

In dealing with such issues, especially given that most of his work takes place in the 1970s and 1980s which was a politically turbulent time but also a transitional time and an era that offered fruitful ground to challenge symbolic orders (an effort made clear in all aspects of culture, from music to literature and cinema), Kureishi deconstructs an imaginary portrait of an England which the said symbolic orders were trying to revive. By depicting the extent of marginalisation, exclusion and narrow-mindedness, characteristics of an intolerant British society, he critiques seemingly "pure" and clear-cut categorisations, offering, in the process, new and liberating modes of being. Kureishi's work, as this thesis has underlined, is nothing if not a constant challenging and deconstruction of myths about a coherent, homogeneous space of Britishness, whose impossibility he unravels. In its wake, he offers a view of a poly-cultural Britain within which his characters and indeed the members of the South Asian community can find counter-solutions to demands of assimilation and the gradual eradication of Otherness. He is successful in doing so as Kureishi is, above all, a cultural translator, employing his experiences in an attempt to explain each culture to all constituent parts.

In examining Hanif Kureishi's oeuvre, the present thesis has exposed an array of accounts pertaining to the diasporic experience expressed as it is in different socio-political and personal contexts through the various manifestations of desire and sexuality. Given the interdisciplinary nature of Kureishi's successful and pioneering work pertaining to the

South Asian diaspora in Britain and his cultural contribution to literature, film and theatre, which allowed him to reach a wide spectrum of audiences, it can undoubtedly be argued that he has had a profound effect on works that followed him. Indeed, Kureishi initiated a wave of popular cultural productions pertaining to the South Asian experience in Britain which empowered the presence of the diasporic community and it is within this new kind of cultural production that the voices of the Other could be heard more powerfully (Claydon 26). Kureishi was successful in challenging the supposed homogeneity of the British Cinema genre at the time, as the rise and success of Raj Revival films overwhelmed the space of cinematic production and it seemed that there was no space for the South Asian experience to be heard. Kureishi's work helped change that as, specifically his cinematic work in the 1980s led to the rise of a voice in British literature, television and cinema that transgressed stereotypical forms by challenging the supposed homogeneity of the cultural landscape. It was the disruptive nature of his characters in narrative that upset such uniformity, while undermining traditional ideas of belonging based on the colonial past as well as conventional understandings of nation. In doing so, he brought the South Asian experience to the forefront of British society, underlining their existence as well as the various aspects of that existence, pertaining to sexuality (more often than not non-heteronormative), identity and the sociopolitical. Regarding his cinematic work, Kureishi paved the way for the production and success of cinematic works by British South Asian artists such as the director Damien O'Donnell and the writer Ayub Khan-Din. Their film *East is East* (1999) is similar to Kureishi's early work in that it is a coming-of-age narrative that includes an exploration of interracial, homosexual relationships. Ayub Khan-Din made his cinematic debut acting in *My Beautiful Laundrette* and also starred in *Sammy and Rosie get Laid* as Sammy. One could easily deduct that by participating in the creation of these films, Khan-Din was at the very least encouraged by his place in the arts. Most probably, the experience empowered him. The opportunity to work with and for or around Kureishi on the set and with his scripts would help any actor envision other roles (i.e., directing or writing) for himself in film.

Kureishi's importance extends beyond the homoerotic element though, as he produced cultural work regarding the lives of the members of the South Asian diasporic community in Britain, painting a portrait that could be recognised by audiences. Despite the fact that they do not deal explicitly with the homoerotic element, Gurinder Chadha's *Bhaji on the Beach* (1993) and Meera Syal's *Anita and Me* (the novel was published in 1996 and it was made into a film in 2002) also follow Kureishi's path, as they constitute

self-realisation films for diasporic characters, dealing extensively with the significant notion of home. In a further attempt to establish his influence in the contemporary generation of South Asian authors and directors in Britain, the thesis looks into which films can be considered to follow Kureishi's legacy, in an attempt to explore to what extent he may be considered groundbreaking within British South Asian cultural production (and consumption). From the 1980s onwards, Kureishi's pioneering work has been the predecessor of such successful cinematic and literary approaches and has managed to bring the South Asian experience in Britain to the forefront, helping in the re-shaping of the map of genres such as the British Novel and especially Anglo-Indian writing and the British Cinema alike, through which he posed his vision for a polycultural future of Britain and its culturally diverse nature, one that does not reject the past but does not let it form or burden the present through a translation of colonial elements into contemporary times. In that, it has been argued that the "romance" between Britain and India has been reconfigured; such a process is evident in the metamorphosis of London into a queer space. Indeed, the present thesis has identified in its examination of spaces a shift of focus from the exoticised spaces of the colonial "motherland" to post-imperial, multicultural London, through a sexually-charged metaphors of intercourse.

Kureishi introduced the postcolonial queer element into the British novel and cinema alike as he unravelled the complex nature of the country's cultural scene, exposing the way in which histories of colonialism still haunted contemporary society. Edward Said has argued that "Many of the most interesting postcolonial writers bear their past within them, as scars of humiliating wounds, as instigation for different practices...as urgently reinterpretable and redeployable experiences, in which the formerly silent native speaks and acts on territory taken back from the empire" (*Culture and Imperialism* 34-35). Kureishi's work presents a different relationship between past and present in his postcolonial writing, not in the way that Said argues, but in a more positive one as he establishes a specific aspect of it which can essentially function as a narrative strategy that can move audiences to re-imagine what it means being part of Britain. As argued in the previous chapter though, this does not mean that the past is rejected altogether, as Kureishi rediscovers and revisits it through the finding of the manuscript of his father. What he is successful in doing though, is putting forward a new kind of dialectical process between the past and the present, one where the former is not altogether rejected nor is it a burden to the latter. In that, Kureishi "belongs to a tradition of inquiry into the state of the nation and the meaning of 'Englishness'" (*Hanif Kureishi* 3), as unquestionably, it can be argued

that such a re-examination of this relationship affects the ways in which South Asian subjectivities are imagined and realised, at the same time touching on notions of identity and belonging in a postcolonial society.

Such dealings with extremely important issues and the new elements that Kureishi's pioneering work introduced in the postcolonial literary scene inevitably influenced many writers of South Asian origin that followed in his literary path. As much as his own work was the result of the development of a genealogy that began with Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* in 1981, which marked the evolution of the subcontinental/Anglo-Indian genre into a new literary typology that defied dominant limitations, Kureishi's work similarly led to a new literary and cinematic age. In 1985, *My Beautiful Laundrette* was the first film to underline the heterogeneous nature of British culture reflecting as it does the eminent shift in British cinema due to changes in the economic, political, social and cultural landscape of Britain. His work helped in facilitating this change, doing so through his various manifestations of desire and sexuality, as the film transforms on-screen representations of the homoerotic element. This change includes a new alliance between otherwise conflicting entities, united by social hardships, e.g., both white English and South Asian English struggling against unemployment during the Thatcher years. In that, it can be argued that Kureishi's work promotes the reconstruction of a new kind of narrative within the genre of British Cinema where the South Asian diasporic community can come to terms with Britain, dictating its own terms for belonging, rather than being the subject of traditional understandings of nation, which were being translated from the imperial past.

Jigna Desai argues that "film is the most popular and significant cultural form and commodity in the transnational South Asian cultural and political economy. More important, South Asian diasporic identificatory processes are centrally configured and contested through the cinematic apparatus" (*Beyond Bollywood* 33). Indeed, the importance of Kureishi's cinematic work can be traced in examining the work that followed him. Susie Thomas argues that the multicultural face of Britain is a significant part of mainstream British literature, as Kureishi's immense influence on writers of the South Asian diaspora in Britain such as Ayub Khan Din, Meera Syal, Shyama Perera, Atima Srivastava and Monica Ali, has driven them to go down his path and break the mould, redefining what it meant to be British (*Hanif Kureishi*), away from a limiting definition based on tradition. Indeed, if we take a look at the issue of tradition in the films that followed and were inspired by Kureishi, and given that film fictions matter politically,

especially when issues of national identity are at stake, as Wollen argues (“Over Our Shoulders” 187), then one could argue that films such as *East is East* and Gurinder Chadha’s *Bend it Like Beckham* (2002) share similar themes as the ones we find in Kureishi’s filmography. These include the preoccupation with elements such as traditional, suppressive families with a strict father, as well as issues of religion, sexuality, race and class. Of course, they do not all deal with these issues in the same way as, for instance, *Bend it Like Beckham* does not focus on religion as *East is East* does. Claydon says:

East is East is a film which literalises multiculturalism in the family unit at a time when multiculturalism meant less a mixing of cultures together and more the presence of many cultures, [while] *Bend it Like Beckham* seeks to represent the multicultural society we wish we had through the commonalities between Joe, Jess and Jules, whilst revealing the prejudices of all sides through the families and thus, the lack of integration and hybridity (“Nostalgia in the Post-National” 34).

East is East deals with religion as an oppressive system bound by tradition that even further complicates attempts at belonging for South Asian diasporic subjects in Britain.

Meera Syal said that “Although Kureishi was not a conscious influence on my work, his work to satirize the sacred cows was obviously part of my growing...He was also very hip, the first hip Asian in the arts as far as I can recall” (Ranasinha 122). Kureishi’s freshness and “hipness” certainly mark him as one of the most important writers of his generation and, arguably, the most successful British-born South Asian writer. Meera Syal’s *Anita and Me* (2002) is an example of how Kureishi’s bildungsroman work influenced the work that followed him. *Anita and Me* is a coming-of-age story, where the issue of racial violence is explored through Meena, the 12-year-old daughter of Indian immigrant parents and her complex subjectivity. She initially wants to be like Anita, her tall, blonde neighbour. When she is asked what she wants to be when she grows up, she replies: “Blonde” (*Anita and Me*). However, her process of maturing and growing-up comes after a family friend is beaten up by a gang in a racial violence incident, which brings to surface the true feelings of Anita, her boyfriend and her family towards immigrants. Such films capture the complexity of lives in the South Asian diaspora in Britain, at the same time revealing the failure of Britain in the 1970s and 1980s to accommodate their desires.

Such a socio-political failure is examined in *East is East* through the contextualisation of Powellian racism of the 1960s and 1970s, while in *Bend it Like*

Beckham, the same failure is seen through sports, as Jess is driven away from the cricket pitch. *Bend it Like Beckham* explores a new way of bringing together South Asian and British people through football. Chadha says that she was inspired when she saw *My Beautiful Laundrette*: “I was, like, Wow! Hanif took Asians into another space. I remember thinking that we’ll never go back to having arranged-marriage stories on screen. We invariably do. But he showed that we could be open, honest and critical of our communities” (“Life Lines”). In *Bend it Like Beckham*, the non-heteronormative sexual element is explicitly evident in the character of Tony, while the homoerotic one is implicitly manifested in the relationship between the South Asian Jess and the British Jules, while race is –of course– present as a catalyst for significant conflict. There is also another interesting detail regarding non-heteronormative sexuality: according to the director’s close friend Nisha Ganatra (who directed the lesbian-themed film *Chutney Popcorn* in 1999), Chadha originally planned to include an explicit lesbian romance between Jess and Jules but she regretted it at the last minute for fear of offending Indian audiences (Sandhu). Even though *Bend it Like Beckham* was screened in 2002, almost 30 years after Kureishi’s *My Beautiful Laundrette*, and, according to the director, was influenced by it, it still seems that Kureishi was more radical than Chadha, given her unwillingness to collide with Indian audiences. As sexuality is embodied (just like racial identity), Kureishi’s manifestations of sexuality in his early work and especially in *My Beautiful Laundrette* aimed at disrupting from within the body. Lastly, in all three films, the issue of tradition and the way it was used to construct various notions of identity is predominant: there is a clash between the first and the second generation of immigrants, between old and new, past and present. The elders construct their identity through tradition, remembering the country they left behind and conveying its remembrance through story-telling. Home, the past and identity are intertwined in their stories and that has an effect on their children: Even though Meena could not speak Punjabi, she miraculously acquires the ability to do so only after an aggressive visit by her grandmother with a machete. The funny element notwithstanding, and as Marco Abel has argued, it seems that violence, in its all-pervasive nature, forcefully reconnects second-generation immigrants to their past.

All in all, such socio-political preoccupations expressed in these films –of which Kureishi is considered to be the “godfather” (Sandhu) –testify to the extent to which his status as a predominantly political writer has affected cinematic cultural production in the 1990s and 2000s. The films’ success (*East is East* received four BAFTA nominations

while *Bend it Like Beckham* received a Golden Globe nomination) strengthened the voice of the Other and managed to change an already increasingly hybrid postcolonial and post-national British cinema. In *Anita and Me*, Meena shouts: “I am the Others!” as Anita falls into the river. These films were made and/or written by British-born directors and writers with a South Asian heritage, whose culturally rich backgrounds find their ways into the films. They fuse elements from the host and the mother country, bringing together elements from the two worlds. They attach bhangra music to predominantly English scenes, or mix Bollywood elements with England, interweaving cultural elements in the process. Lastly, Kureishi’s influence on television production can be traced firstly to Meera Syal’s *Goodness Gracious Me* (1996-2001), a sketch comedy of the BBC on the lives of British South Asians. Another example of an obvious Kureishi connection is Monica Ali’s *Brick Lane* (2007) which deals with the anti-establishment protests of British Asian youths and the realities of social exclusion. Although some might argue that it cannot be viewed as being directly influenced by Kureishi, at least in thematics, it could be categorised as relevant. Undoubtedly, Kureishi’s later works influenced Ali and others within what Sara Upstone terms a movement towards the “post-ethnic reality that Kureishi’s later fiction embodies, and which writers such as Monica Ali, Suhayl Saadi and Hari Kunzru have taken up” (“A Question of Black or White”).

It is equally important to note and examine the interdisciplinary nature of Kureishi and the works that followed him, as well as the close connection of the writers, directors and actors in this cultural production process regarding South Asians in Britain, which was initiated by Kureishi. For instance, *East is East* was staged at the Royal Court, in 1997, before being filmed; Meera Syal played the role of Rani in *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid* and wrote the script for *Goodness Gracious Me* for television before going on to cinematic productions, writing the script for both *Bhaji on the Beach* and *Anita and Me*, whereas Khan-Din also starred in Kureishi’s *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid*. Such close connections between actors, writers and directors not only create a sense of association with the audience, but it also strengthens the bonds of the South Asian community’s cultural productions, making the voice of the “Other” heard more clearly in cinematic productions. Lastly, although this appears to move slightly beyond the scope of this chapter, music has been a constant in Kureishi’s work, so it can be said that his influence extends beyond the cinematic and literary realms. It has been argued that he paved the way for music artists such as Talvin Singh who excelled in the popularisation of Asian underground sub-cultural experimental music, what with the intertwining of Indian classical music to western pop

and Jazz, or even Cornershop, the British Indie rock band, both of which emerged in the early 1990s (*Hanif Kureishi* 192). Given the importance he attributes to music then, one might want to research specifically the extent to which Kureishi's musical references in the literary realm, especially within the context of intermingling cultures, has led to such experimental music which borders on both cultures, western and eastern. All in all, it is certain that Kureishi started a wave in popular cultural production ranging from literature, television and cinema, and extending further to music production, all of which contribute to a portrait of the South Asian experience in Britain; it is through this powerful wave that the voice of the Other actually grew louder. Kureishi succeeded in giving the Other a voice, challenging the supposed homogeneous nature of British Cinema which had not previously allowed a space of representation for the South Asian diaspora. In that, he marked the rise of a voice in British Cinema which transgressed stereotypical representations of diasporic subjectivities. Kureishi's legacy goes beyond a mere literary effect, as the social trajectories of his work helped change the face of British society, helping it to come to terms with its suppressed elements and marginal communities that have always been, nevertheless, an integral part of it. Furthermore, in global terms, this transformation could also serve to empower other diasporic communities and their individual creative members to participate in their respective homelands.

Of course, even though these pieces of work were enabled by Kureishi's work in that he brought the British South Asian experience to the forefront and thus these works received popular and critical notice and appraisal, as previously indicated, this does not mean that there are no differences between them. Moreover, Kureishi has also been accused of not being attached enough to his Asian side, even by the authors he influenced and enabled, some going as far as to claim that Kureishi was directing more for his "white" audience (*Hanif Kureishi* 192). Other critics believe that Kureishi presents stories solely from a male point of view, which some believe is sexist. In fact, even though Gurinder Chadha's work was recognised largely because of Hanif Kureishi, she tried to distance herself from him saying that he "used that side of him (i.e., being of Asian ancestry) without real cultural integrity" (*Hanif Kureishi* 192). In light of these thoughts and also taking into account that even the negative critiques against Kureishi are a marker of his importance (as he has set up a point of reference to look up to or object to), the present work intended to construct a complete portrait of the man and his works to date while also considering that Kureishi's career remains an ongoing process, and the artist might have more in store for his audiences in the future. In any case, it is true that Kureishi's earlier

work was more readily received by audiences, critics and readers alike. The cinematic legacy discussed here was enabled by his early, cinematic work. My examination of his later work and especially of the ways in which sexuality and desire are manifested in the social world, point to a need to reassess the legacy of this latest work. It is my belief that Kureishi's later work has not been assessed or accepted by critics and audiences in the way it should have. Despite this difference in impact that his later work had, it is my belief that the present thesis has pointed to a direction pertaining to re-assessing Kureishi's legacy so as to include his later work. Indeed, Kureishi is still more contemporary than ever and he is still a political writer that tackles new complexities, arising as they do through the development and progress of British society. In that, I believe that my work can lead to a reassessment of the impact of his post-1990 work, opening up questions regarding religion, identity and sexuality within a contemporary context, especially given the course of the socio-political events that shaped British society in the 1990s and 2000s, which are still very much present in the British imaginary. Kureishi remains is still preoccupied with new kinds of complexities present in British society and, since he is currently working on a new novel⁵, we have to wait and see what kind of new turns his career will take, which will most probably invite further scrutiny of the artist, the man and his work.

⁵ I received an email from his agent, in which Kureishi politely refused to do an interview with me, because he is currently working on a new novel.

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