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NAHEM YOUSAF

Hanif Kureishi has referred to writers like himself as 'cultural translators' and to writing about contemporary British communities as involving 'the psychological loosening of the idea of Empire'.¹ This would immediately appear to locate his work in relation to Homi Bhabha's philosophising upon the idea of cultural translating and the hybridity of cultures together with the process of representation undermining any pretence to 'a holistic, organic identity'.² His reference to 'a psychological loosening of the idea of Empire' could, in turn, align him with Rushdie and his discussion in 'The New Empire Within Britain' of the image of 'the immigrant', institutional racism and the idea that 'in the new Empire, as in the old one, it seems our masters are willing to use the tried and trusted strategies of divide-and-rule'.³ It is certainly possible to locate Kureishi's writing within contemporary debates about identity politics and the idea of a 'dis-United Kingdom' and to understand it in terms of 'the structural predicament in which black artistic and intellectual practice takes place',⁴ to which Kobena Mercer has referred.

Kureishi is willing to help to fill what he has called 'a hole in the centre of English writing',⁵ a gap about the lives and experiences of black peoples in Britain or, as Mercer would term it, 'the role of making present what had been rendered absent' (p. 62). As Stuart Hall has pointed out, 'Practices of representation always implicate the positions from which we speak or write – the positions of enunciation',⁶ and Hall's elaboration upon the disjunction between the individual's subject position and the subject spoken of, and a consequent dis-location, goes some way towards grasping an understanding of Kureishi's 'threshold of enunciation'. He has admitted the difficulties of identifying himself with England – its colonialist history and its myths of nationhood⁷ – but has been consistently tenacious in his exploration of what it is to be British and how that complex citizenship might be represented:

It is the British, the white British, who have to learn that being British isn't what it was. Now it is a more complex thing, involving new elements. So there must be a fresh way of seeing Britain and the choices it faces: and a new way of being British after all this time. Much thought, discussion and self-examination must go into seeing the necessity for this, what this 'new way of being British' involves and how difficult it might be to attain.

The failure to grasp this opportunity for a revitalized and broader self-definition in the face of a real failure to be human, will be more insularity, schism, bitterness and catastrophe. (*MBL*, p. 38)

Kureishi's statement here could be said to serve as an alternative articulation of the predicament of contemporary British artists – white and black – to that offered by Mercer when he asks:

If, after many years of struggle, you arrive at the threshold of enunciation and are 'given' the-right-to-speak and a limited space in which to tell your story, is it not the case that there will be an overwhelming pressure to try and tell the whole story at once? (p. 62)

Rather than the pressure to tell everything at once, Kureishi confronts the difficulty of being able to convey this 'complex thing', this 'fresh way of seeing Britain', and the 'innumerable ways of being'⁸ he perceives, effectively, or indeed at all.

Certainly in his work the politics of representation is inextricably linked to the issue of citizenship, of membership of a British community, and by extension a 'multi-cultural' Europe.⁹ This is not to say that Kureishi seeks to create a group identity that is 'Asian' and 'British'; rather he seeks to illustrate the diverse forms of membership of any community. With regard to 'an Asian community' in contemporary Britain, membership ranges from that *necessary* to African Asian refugees fleeing Amin's Uganda, or 'encouraged' to leave Kenyatta's Kenya, to that *negotiated* by first generation immigrants like Nasser and Hussein in *My Beautiful Laundrette* and Haroon in *The Buddha of Suburbia*, to that *challenged* by Karim and Jamila in the same novel, by Omar in *My Beautiful Laundrette* and Chili in *The Black Album*; young 'Britons' for whom identity politics are relative and are an extension of the political and ideological times and tides within British society. Omar experiments with Thatcher's 'new enterprise culture' and Karim and Jamila rail against the burgeoning right-wing movements of the late 1970s. Karim can be 'read' against his younger brother Amar or 'Allie' who hates 'whingeing lefties' and 'people who go on all the time about being black' and loves Italian clothes and soap operas.¹⁰ Jamila's political views can be located not only within the texts she reads, works by Simone de Beauvoir, Angela Davis and George Jackson, but also in terms of the political organising against racism of the late 1970s and the campaigns launched by black women's movements and Asian youth and community groups.¹¹ Against these portrayals, Kureishi sets Charlie in *The Buddha of Suburbia* who, on reaching New York, acquires a Cockney accent, 'when my first memory of him at school was that he'd cried after being mocked for talking so posh'; Charlie is commodifying Englishness and selling it. In *My Beautiful Laundrette* Johnny's position within the British community is also unstable and shifting; he moves from marching with the National Front through Lewisham to working for Omar and being one of Nasser's 'people'. In this way, Kureishi draws in the discourses of nationalism and 'patriotism' and the commodification of 'Englishness' with those of race and community, in an attempt to deny any reductive reading of his characters but to provide a 'fresh way of seeing Britain'.

Asian critics, nevertheless, tend to critique his representations of community. Per-minder Dhillon-Kashyap, in an otherwise thoughtfully argued piece, worries that in *My Beautiful Laundrette* Kureishi 'has created a new victim, the white fascist – a victim of economic circumstances who is being exploited by petty bourgeois Asian

businessmen'¹² – and is concerned about the possibility of Kureishi perpetuating pernicious stereotypes. Kureishi, however, is unafraid of employing problematic paradigms to politicised effect. He entitled his feature in *Time Out on My Beautiful Laundrette* 'Dirty Washing'¹³ and, in portraying Omar as an Asian 'underpants cleaner' in that film he challenges, both figuratively and literally, the 'unspoken imperative' that Mercer explains has been seen as a necessity in maintaining an unassailable 'imagined community':

that we should never discuss our differences' in public: that we should always delay our criticism and do our dirty laundry in private. (Mercer, p. 64)

Kureishi arguably provides an ironic twist, though, since the clientele of the laundrette are, in the film at any rate, white British. It is they who wash their clothes publicly – as Nasser declares, 'There's money in muck. What is it the gorra Englishman always needs? Clean clothes!' (*MBL*, p. 63) – and Kureishi who, via the title at least, takes the dirty laundry of the white British themselves as his subject matter.

There is no unified voice of 'the' Asian artist in Britain. Farrah Anwar begins her article 'Is there a sodomite in the house?' with the premiss that 'Asian film-makers show troubled lives. But the Asian community doesn't like them' and cites Kureishi's rejoinder after the release of *My Beautiful Laundrette* that 'the Asian community think that I'm perpetually throwing shit at them'.¹⁴ It may seem significant here that Kureishi appears to remove himself from 'the Asian community' in this statement but I feel that, rather than simplistically denying his own place within that community, he is questioning the idea of community itself. Kureishi refuses to see community in monolithic terms, so that when critics maintain that his work is fragmentary and unstructured,¹⁵ arguably, they are perceiving Kureishi's artistic response to the 'structure' of the Asian community as *bricolage*; as incredibly diverse, heterogeneous peoples yoked together under the political aegis of 'Asian' or 'Black' as a result of the 'Othering' of their communities by white British institutions. Neither cultural nor national identity is organic but social institutions may operate hegemonically to make it appear so. Floya Anthias and Nira Yuval-Davis have pointed to the problems around the imaginary construction of Britain as a multi-cultural society, for example, with its

assumption that all members of a specific cultural collectivity are equally committed to that culture [which] tends to construct the members of minority collectivities as basically homogeneous, speaking with a unified cultural voice. These cultural voices have to be as distinguishable as possible from the majority culture in order to be seen as 'different'; thus, the more traditional and distanced from the majority culture the voice of the 'community representatives' is the more 'authentic' it would be perceived to be . . .¹⁶

This is precisely the imagined construction of the, in this case, Asian 'cultural representative' and community, that Kureishi has been assessed from within, and it is powerfully entrenched both within and without his specific minority community. Gurinder Chadha, director of the short *I'm British But . . .* and *Bhaji on the Beach*, comments that, in her view, for minority communities, 'having a British identity is not as important as having a cultural identity' and she has spoken of making a film

like *I'm British But . . .* as a way of paying her dues to her own community, the Asian community in Britain.¹⁷ She has assessed Kureishi as 'quite isolated from the Asian side of himself. If there's one criticism of him, it's that he's used that side of him without real cultural integrity.'¹⁸ Chadha has fallen into the assumption outlined by Anthias and Yuval-Davis and consequently also the idea of ethnicity that aligns a particular culture with a particular ethnic identity, an idea that Paul Gilroy has rejected as a patent oversimplification of British experiences of 'raced' identity.¹⁹

Gilroy has also noted 'the continuing lure of ethnic absolutisms in cultural criticism produced both by blacks and by whites' as he seeks to 'explore the special relationships between "race", culture, nationality, and ethnicity which have a bearing on the histories and political cultures of Britain's black citizens'.²⁰ Kureishi, I would argue, intends to create complex and contradictory hybridised citizens whose cultural identities are inextricably linked with class politics. He does not intend to represent Asian peoples collectively or their communities as static; only if the individuals who may be said to constitute ethnically recognisable groups are threatened and besieged do they consider that mass identity formation may serve a political and survivalist purpose, an idea that he takes up in detail in *The Black Album*. Although the Asian culture is not an ethnic absolute for Kureishi, he does see that, at times, it may be bound up with issues of what might be termed 'negative identity' that black citizens are subject to, as when 'Hairy Back' in *The Buddha of Suburbia* calls Karim 'a little coon' (*BS*, p. 40) and when the 'ragamuffin' Chad in *The Black Album* is assumed to be a handbag snatcher or car thief (*BA*, p. 89).

Karim and Chad have grown up in Britain and consequently have been positioned as 'Other' within society. This has not always been the case for the first generation immigrants like Karim's father Haroon, however, who, having grown up in societies where they were not positioned as a racial 'Other' and have either to attempt to ignore this projected 'negative identity' or to learn their Otherness in Britain. Kureishi attempts to tell the stories of the father *and* of the son in *The Buddha of Suburbia* and clearly differentiates between their experiences. For Haroon:

I have lived in the West for most of my life, and I will die here, yet I remain to all intents and purposes an Indian man. I will never be anything but an Indian. (*BS*, p. 263)

Whereas Karim describes himself as:

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). (*BS*, p. 3)

In both novels Kureishi explores the issues inherent in each of these descriptions of different facets of British Asian identity. Anwar in *The Buddha of Suburbia* attends the mosque and espouses some of the tenets of Islam in his decision-making processes. He may be demonstrative of what has been termed 'the radical negotiability of the concept of identity' and he could be read as a working through of a *philosophical* description of a Muslim whose Islamisation is arguably negotiated as a result of an

unhappy, dissatisfying time in Britain:²¹ 'We old Indians come to like this England less and less and we return to an imagined India' (*BS*, p. 74).²² In *The Black Album* we are offered the enigmatic figure of Riaz whose philosophising of Islam acts as a magnet to British Asian students who translate and transform his ideas into vigilante resistance and protection of Asian families under siege from white racists.

In telling the stories of individuals, Kureishi acknowledges the multifarious complexity of Asians' experiences in Britain and consequently could also be said to contribute to the agenda within cultural studies that strives to open up and to deconstruct popular misconceived images of Asian peoples in Britain. Kureishi creates families in various of his works and it is with this image most redolent in the 'popular' press that he also contends:

If 'Asian' suppresses cultural diversity, the term 'the Asian family' performs a double conjuring trick: within it also disappear the many types of Asian family structure, specific religions, cultures and migratory patterns, alongside the great variety of family life found here . . . a caricature is developed in opposition to an account of the British family which posits it as open and non-patriarchal. It is a convenient fiction and one that totally ignores, first, the power relations of all families, second, that Asian families are British families, and third, that Asian families are a major source of strength and resistance against the racism of British society . . .²³

The 'popular' image of the Asian family involves tropes of the authoritarian patriarch, the unhappy arranged marriage and the Asian woman as submissive victim of the family itself. This would seem to characterise the family unit that is Anwar, Princess Jeeta and Jamila in *The Buddha of Suburbia*. They are not the focal family but they, and the writer's representation of them, form the crux of 'the structural predicament in which black artistic and intellectual practice takes place'. Kureishi addresses this tenacious 'popular' image of the familial community; though it is an image that favourable reviewers of the novel have frequently felt uncomfortable with and endeavoured to ignore. Neil Berry in the *London Review of Books* writes 'in Karim's uncle Anwar, Jamila is faced with an obdurate Muslim father, bent on lining up an arranged marriage for her', exhibiting the kind of 'reviewers' shorthand' that is possible when the image of that particular confrontation is so clearly inscribed within the minds of the reading public. Berry refuses to engage with the issue of representation though:

All this might well seem to justify claims that Hanif Kureishi trades in facile caricatures of Asians. But his quality as an observer of Asian mores becomes a less obtrusive issue when the narrative shifts from the suburbs to London itself.²⁴

Like Angela Carter in the *Guardian* and Hermione Lee in the *Independent*, he celebrates the novel's humorous ebullience instead, although Lee does address the issue of representation, deciding finally that 'perhaps Karim/Kureishi's gift is not for political heartsearching or answerability but for ruthless, farcical improvisation'.²⁵ Kureishi has produced two lively, busy novels and perhaps in them he does try to do too much, in terms of Mercer's assertion; to tell too many stories, to create humour and to provide food for cultural and political thought, all at the same time. Problems

arise when the black artist is straitjacketed into a formulaic series of expectations – that Mercer has summarised as 'the burden of representation' and that Kureishi in *The Black Album* calls 'the brown man's burden' (p. 5) – and when the artist is monitored and regulated as to his or her access to modes of cultural production and to visibility as a cultural producer. This containment of black artists leads to what Mercer terms the 'sense of urgency' to tell everything at once but it may also lead to a desire to tell stories other than the ones expected of a black cultural producer.

Trinidadian-born film director Horace Ové, director of Britain's first black feature film *Pressure* (1974), has spoken candidly about the obstacles that have beset black film-makers in Britain:

Here in England there is a danger, if you are black, that all you are allowed to make is films about black people and their problems. White film-makers, on the other hand, have a right to make films about whatever they like.²⁶

Ové is describing the obstacles that Kureishi has worked hard to avoid. His most recent screenplay *London Kills Me* (1991) has also been his first attempt at directing and, to date, his least 'successful' or critically acclaimed venture – but this may be the result of Kureishi making a film about whatever he likes rather than what has been deemed the inevitable subject matter of the black artist – racism and clashes between cultures. The film is contemporary in its depiction of a young white drug dealer in Notting Hill and his trials and tribulations, most particularly his search for a decent pair of shoes in order to get a 'decent' job (an idea reminiscent of Italian neo-realist film-making and specifically de Sica's *Bicycle Thieves*). It has a cast that includes black characters: Dr Bubba, a version of Haroon in *The Buddha of Suburbia* and evidence of Kureishi's interest since *My Beautiful Laundrette* in the idea of a 'sadhu of south London' (*MBL*, p. 85) or a 'buddha of suburbia'; and Bike, one of the young people who exist predominantly on the streets. But the story is really Clint's and Clint is white. Kureishi has experimented previously too with the idea of a 'central' white character. In 'With your tongue down my throat' the narrator is apparently a young woman, Nina, who is of mixed heritage – daughter of a Pakistani father and a white English mother – but it turns out that she has in fact been narrated by Howard, a white 'radical (ha!) television writer' who is 'making an attempt on the truth through lies'.²⁷ Kureishi creates a white man who creates an Asian girl on paper because he can't 'have her' in the flesh. Both of these texts indicate Kureishi's intention to create diverse British communities of which characters of Asian backgrounds are members; a cosmopolitan Britain, although one that is still focused on London (Kureishi has said 'I'm no Britisher, but a Londoner'²⁸) as the signifier of an ultimately much more complex and heterogeneous British Isles. bell hooks is particularly sensitive to Kureishi's position as one of what she terms 'a new breed of artists and cultural critics' who:

want to give expression to life as we have lived it, calling attention to our participation in a social context where white is not always what is at the center.²⁹

And this is generally the case with his work. But life, as the fictional lives of his black characters is intended to demonstrate, frequently involves recognising the

whiteness at the centre of ideas of British community and consequently at the centre of some of his texts that explore the stories of that community.

Kureishi has asserted his own authorial control over any 'cultural' responsibility ('I really don't care what other people want me to write'³⁰) but I would argue that his apparently cynical hardiness may mask a more thoughtful, thoroughgoing analysis of the black writer's position in Britain, as apparent even in the same interview:

You would flatter yourself if you thought you could change things by a film or a play or whatever, but perhaps you can contribute to a climate of ideas. It may be that you write a film about Asians or gay people . . . people may see this as being a normal part of everyday life and not a sort of freak show on the margins. It is important to ask questions about how we live sexually, how we live racially, what our relations are with each other emotionally. Asking these questions seems to me to be the things artists can do rather than change society in any specific way. (*LS*)

Kureishi has attempted to ask these kinds of questions in his fiction and films and to underpin each question with a recognition of how class politics affects sexual and interracial relationships and issues of British democracy.³¹ An early essay by Paul Gilroy is particularly close, in its identification of the intersection between class, race and cultural identity, to the issues that Kureishi explores. In 'You can't fool the youths . . .' Gilroy describes an enduring image of working-class black communities from the 1970s on and, in so doing, captures the stereotypes of young people like Karim and Jamila in *The Buddha of Suburbia* and Shahid in *The Black Album* as explored (or others may say re-inscribed) by Kureishi:

the image of the respectable and hard-working first generation of black immigrants locked in struggle with their children, whose 'identity crises' and precarious position 'between two cultures' impel them into deviant behaviour. Rejecting the parental culture whilst reproducing its pathological characteristics, these young people, whether of Asian or Afro-Caribbean origin, are presented as divorced from their parents' concerns. *This powerful stereotype unites self-proclaimed radical and openly racist theories of black life.* (my emphasis)³²

This final sentence encapsulates the dilemma inherent in representing black characters' lives when that representation can be tipped either way on the scales of political and moral responsibility. Kureishi has, it seems to me, been judged according to a cultural studies agenda of the 1970s that expressed the need to formulate 'positive images' that would perform a public relations exercise for the community to which the artist belonged.³³ But he has simultaneously found himself judged according to the tenets of a typically 1980s political agenda that has sought to articulate raced subject positions in ways that prove them to be both heterogeneous and sophisticated. Kureishi has been caught between a rock and a hard place and he expresses this anomalous position through Karim's dilemmas in *The Buddha of Suburbia* over his dramatic presentations of Changez and Anwar and his rendition of Mowgli, and he challenges it in *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid*, where, he de-criminalises the black communities that the State criminalised as 'rioters', particularly through the quiet unassuming character of Danny/Victoria. In Rafi Rahman, Sammy's father, he cre-

ates a complex character who we understand to have been an anti-colonial resistance fighter and politician whose commitment also involved the torture of others: 'a murderer and a man eager to be loved, a populist and an elitist' (*SRGL*, p. 103). Rafi serves as an example of Kureishi's critique of the Left's liberal hegemony whereby 'Liberals want to see black or Asian people as a homogeneous group, often as beneficiaries of their attention and worthy goodness' (*LS*), just as Labour council leader Rudder pretends to do by being 'a true friend of Asia' (*BA*, p. 147). Kureishi, it seems to me, strains to break free of 'safe' characterisations and to negotiate his 'politics of representation' from what Stuart Hall in 1988 termed then a 'new and quite distinct ground – specifically, contestation over what it means to be "British"',³⁴ discovering as he does so a space for enunciation that critiques the Right but does not fail to interrogate the failings of the Left.

Kureishi clearly perceives his own work as located firmly within a British context where establishing a *conceptually* British identity that incorporates ethnic and cultural differences is an ultimate aim.³⁵ He has stated that:

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.³⁶

The consequences of this will, quite plainly in his view, include the marginalisation of racism as a problem to be tackled by white British society. Even when located within a 'conventionally' British context, however, Kureishi's work to date remains controversial, not as a result of its comedy but as a result of its clearly anti-Thatcherite stance.

Stephen Frears, whose directing career might be described as 'anti-establishment', has dryly described his 1980s films, including the two with Kureishi, as 'films shrieking at Mrs Thatcher',³⁷ and the right-wing Oxford historian Norman Stone has infamously criticised a number of films of the 1980s for an 'overall feeling of disgust and decay' which he found 'worthless and insulting'.³⁸ The venomous tirade in which he celebrates 'very good films of a traditional kind' like *Passage to India* and *Room With A View* and *Hope and Glory* and vilifies Jarman's *The Last of England* together with the two Kureishi/Frears productions, is telling in its harking back to British films of the 1930s and 1960s in a way that falls clearly into Gilroy's definition of the national myth of British life as 'stable and as peaceful as it was ethnically undifferentiated'. Gilroy also sees racism as symptomatic of 'crude and reductive notions of culture',³⁹ and consequently community, and, in his admiration for the Merchant-Ivory productions, Stone belies his own sense of British community as bound up with a romanticising of the history of Empire that denies the debate around race, class, gender and sexuality that underpins the dynamics of contemporary British society as depicted in the films he attacks.⁴⁰ Rushdie's comments on the success of film and television productions of 'Raj revisionism' in the 1980s as 'the artistic counterpart to the rise of conservative ideologies in modern Britain' helps to clarify Stone's reactionary attack.⁴¹

Stone forms an extreme example of the rearguard action that right-wing ‘moral’ apologists mounted in the 1980s to help to preserve a myth of harmonious ‘Englishness’ in the face of that decade’s political and social realities. It is difficult to consider Kureishi’s work without also countering Stone’s criticisms,⁴² since Kureishi’s (and Jarman’s) films are examples of contemporary popular cultural projects that provide new perspectives on the myths of Englishness and nationhood in the way that the film critic Sheila Johnson has called for. She has examined ‘Britishness’ in the cinema with particular analysis of two films, *Chariots of Fire* and *Ploughman’s Lunch* (one would assume that Norman Stone would enjoy the former but revile the latter), and she identifies the 1980s as ‘an historical moment when notions of national unity were once again being dusted down and re-mobilised in the interests of political expediency’ but hopes that ‘subsequent films will continue to move away from hoary national mythologies and conventional narrative formats’.⁴³ Kureishi and Frears are clearly moving in this direction whilst it is the critic Norman Stone who finds it impossible to rid himself of the ‘hoary national mythologies’.

I would argue that despite their apparent popularity⁴⁴ 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’.⁴⁵ Here Kobena Mercer is referring to the African diaspora rather than the Asian diaspora but the Bakhtinian concepts that bespeak the multiple voices of diasporic peoples are relevant too to the multi-layered film narratives of *My Beautiful Laundrette* and *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid*. Kureishi and Frears do not experiment with the self-consciousness of Sankofa or the Black Audio Collective that Mercer commends, but they strategically deploy writerly and cinematographic techniques that consider multiple issues simultaneously and that help to deconstruct hegemonic codes around subject positions through the content, without being overtly avant-garde in terms of film form. At this juncture, I should point out that I am aware of the pressure and influence upon the critic to try to ‘save’ Kureishi from the label of popular, mainstream artist according to the orthodoxy within this critical arena that Judith Williamson has described as ‘realist narrative, mainstream cinema = bad; non-realist narrative, difficult, even boring, oppositional cinema = good’ (p. 108). Part of the controversy around Kureishi’s films has arisen precisely because of their position in the ‘mainstream’ of audience experience rather than at the periphery, which has been the case with Sankofa and the Black Audio Film Collective.⁴⁶ However, Mercer has drawn attention to the fact that certain things operate generically across black film-making in Britain. For example, the raising of:

questions of representation that speak directly to the experience of cultural fragmentation and displaced selfhood that has become such a general preoccupation in postmodern trends in the arts.⁴⁷

And, since ‘questions of identity can never be seen “beyond representation”’,⁴⁸ questions of cultural displacement in Britain versus cultural ‘nationhood’ are proving to be the dialectic around which black film-makers, including Kureishi, engage.

For Kureishi community and identity politics is fraught with pitfalls and problems, with conflicts and contentions (most recently 'The notion of "community" is much abused and probably meaningless'⁴⁹) but it is this very 'structural predicament' that has contributed to the vibrant engagement of his fictions and films with issues of representation, and black cultural politics, as well as 'Englishness' and community. Perhaps both Kureishi and critic Stuart Hall are intrinsically more hopeful than Kobena Mercer in their allegiance to the idea that the black artist need not be constrained by the position attributed to him or her:

we all speak from a particular space, out of a particular history, out of a particular experience, a particular culture, without being contained by that position as 'ethnic artists' or film-makers.⁵⁰

Kureishi's is an effort to realise a 'revitalized and broader self-definition' as expressed in his own terms, and one that responds to the anxieties Mercer expresses but refuses to be contained by them.

¹ Hanif Kureishi, *Outskirts and Other Plays*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1992), p. xvi.

² Jonathan Rutherford, 'Interview with Homi Bhabha: The Third Space', in Rutherford (ed.), *Identity, Community, Culture, Difference*, (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), pp. 207-21.

³ Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991* (Granta: London, 1992), p. 138.

⁴ Kobena Mercer, 'Black Art and the Burden of Representation', *Third Text*, 10 (Spring 1990) p. 62.

⁵ Hanif Kureishi, *The Late Show*, BBC2, April 1990. All further references to this programme will be included in the text as *LS*.

⁶ Stuart Hall, 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora', Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (eds.), *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), p. 392.

⁷ See, for example, his essay 'The Rainbow Sign', in *My Beautiful Laundrette* (London: Faber and Faber, 1986) and especially pages 35-8. All further references to the screenplay and essay will be given in the text as *MBL*.

⁸ Hanif Kureishi, *The Black Album* (London: Faber and Faber, 1995), p. 228. All further references to this novel will be given in the text as *BA*.

⁹ So too is the thinking of Stuart Hall and David Held in their essay 'Citizens and Citizenship', in Stuart Hall and Martin Jacques (eds.), *New Times: The Changing Face of Politics in the 1990s* (London: Verso, 1990). Kureishi explores these issues in an early work, the play *Birds of Passage* reproduced in *Outskirts*, op. cit.

¹⁰ Hanif Kureishi, *The Buddha of Suburbia* (London: Faber and Faber, 1990), pp. 267-8. All further references to this novel will be given in the text as *BS*.

¹¹ See, for example, Amrit Wilson, *Finding a Voice: Asian Women in Britain* (London: Virago, 1984) and most particularly the postscript to the 1984 edition, 'Development in the Eighties', in which these early campaigns are contextualised. ('We had to do something - something to resist'), pp. 172-8.

¹² Perminder Dhillon-Kashyap, 'Locating the Asian Experience', in *Screen: The Last 'Special Issue' on Race*, 29:4 (Autumn 1988), p. 125.

¹³ Hanif Kureishi, 'Dirty Washing', *Time Out*, 14-20 November 1985.

¹⁴ Farrah Anwar, 'Is there a sodomite in the house?', *Guardian*, 7 August 1992, p. 29.

¹⁵ For example, the reviewer Mark Sanderson in *Time Out*, 20-27 January 1988.

¹⁶ Floya Anthias and Nira Yuval-Davis, *Racialised boundaries: race, nation, gender, colour and class and the anti-racist struggle* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 38.

¹⁷ Gurinder Chadha, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, 156: 669 (October 1989), p. 315.

¹⁸ Gurinder Chadha, cited in Farrah Anwar, op. cit., p. 29. Mahmood Jamal goes even further, arguing that Kureishi exhibits a state of mind he describes as 'neo-orientalist' creating images of Asians for the white British to laugh at. See 'Dirty Linen', in *ICA Documents 7*, pp. 21-2.

¹⁹ Paul Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack* (London: Routledge, 1992), esp. chapter 2, pp. 243-71.

²⁰ Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic* (London: Verso, 1993), p. 3.

²¹ See Akeel Bilgrami, 'What is a Muslim? Fundamental Commitment and Cultural Identity', *Critical Inquiry*, 18 (Summer 1992), pp. 821-43, for a working through of some of these ideas.

²² See also Nikos Papastergiadis, 'Ashis Nandy: Dialogue and the Diaspora - a conversation' where he explores the difficulties entailed in clinging to memories of South Asia, of 'ultra-nationalism' and of the complexity of the diaspora situation. In *Third Text 11: Beyond the Rushdie Affair* (Summer 1990), pp. 99-108. Kureishi too addresses the politics of location and the idea of 'home' in 'The Rainbow Sign', in *My Beautiful Laundrette*, op. cit., pp. 9-38.

²³ Sallie Westwood and Parminder Bhachu, 'Images and realities: our beliefs about Asian families are often selective, prejudiced and riddled with contradictions', in *New Society*, 6 May 1988, p. 20.

²⁴ Neil Berry, review of *The Buddha of Suburbia* in *London Review of Books* (1990).

²⁵ The comparison Hermione Lee makes between Kureishi's position as an Asian writer in Britain and Karim's struggle with political and personal responsibility is surely the beginning of the idea behind Seema Jena's 'From Victims to Survivors: The Anti-Hero and Narrative Strategy in Asian Immigrant Writing', in *Wasafiri*, 17 (Spring 1993), pp. 3–6.

²⁶ Horace Ové, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, 54:647 (December 1987), p. 361. His complaint is echoed by Menelik Shabazz, the Barbadian born director, whose *Burning An Illusion* followed *Pressure* but as late as 1981. See Shabazz in conversation with James Leahy in *Monthly Film Bulletin*, 56:663 (April 1989), pp. 101–2.

²⁷ Hanif Kureishi, 'With your tongue down my throat', *Granta*, 22 (Autumn 1987), p. 21 and p. 57.

²⁸ Hanif Kureishi, 'Some Time with Stephen: A Diary', in *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid* (London: Faber and Faber, 1988), p. 75. All further references to this screenplay will be included in the text as *SRGL*. Gayatri Spivak focuses on this assertion in some detail in her 'Sammy and Rosie Get Laid', in *Outside in the Teaching Machine* (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 243–54.

²⁹ bell hooks, 'Stylish Nihilism: race, sex and class at the movies', in *Yearning: race, gender and cultural politics* (London: Turnaround Press, 1991), p. 157.

³⁰ Hanif Kureishi on *Rear Window*, C4, April 1990. All further references to this programme will be included in the text as *RW*.

³¹ Cultural critics like Paul Gilroy, A. Sivanandan and Henry A. Giroux emphasise this connection with 'democracy'. Giroux in a recent article on what he calls 'the new cultural racism' writes about what he perceives as a profound 'conflict over the relationship between democracy and culture, on the one hand, and identity and the politics of representation on the other' (p. 2), and consequently the need to articulate the relationships between identity and British 'democracy'. In 'Living Dangerously: Identity Politics and the New Cultural Racism: Towards A Critical Pedagogy of Representation', in *Cultural Studies*, 7:1 (January 1993), pp. 1–27. See also A. Sivanandan, *A Different Hunger: Writings on Black Resistance* (London: Pluto Press, 1982), esp. pp. 99–140.

³² Paul Gilroy, 'You can't fool the youths . . . race and class formation in the 1980s', in *Race and Class: Britain 81!: Rebellion and Repression*, 23: 2–3, (1981–2), p. 213.

³³ Kobena Mercer situates this type of agenda historically in 'Welcome to the Jungle', in Rutherford, op. cit., pp. 48–9.

³⁴ Stuart Hall, 'New Ethnicities', in James Donald and Ali Rattansi (eds), *'Race', Culture and Difference* (London: Open University Press, 1992), p. 258.

³⁵ Ironically, perhaps, Roy Jenkins as Home Secretary in the Labour government expressed such a view as early as 1966:

I do not think we need in this country a melting pot, which will turn everybody out in a common mould, as one of a series of carbon copies of someone's misplaced vision of the stereotyped Englishman . . . I define integration, therefore, not as a flattening process of assimilation but as equal opportunity, coupled with cultural diversity, in an atmosphere of mutual tolerance. (Cited in Sebastian Pailter, 'Cultural Pluralism and its Limits: A Legal Perspective', in *Britain a Plural Society: Report of a Seminar – Discussion Paper 3*, London: Commission for Racial Equality, 1990, p. 5.)

³⁶ Hanif Kureishi, 'Dirty Washing', op. cit.

³⁷ Stephen Frears, *Empire*, September 1993, p. 57.

³⁸ 'Sick Scenes From English Life' and 'Through a Lens Darkly', in *Sunday Times*, 10 January 1988.

³⁹ Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, op. cit., p. 7.

⁴⁰ Although Kureishi in his response to Stone ('England, bloody England', *Guardian*, 22 January 1988) does point out that E. M. Forster, writer of two of the three novels on which Stone's 'favourite' films are based, was himself a controversial and dissenting individual. Kureishi has also drawn attention on many occasions to his own repeated readings of Orwell's 1944 essay 'England Your England' as he wrote *My Beautiful Laundrette*.

⁴¹ Salman Rushdie, 'The Raj Revival', in *Observer*, April 1984, cited in Perminder Dhillon-Kashyap, op. cit., p. 122. Ironically, Kureishi cites an aunt of his expressing views similar to Stone's, in 'Some Time with Stephen', op. cit., p. 64.

⁴² Judith Williamson makes a similar point in 'Two Kinds of Otherness: Black Film and the Avant-Garde', *Screen*, 29:4, Autumn 1988.

⁴³ Sheila Johnson, 'Charioteers and Ploughmen', in Martyn Auty and Nick Roddick, (eds), *British Cinema Now* (London: BFI, 1985), pp. 109–10.

⁴⁴ A number of critics have commented on the popularity of Kureishi's first two films with cinema audiences. For example, June Givanni cites *My Beautiful Laundrette* together with Spike Lee's *She's Gotta Have It* as examples of 'relatively low-budget feature films [that] have "crossed over" from small art-house audiences to achieve commercial success in high street cinemas' despite the general potential for such 'cross-overs' being limited, in 'In Circulation: Black Films in Britain', *ICA Document 7*, p. 40.

⁴⁵ Kobena Mercer, 'Diaspora Culture and the Dialogic Imagination', in Manuel Alvarado and John O. Thompson, (eds), *The Media Reader* (London: BFI, 1990), p. 31.

⁴⁶ Black Audio Film Collective have, since their inception, been committed to exploring film forms and mixed media and to consequently producing quite complex postmodernist explorations of post-colonial and contemporary British issues and debates. In the case of *Handsworth Songs*, description by John Akomfrah, the director, of its aims

attests to the level of complex engagement that risks alienating the 'popular' audience. See *Monthly Film Bulletin*, 36:668 (September 1989), p. 261. Sankofa's *The Passion of Remembrance* depicts some of the issues of protests, demonstrations and police violence that concern Kureishi in *Sammy and Rosie* but employs video-footage and a multi-layered structure to do so. Both Paul Gilroy and Kobena Mercer have asked questions about the composition of the audiences for black cultural products, as Mercer discusses in 'Black Art and the Burden of Representation', *op. cit.*, pp. 65–7.

⁴⁷ Kobena Mercer, 'Recoding Narratives of Race and Nation', in *ICA Documents 7*, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

⁴⁸ Homi Bhabha, 'Interrogating Identity', *ICA Documents 6*, *Identity: The Real Me* (London: ICA, 1988), p. 6.

⁴⁹ Hanif Kureishi in Maya Jaggi, 'A buddy from suburbia', *Guardian*, 1 March 1995.

⁵⁰ Stuart Hall, 'New Ethnicities', *op. cit.*, p. 258.