

Representation of Pakistani Diasporic Community in Hanif Kureishi's *The Black Album*

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Abstract:

In The Black Album Hanif Kureishi shows the inter-communal and racial conflicts. This research paper examines the representation of Pakistani diasporic community in contemporary Britain. The nature of these conflicts is both religious and cultural.

Key words: Diaspora, Community, Conflict in Britain, Hanif Kureishi, *The Black Album*

Introduction

Pakistani Diaspora communities in Britain with inter-communal and racial conflicts show the prejudices that are faced by them. With multiculturalism and hybridity of London there is new concept of community that the British fail to recognize.

The division of this community on basis of religion makes differences between the people living side by side in Britain. "Religions may be illusions [...] but these are important illusions. This is what an effective multiculturalism that 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." ("Carnival" 100) The new concept of community should be understood with its undertaking

religion as not a factor of prejudice.

Diaspora, a process of geographical dislocation and relocation, is also a mental transport. Furthermore, the term diaspora, applies to groups with different origins whose diversity needs to be acknowledged and appreciated.

‘And where are you from?’

‘Lahore. Originally.’

‘That “Originally” is a quiet big thing,’ Shahid said.

‘The very biggest thing of all. You recognize that, eh? I was brought away to this country at fourteen.’

Shahid established that Riaz has lived and worked ‘with the people, showing them their rights’, in a Muslim community near Leeds. His accent was certainly a compound of both places, which explain why he sounded like a cross between J. B. Priestley and Zia Al Haq. (Kureishi 6)

Regardless of the type of migration or its causes, two different geographic areas and three societies are affected. The geographic areas are the out-migration (migration abroad) and the in-migration (internal migration), and the three societies are: the society of origin, the host society and the immigrant group itself (Velikonja 1989, 709-725). London is a metropolis that is a place of social mixture and a site that is saturated with potential for intermixture of cultures. Iain Chambers comments on the disorder that is created by the cultural complexity of the modern metropolis: “It is a reality that is heterogeneous diasporic. The city suggests a creative disorder in which the imagination carries you in every direction.” (Chambers 1993, 189). The heterogeneous shape of London with its diasporic communities and hybrid cultural forms negotiates the identity. The diasporic group as one of the most salient central themes for Kureishi and other non-white British writers, is not a homogeneous community, or, to speak more exactly, the epitome of the very idea of community that is possible.

People decide to migrate for various reasons such as: to

avoid political or personal oppression at home; searching for better economic conditions; avoidance of religious and ethnic persecution; exploitation and alienation; or lack of freedom (Velikonja 1989, 709-725).

He'd boast about England so much that his brother Asif said, 'What are you personally related to the royal family, yaar?' (Kureishi 106-107)

Riaz said 'Besides, there is already hanging there a picture of Nelson Mandela.'

'And the African mask,' added Chad.

'We will not be ghettoized,' Riaz said.

'No, no. no ghettoization.' (Kureishi 179)

Those ethnic groups who have a well developed sense of honour will continue to maintain their customs and transmit their beliefs to the next generation, whether or not they encounter discrimination.

The most frequently used cultural elements in defining ethnic identity are language, religion, food preferences, media, celebrated holidays and behaviour (Laroche 2005, 143-167). These elements, with culture being the main one, have been used by researchers either individually or in combination to measure the ethnic identity of certain ethnic groups or ethnically diverse groups of immigrants (Kwan & Sadowsky 1997; Laroche et al. 2005, 25, 51-67).

Berry suggests four stages in an immigrant's journey through ethnic identity: *integration*, *assimilation*, *marginalization*, and *separation*. He defines *integration* as a strategy of an immigrant who identifies with and is involved with both the culture of origin and the culture of the host country. It is a process that incorporates the maintenance of the culture of origin with the gaining of the culture and relationship of other ethnic groups.

'What kind of thing are we talking about here?' Chad asked.

'What kind of thing? Of going around abusing Pakis, niggers, Chinks, Irish, any foreign scum. I slagged them under my

breath whenever I saw them. I wanted to kick them up the arse. The thought of sleep with the Asian girls made me sick. I'm being very honest with you now –'

'Even when they came onto me, I could bear it. I thought, you know, wink at an Asian girl and she'll want to marry you up. I wouldn't touch brown flesh, except with a branding iron. I hated all foreign bastards.'

'I argued ... why can't I be a racist like everyone else? Why do I have to miss out that privilege? Why is it only me who has to be good? Why can't I swagger around pissing on others for being inferior? I began to turn into one of them I was becoming a monster.'(Kureishi 11)

'The people here can't oppose the corporations,' Brownlow said. 'Powerless, they are. Badly fed. Uneducated and unemployed. Can't make jobs from hope.'

Riaz went on: 'And do you think our brothers in the Third World, have a fraction of this? Do our villages have electricity? Have you ever seen a village?'

'An' he's not talking about Gloucestershire,' Chad muttered.

Brownlow said, 'In Soweto. Three months living with the people.'

'You will know, then,' Riaz said, 'that what I have said would be James Bond luxuries to the people there. They dream of having fridge, televisions, cookers! And are the people racist skinhead, car thieves, rapists? Have they desired to dominate the rest of the world? No, they are humble, good, hard-working people who love Allah!'(Kureishi 94-95)

On the other hand, *assimilation* equates to a person's loss of the original ethnic identity and the adoption of a new one, identical to that of the dominant society (Constant et al. 2006, 135), or it refers to the situation where an immigrant's sole identification is with the new culture (Berry 1980, 9-25). However, wherever assimilation does not take place or is delayed, it might be due to the denial of the dominant group to accept the ethnic groups, and not so much on the ethnic groups refusing to assimilate (Sanders 2002, 327-5).

He'd say that the Pakistani in England now had to do

everything, win the sports, present the news and run the shops and businesses, as well as having fuck the women. 'Your country's gone to the wogs!' He labeled this 'the brown man's burden'. (Kureishi 6)

Chad said, 'Don't he say we becoming Western, European, socialist? And the socialists are all talk. They are paralyze now for good! Look at that slug Brownlow, for instance! Or his wife, that Osgood woman!'

'What about her?'

'They are existing at the lowest level! And we think we want to integrate here! But we must not assimilate, that way we lose our souls. We are proud and we are obedient. What is wrong with that? It's not we who must change, but the world!' Chad was looking at Shahid. 'It's hell-fire for disbeliever, you know that.' (Kureishi 80-81).

'We'll see,' said Brownlow. 'For those TV people Riaz is a fascinating freak. They've never met anyone anyone like that before. He could end up with his own chat show.'

Brownlow went on with his packing but kept stopping to look at Shahid – who was turning the aubergine in his hand – like he wanted to say something. 'The thing is, this religion – the superstitions, cults, forms of worship, prayers – some are beautiful, some interesting, all have their purposes. But who'd have imagined they'd survive rationalism? Yet when you thought God was dead and buried, you realize he was merely awaiting resurrection! Every fucker's discovering some God inside them now. And who am I to challenge this?' (Kureishi 243)

Hat said, 'Because Allah is forgiving and merciful, I will only show love and consideration for others. I ashamed of what they did.'

'Why?'

'Whatever you done, it not my place to condemn another person. Only God can do that. I was wrong to put myself in that position, as if I never done wrong things. I hope you don't turn away from God.' (Kureishi 271)

How Hat interprets Islam himself and how he interprets it for Riaz and group. He surely sets them up.

Marginalization indicates a strong detachment and weak dedication to either the host society or the culture of origin. *Marginalization* is usually a product of racial discrimination and prejudice experienced in the host country, not controlled by the immigrants themselves, and leading to inter-ethnic conflict and societal imbalance (Constant et al. 2006, 135). On the other hand, Berry refers to marginalization as the immigrant's lack of involvement, and finally rejection of both cultures.

'Everywhere I went I was the only dark-skinned person. How did this make people see me? I began to be scared of going into certain places. I didn't know what they were thinking. I was convinced they were full of sneering and disgust and hatred. And if they were pleasant, I imagined they were hypocrites. I became paranoid. I could go out. I knew I was confused and ... fucked up. But I didn't know what to do.' (Kureishi 10)

He shouted, 'We're third-class citizens, even lower than the white working class. Racist violence is getting worse! Papa thought it would stop, that we'd be accepted here as English. We haven't been! We're not equal! It's gonna be like America. However far we go, will always be underneath!' (Kureishi 209)

London mayor Ken Livingstone, who proclaimed the diversity of London with its solidarity in response to an insolubility of London Diasporic communities, he has presented an argument that "ordinary, working-class Londoners, black or white, Muslim or Christian, Hindu or Jew, young or old", in a city which is not divided as there everybody lives harmoniously (Livingstone n. pag). This is said about London but the reality is ironical and harmony is far away. The involvement in radical activity is part of a growing Muslim international consciousness due to conflicts that Muslim population have and the role of Britain in these conflicts.

Separation implies that the individual maintains an exclusive commitment to the culture of origin, even after many years of emigration, and showing very weak involvement with the dominant culture (Constant et al. 2006, 135). *Separation* and *marginalization* affect immigrants negatively, isolating

them from mainstream society, even though they continue to enjoy the events and lifestyle offered within their own ethnic community or sub-community. Berr (refers to separation as a choice made by the immigrant to identify solely with the home culture, which he refers to as the traditional culture.

With strained patience Chad went on. 'Listen. It's been the longest, hardest century of racism in the history of everything. How can you have not picked up the vibe in this distorted way? There's a bit of Hitler in all white people – they've given that to you. It's all they ever done for us .' (Kureishi 12)

An immigrant can undergo a range of journeys in the attempt to survive in the host society. He or she can move through the four states starting from the 'separation' stage and then move towards 'integration', then 'assimilation' and finally 'marginalization', or remaining at 'separation'.

Diaspora communities' ability to preserve a distinct ethnic identity, as well as their bonds with their country of origin, have often led the host society to regard them as outsiders and question their loyalty and motives. In fact diaspora communities have often served as easy scapegoats for social unrest during hard economic times in many large migrant countries. The sensitive issue of dual loyalty has always been a source of potential conflict, and in the past was a cause of persecution. Diaspora power has always been a cause of conflict with their host governments, especially when the latter have disapproved of diasporas' attempts to act on behalf of their home countries.

"Religions may be illusions [...] but these are important illusions. This is a robust and committed exchange of ideas – a conflict which is worth enduring, rather than a war." ("Carnival", 100) Understanding other human beings is the motive of multiculturalism. But if this understanding is negatively driving views against their religion then severe religious and cultural conflicts are possible.

The emergence of diasporas cannot be explained by the

fact that the nation-state is in any imminent danger of extinction but rather because there is a move in some political quarters in host countries towards abandoning the idea of instilling immigrants with a sense of the national ideal. So, although many politicians pay lip service to multiculturalism, government action such as the French policy which forbade Muslim girls from wearing the head-scarf (*hijab*), is interpreted by some as an example of efforts to integrate ethnic minorities and discourage difference. Therefore, the real picture of the relationship between host governments and ethnic groups today is a very ambiguous and contradictory one.

‘But we women go to a lot of trouble to conceal [...] We are constantly mocked and reviled, as if we were the dirty ones. [...] a man on the street said, this is England, not Dubai, and tried to rip my scarf off.’(Kureishi 105)

Papa had been ill. Finally, nine months ago, he died of a heart attack. Without him the family had seemed to fly apart. Shahid had left his girlfriend acrimoniously. Zulma and Chilli had been fighting. His mother had been unhappy and without purpose. It had been a rotten time. Shahid wanted a new start with new people in a new place. The city would feel like his; he wouldn't be excluded; there had to be ways in which he could belong. (Kureishi 16).

For a country ‘she’ is used as a pronoun. This ‘she’ refers as a mother of its citizen. In a situation when a young man like Shahid has lost his father and he wants to have a new start this country with its she has behaved like a step mother.

Questions regarding the degree of civil and political rights ethnic groups should be entitled to, become contentious domestic issues and the voices of these groups are simply not heard through all the shouting. Robin Cohen, traces diaspora experiences of survival and adaptation in exile, following their development and proliferation. He puts diasporas' ability to transcend what he calls “the victim tradition” (their life of hardship and discrimination), to enrich their lives and to adapt to new socio-cultural forms, down to the consequences of

globalization This process of globalisation has as Cohen puts it, enabled diasporas to "survive and thrive". Other researchers see globalisation as facilitating the "tendency of today' s transmigrants to maintain, build and reinforce multiple linkages with their countries of origin." In globalisation, physical presence or proximity is no longer a prerequisite for the practice of community. "Globalisation concerns the intersection of presence and absence," writes Anthony Giddens, "the interlacing of social events and social relations at distance with local contextualities." This quality can be implicated in the ability of certain groups to engage in, sustain or reproduce particular forms of community across great distances and in the face of competing traditions. (21)

At twenty Chili married their cousin Zulma and moved away, in the western fashion, to a flat in Brighton. There they attempted to continue the fashionable life she had in Karachi. But such glamour was only possible with help. Zulma wasn't used to housework. She had many specialities, including, it was said, fellatio; but washing up wasn't among them. Nor was it among Chili's.

Last year, after Papa died, Chili took Zulma and their little girl, Safire, back to live in the family house. Since then Shahid doubted whether Chili had seen much of her. He claimed to be obsessed with developing a business plan. He was certainly bored with being a travel agent and had stuck to his business duties only to please Papa and to draw a big salary. This was how he justified never being at home. (Kureishi 40)

Only a handful of writers have attempted to define diaspora and have laboured over tracing the roots of the term and determining the key features which distinguish diasporas from other ethnic minorities and migrant groupings. Of them, Khachig Toloyan is probably the most ardent critic of the term's misuse, asserting that "diaspora is in danger of becoming a promiscuously capacious category". In his extensive historical review of the term's development, Toloyan points out how labels such as "expatriate, exile, ethnic, minority, refugee, migrant,

sojourner and oversees community” are commonly and routinely being used interchangeably with diaspora. He goes on to show how a diaspora is distinguishable as a 'collectivity' whose identity differs from that of the dominant host society, while other groups such as the ones mentioned above are simply “a scattering of individuals.” Unlike other writers who concentrate on determining the features which define diasporas, Toloyan examines the internal workings of diasporas emphasising the significance of the "norms, values, discourses and practices of diaspora's communal institutions “in constructing "diasporic-specific social identities.” (30)

He didn't know. But he would get away at last, and read and write and find intelligent people to discuss with. May be even Deedee Osgood herself would have time for him. She was pleased by how much he'd read. At home he'd still had school friends, but in the past three years had lost interest in most of them; some he had come to despise of their lack of hope. Almost all were unemployed. And their parents, usually patriotic people and proud of the Union Jack, knew nothing of their own culture.(Kureishi 26)

These Muslims of Britain diaspora like every other diasporic community has left their lands, homes, family, food and most importantly their ways of living. To be a part of British culture and to go on the cross roads of British ways of living they have even forgotten their own culture. So as a researcher of diasporic community one must ask the authorities that what else do they require from the immigrants?

Diasporas do not frequent one singular cultural space because they are simultaneously occupying two areas, that in which they have settled and that which ties them to their home. This central feature of their existence has aligned diaspora with terms like hybridity, creolization and syncretism.

“If my son is both Indian and American, which one is he really? Which is the real self and which the other? How do these two selves coexist and how do they weld into one identity? How is ethnic identity related to national identity? Is

this relationship hierarchically structured, such that the "national" is supposed to subsume and transcend ethnic identity, or does this relationship produce a hyphenated identity, such as African-American, Asian-American, and so forth, where the hyphen marks a dialogic and non-hierarchical conjuncture?"

Writers such as Radhakrishnan who focus on the hybrid condition which results from being in diaspora, try to reconcile the difficulties of coexistence between two selves. According to him, some diasporic individuals recite the "reality of a double life, the ethnic private life and the public life, with very little mediation between the two." (206) Others claim that their different forms of identity do not necessarily stand separately but can be upheld simultaneously. Speaking on behalf of many diasporic writers, for instance, Salman Rushdie claims:

"...we are not willing to be excluded from any part of our heritage; which heritage includes both a Bradford-born Indian kid's right to be treated as a full member of British post-diaspora community to draw on its roots... we are Hindus who have crossed the black water; we are Muslims who eat pork ... we are partly of the West. Our identity is plural as well as partial. Sometimes we feel that we straddle two cultures; at other times, that we fall between two stools." (15)

If they can make Hindus cross black water and Muslims eat pork then why can't one make them respect someone's beliefs.

The different diasporic configurations of committed, activist and militant are not simply a matter of some individuals feeling of being more ethnic than others. But such configurations are based on the feelings to have rights to practice one's beliefs honourably. The reality is that many individuals shift between different roles adapting their behaviour to changing circumstances or even to suit their mood. As Arthur Mann points out:

“I have observed ... certain minority people playing one role in the presence of local majority people, a second role equally artificial, in the presence of more militant members of their own minority. And a third role, more natural, with their own friends, all minority people but none of them aggressively minoritarian.”

‘You know Dr. Andrew Brownlow, Shahid?’ said the other student. ‘I am Hat, by the way.’ (Kureishi 31)

‘I think I have seen Dr. Andrew around,’ Shahid said. ‘But I don’t know who he is.’

‘Teaches history here. A couple of decades back he was at the Cambridge University –’

‘The top student of his year,’ Chad interrupted.

‘Yeah, I am telling you,’ Hat said. ‘He comes from the upper-middle-classes. He could have done any fine thing. They wanted him at Harvard. Or was it Yale, Chad?’

‘He refused them places down.’

‘Yeah he tol’ them to get lost. He hated them all, all his own class, his parents – everything. He comes to this college to help us, the unprivileged niggers and wogs an’ margin people.’ ‘He always strong on anti-racism. He hates imperialist fascism and white domination.’

(Kureishi 32)

“The models on which the gang’s aggression is based not on models taught within the Muslim culture itself, but within the alternative acts of prejudice.” (Stein 2000, 132) The research paper analyses the inter-communal and racial conflicts breed into alienation that not only drives British-Asian Muslims towards mutual support but also towards destruction.

The bombings of July 7th, 2005 asks that what is meaning of being British and drew into stark relief the exclusions clearly complicit in it. The warnings are offered by Kureishi to British society about the dangers of cultural alienation. *The Black Album* offers a representation of Islam that sends a message about violence. But in terms it raises questions that it is Muslim violence or British violence on Muslims:

Even if he opened by wryly saying, 'Today I am not going to blast anything,' he would start to rage, fist in the air, throwing down his pen, creating a frisson of humorous agreement in his audience. Then, pretending to be contrite, he'd beg the brothers to apologize to anyone they might have argued with, and to love those of other religions. (Kureishi 80-81).

A singed page lay in the gutter outside the college. But the buses were running, the kebab houses were open, people pushed prams and walked home from work. On the steps of the subway a priest squatted to read the Bible to a teenage beggar who sat there all day. None of these people knew a book had been burned nearby. Few of them would, perhaps, have been concerned. Nevertheless, that morning there had been another bombing in the City; many roads had checkpoints. He knew it would be wrong to think that everything would remain all right.

Deedee, hugging herself and trembling, asked an old man if he knew what had happened. He said it had been a petrol bomb. The shop had been attacked by fanatics, he reckoned. After all, the attempt hadn't been to steal from the shop – what would anyone do with a load of books? – but to destroy it.

The man said, 'I heard some awful screaming.'

'How come?' Shahid asked. 'Was there someone in the shop?'

The man shook his head. 'There was a strong wind. They threw the first petrol bomb and it went through the window. The second one blew up in his face. The others tried to put it out but the boy had his hand and face on fire. What could anyone do? When the police came, they ran away. The kid won't last long, I shouldn't think, with those injuries.' (273)

Two of them reported both the book-burning and the attack on the shop, in which Chad had been badly injured. After this he didn't feel like reading any more; she put the papers away, and they sat and looked at one another.

He didn't know what would become of any of them. (Kureishi 275)

As Chris Wheedon notes that the novel "works with binary oppositions with the sameness and differences of ordinary

Muslims and their lives become invisible” (2004, 152). Against a lack of state ideology, *The Black Album* suggests only an alienated British Muslim youth is a basic ideology which offers them the sense of rootedness.

The Black Album demonstrates a sense about a hybrid society where one would find no space for those whose identities are rooted in a particular belief system. There is no place for strong and committed religious faith because hybridity is directly opposite to the identity of Islam, which defies the oppositional status to multiculturalism and hybridity. The event of the novel when Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* has been subjected to burning that implies that *The Black Album* has been seen as a revolt for the crime of Rushdie's novel in its lack of respect for Islam:

Shahid had to say he was. Twice he'd visited the large, cool building with the posse, to watch Riaz's Sunday's talks. They were well attended by a growing audience of young people, mostly local cockney Asians. Not being an aged obscurantist, Riaz was becoming the most popular speaker. He must have tasted the atmosphere of his time without drinking it in, for he entitled his talks 'Rave to the Grave?', 'Adam and Eve not Adam and Steve', 'Islam: A Blast from the past or a Force for the Future?' and 'Democracy is a Hypocisy'. (Kureishi 80-81). 'You know how some people love to say we are undemocratic. Why shouldn't we fully discuss the entire thing?' Shahid said, 'Surely we should talk it over without prejudice.' 'Why not? Will you speak to the interested brother and sister about a place and time?' Shahid loaded. 'We must do it soon. Why not tomorrow morning? And please, will you write a draft of an article about Western arrogance with regard to our right not to be insulted?'(pg#176)

Democracy gives right to refuse to believe in someone's religion but is it also give right to insult someone's believe.

“Hybrid identities are never total and complete in themselves.” (McLeod 2004, 219). Kureishi's description of the London mosque offers an image of Islam that is not at all the

representative of essentialism but of diversity. This rendering of Islam is at its height in Kureishi captures the Islamic ummat al-mu'minin, in which all people are equal towards God. Here the mosque defines hybridity of roots, rather than opposes it. The failing of this recognition bring unrest as a result.

At the centre of this representation of a model of community that is intrinsically heterogeneous and allows the Islamic ummat al-mu'minin that is to be realised in its full potential. London in the novel is in essence a limitless city, and the attacks against it create a tragedy which is "the closest a city like London could come to communal emotion"

'That's what some people are saying. But they're simple types. Unlike you, they can't read French philosophers. A few years ago they were in their villages, milking cows and keeping chickens. We have to respect the faith of others.' (Kureishi 209)

'She believes in equality, all right, but only if we forget that we are different,' said Tahira. 'If we assert our individuality, we our inferior, because we believe foolishness.' (Kureishi 229-230)

Kureishi's representation of Muslim violence makes it clear that such threats do not spring from as reactions born out of the specific ideological circumstances. Riaz's gang see themselves as part of an international solidarity declaring war against their people. The involvement in radical activity is due to conflicts that Muslim population have and the role of Britain in these conflicts:

'For what?'

'There's an emergency on. Defense required. Our people under attack tonight.'

'What are you talking about?'

Riaz looked at Chad and then at Shahid. Chad composed himself. Riaz's presence calmed everyone. He said, 'You should be with us, Shahid, tonight.'

'Shahid's always with us', Chad said patting his shoulder.

'But I -'

Hat said, 'Many others from college to join us.'

'Come along,' said Riaz. 'Collect your warm clothes.'

Shahid felt he had no choice but to slip on the black puffa coat his mother had given him. He had, anyhow, been waiting to try it out.

'What are we doing then?' he asked.

'Protection racket,' Hat said. 'Honest people abused.'

'We're not blasted Christians,' Riaz replied with considerable aggression for him, though the effect was rather undermined by the fact that he was, as usual, carrying his briefcase. 'We don't turn the other cheek. We will fight for our people who are being tortured in Palestine, Afghanistan, Kashmir! War has been declared against us. But we are armed.'

'No degradation of our people,' said Chad, as they charged downstairs. 'Anybody who fails to fight will answer to God and hell-fire!' (Kureishi 82)

Apparently they were bringing the bodies out, no one knew how many. The injured were being ferried to hospitals in the area. It was said that the station was burning, but it was too dark to see, since a dismal cloud had fallen over the city. (Kureishi 102-103)

In the rain the police erected the barriers, directing people up one street and then down the same street, shouting through megaphones. Helicopters circled above. (Kureishi 102-103)

One thing was clear: no one knew anything. Naturally there was plenty of talk. On the street someone told Shahid that this emergency wasn't an orthodox random attack but that shops, cars and even the airports were being bombed in a concrete effort by several organisations to take London. Not that this could be confirmed: the TV screens merely short blood-soiled faces and accounts by passer-by of the blast. (Kureishi 102-103)

Thousands of commuters milled around in the rain, standing on bridges beneath the low sky, staring into the foul water below, wondering what time they would get home that night, if at all. Some drivers lay down on the back seats of their cars; others abandoned their vehicles altogether and gathered around each other's radios. People went without promoting to the nearest hospitals, queuing silently to give blood, as television crews moved among them like disinterested

scientists. Churches were opened and the perplexed waited in buildings they hadn't entered for years. The cafés and pubs were full; apparently they were being drunk dry. Illicit lover, adulterers and opportunists took advantage. The hotels were booking out. (Kureishi 102-103)

In Palestine, Afghanistan, Kashmir when casualties happen there are no helicopters, shouting megaphones and television crews.

The first effort he copied – he created a sandwich of flimsy carbon paper which resulted in two smeared reproductions – was called 'Paki Wog Fuck Off Home'. It featured the six boys who compromised the backrow of his class at school, who, one day when teacher had left the room in despair, chanted at Shahid, 'Paki, Paki, Paki, Out, Out, Out!' He banged the scene into his machine and record it, recording the dismal fear and fury in a jagged, cunt-fuck-kill prose that expressed him, like a soul singer screaming into a microphone.

One evening he returned to his bedroom to discover his mother, still in her raincoat, reading the piece. She flapped the sheets at him, as if she had discovered a letter in which he had written intolerable things about her.

'I always know when you're playing some trick. I hope you're not trying to publish this!'

'I haven't thought about it,' he lied. 'It doesn't depend on me, does it?'

'What does it depend on?'

'Whether anyone's interested.'

'Not one person is interested! Who would want to read this? People don't want this hate in their lives.' She began to rip up what she'd read. 'Goodbye to filth, goodbye to filth – and don't you spread it!'

It was not physically easy for his mother to obliterate the fifteen pages, a copy of which he had posted to literary magazine *Stand* along with the stamped self-address envelop – every morning he hurried downstairs to see if the envelop had returned. She even glanced towards her son, but he would not assist her, oh, no, especially as she was so intent on doing it that she leaned forward to lay more of her weight into

assault.

More than anything she hated any talk of race or racism. Probably she had suffered some abuse and contempt. But her father had been a doctor; everyone – politicians, generals, journalists, police chiefs – came to their house in Karachi. The idea that anyone might read her with disrespect was insupportable. Even when Shahid vomited and defecated with fear before going to school, or when he returned with cuts, bruises, and his bag slashed with knives, she behaved as if so appalling an insult couldn't exist. And so she returned away from him. What she knew was too much of her. (Kureishi 72-73)

When their words are blocked their actions speak up. As actions are louder than words.

Similarly, Chad, seriously injured in his own violent arson, acts only as a response to his own lack of un-belonging:

'He said to me once, "I am homeless." I said, "You've got nowhere to live?" "No," he replied. "I have no country." I told him, "You're not missing much." "But I don't know what is to feel like a normal citizen." Trevor Buss dressed better than anyone and he made me tapes of music I'd never have heard. Does he still love music?'

'Yes and no.'

'He was drinking and he got stoned. One day I caught him doing coke in a classroom and banned him. He'd stand outside with one shoe balanced on his head, staring through the window. He was dealing, and he was spring-loaded, a gun about to go off.'

'But he didn't go off, did he?'

'No.'

'Why not? Because he met Riaz?'

'May be.'

'I knew it.' Shahid snapped his fingers. 'He could take the shoe of his head! What happened, then?'

'He changed his name to Muhammad Shahabuddin Ali-Shah.'

'No!'

'He'd insist on the whole name. He played football and his mates got fed up saying, "Pass the ball, Muhammad

Shahabuddin Ali-Shah,” or, “On me noddle over here, Muhammad Shahabuddin Ali-Shah.” No one passed to him. So he became Chad.’(Kureishi 108)

‘He was adopted by a white couple. The mother was racist talked about Pakis all the time and how they had to fit in.’ Deedee handed him the bottle of wine. ‘Feeling more like a drink?’

‘These days I’m trying to keep a clear head. To respect limits.’ Chad would hear church bells. He’d see English country cottages and ordinary English people who were secure, who effortlessly belonged. You know, the whole Orwellian idea of England. You read his essays?’

‘Not properly.’

‘Anyway, the sense of exclusion practically drove him mad. He wanted to bomb them.’

‘But why? Why?’

‘When he got to be a teenager he saw he had no roots, no connections with Pakistan, couldn’t even speak the language. So he went to Urdu classes. But when he tried asking for the Southall everyone fell about at his accent. In England white people looked at him as if he were going to steal their car or their handbag, particularly as he dressed like a ragamuffin. But in Pakistan they looked at him even more strangely. Why should he be able to fit into a Third World theocracy?’ (Kureishi 106-107)

For Anthony Appiah, *The Black Album* fails due to Kureishi’s inability to recognise that “a novel is not an argument”. Such criticisms hit at the heart of Kureishi’s acknowledged status as a “political writer”. Its purpose is in the service of forcefully stressing the value of the concept of plurality and cultural hybridity against systems of ideological thought. There is a contradiction that potentially undercuts its own value as a social belief system. It is this tension which is reflected in the novel. The need to reappraise *The Black Album* has its recognition from its place within the inter-communal and racial conflicts. It is a perspective, one which in most cases the author has painstakingly taken time to produce. And it is the

representation of something that to some degree is rooted in the world.

Deedee's call for police show her feeling to defend the freedom of speech that is just as fervent as the anger of many non-white student in this novel, so much so that the legality of burning one's book without causing public danger is totally ignored by one who resolutely advocates individual freedom. In comparison to an attack on a bookstore that violates civil and criminal law mentioned at the end of the novel, to burn one's own novel in the spacious area of the playground in a school is to dispose of one's own private property and to utter one's anger or opinion symbolically against certain discourses, both constitutionalized rights in the law system.

Hat said Shahid down and fetched him food and some of his father's spiced apple chutney. Then, picking from a bowl of radishes, Hat leaned over the table. 'Try this chana, yaar.' Hat even dug his fork into the chickpeas and held it to Shahid's mouth. 'What's the problem, Shahid, boy? A few of us notice you get moody. Someone said you hiding something.'

'Do you think that, Hat?'

'I can't say I ever seen you do some bad actions.'

'But someone did?'

'There's some deep emotion bothering you. Has something gone wrong? You still don't believe?'

Shahid said nothing. He liked Hat; he didn't want to get into an argument. So although Hat looked at him soulfully, as if to say, 'There's someone here to listen, if you feel like it,' and Shahid was grateful, he merely said, 'Don't worry about me, Hat, I'm just thinking 'bout some personal stuff.'

'Don't forget I'm your friend,' said Hat.

As they struggled to heave beds, wardrobe, fridge, television and kid's toys down to the van, Shahid passed Chad on the stairs and heard him say, 'Good, eh, what the Iranians saying?'

'The fatwah business?'

'Yeah.'

Shahid said, 'Someone mentioned it at college this morning.'

But I couldn't take it in. Surely they're not serious?"

Chad said, "That book been around too long without action. He insulted us all – the prophet, the prophet's wives, his whole family. It's sacrilege and blasphemy. Punishment is death. That man going down the chute."

"Are you sure that's necessary?"

"It written."

Shahid had liked *Midnight's Children*; he admired its author. He didn't see why Chad was so worked up.

He said, "If he's insulted us, can't we just forget about it? If some fool calls you bastard in the pub, it's best to not think about it, you know. You shouldn't let these things let you down."

Chad looked at him suspiciously. "What are you talking about?"

"What?"

"What exactly are you saying?"

"Just what I said."

Chad shook his head disbelievingly. (Kureishi 168-171)

"We are discussing here the free and unbridled imagination of men who live apart from people," Riaz said. "And these corrupt, disrespectful natures, wallowing in their own juices, must be caged as if they were dangerous carnivores. Do we want more wild lions and rapist stalking our streets? After all," he went on, "If a character comes into your house and spits out that your mother and sister are whores, wouldn't you chuck him from your door and do bad things to him? Very bad things?" There were many smiles. "And isn't this what such books do?" (Kureishi 183)

"A free imagination," Shahid said, "ranges over many natures a free imagination, looking into itself, illuminates other." (Kureishi 183)

Riaz said, "To me these truths about the importance of faith and concern for others are deeper than the ravings of one individual imagination."

But the individual voice is important is important, too, isn't it?" Shahid persisted, aware that the fervent note in his voice was separating him from his companions.

"Upto a point. And then no further. Is there on society in

which any individual can be allocated ultimate freedom? Anyhow, we must now move forward. People are getting restless. We have to discuss what action we will be taking against this book.'(Kureishi 184)

Deedee's voice rang out: 'What are you going to do with that book?'

Riaz seemed to shake himself before addressing her across turning heads: 'If you will permit me, I shall say something.'

'You're going to burnt it aren't you?'

This was helping him. He appealed to everyone. 'In one moment I will explain.'

'Do you really understand what that means?' she said.

'Pardon me, what is the free speech of an Asian to be muzzled by the authority?'

'No, no,' people murmured.

She said, 'But why don't you try reading it first?'[...]

'You understand?' said Riaz, as the voices rose. 'This is democracy!'

'Democracy!' she said. [...]

He interrupted: 'Are the white supremacists going to lecture us on democracy this afternoon? Or will they permit us, for once, to practise it?' [...]

Riaz spoke only brief before looking at Chad and raising a finger. Chad titled the book. It's pages quivered in the breeze like birds' wings. Hat thrust a lighter into them. At once Sadiq and Tahira jumped back. Smoke hugged the volume before bulging away into the air. [...]

Someone cried, 'Look, they've called the police!' [...]

It was Deedee. She had come out of the building with three policemen. She pointed towards Riaz and Chad. At this Brownlow dashed over and started to speak to them. [...]

Hat, Sadiq and Shahid collected Hat's speakers and them back into the building, just as the fire brigade ran in through the other entrance.

They'd burned the book. The event had been a little lame but it was what they wanted and it was done. Despite the flames, there had been no catastrophe and no immediate victims. The college principal would have to castigate the book-burners, but Shahid doubted if she'd take further action, for fear of

exacerbating the situation. She'd long been suspicious of Riaz's group, but, afraid of accusations of racism, she'd secured them a prayer room and otherwise avoided them, even when their posters were inflammatory.

Students were making their way to the canteen; others went to classes and library. Normality was rapidly re-established. British institutions might be rotten, but they stood, having existed for years; such a minor assault, or even dozens of such impacts, couldn't threaten much, though Shahid disliked hearing himself think it. (Kureishi 223-226)

Community is not only intimate communication between its members, but also its organic communion with its own essence. It is constituted not only by a fair distribution of tasks and gods, or by a happy equilibrium of forces and authorities: it is made up principally of the sharing, diffusion, or impregnation of an identity by a plurality. In the motto of the Republic, fraternity designates community: the model of the family and of love. (Nancy 2013, 9)

A narrative of the lost community re-described by Nancy as such implies contradiction in itself. In Kureishi's work individual and the group are both independent subjects capable of communicating intimately, this communication cannot be based upon commonality, whether of tasks, goods, forces or authorities. For if it were to be so, there would be no need for communication. And the community originates from communications between differences.

Brownlow looked a little dismayed, but Riaz said, 'Mr. Rudder, many thanks again for confronting on our behalf all police and traffic problems. And for letting us use a private house in this public way. We understand how illegal it normally is. Our whole community, so often put down, is eternally grateful. You are a true friend of Asia.' (Kureishi 177)

Religion is a personal matter. They not only need protection of their private houses in the public way but also their private and personal ideology that is considered to be standing in the way of

the community.

He could see, though, where Brownlow had been wrong. All this believing wasn't so much a matter of truth or falsity, of what could be shown and what not, but of joining. He had noticed, during the days that he'd walked around the area, that the races were divided. The black kids stuck with each other, the Pakistanis went to one another's houses, the Bengalis knew each other from way back, and the whites too. Even if they was no hostility between groups – and there was plenty, if only implicit; his mother, for instance, liked to make derogatory remarks about blacks, saying they were lazy, while middle-class whites she revered – there was little mixing. And would things change? Why should they? A few individuals would make the effort, but wasn't the world breaking up into political and religious tribes? These divisions were taken for granted, each to his own. But where did such divides lead to, if not to different kinds of civil war? (Kureishi 133-134)

They are not committing any crime they are worshipping their God, the way their religion teaches. Compartmentalization to this extent breeds violence. If they are not treated as members of community and are avoided like that then such void of communication can only result in violence.

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