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Between Here and There: Transcultural Reception, Diaspora Identity, and the Limits of Hybridity in Hanif Kureishi's Black British Cinema

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the transcultural reception of Hanif Kureishi's screenplays *My Beautiful Laundrette* (dir. Stephen Frears, UK, 1985) and *My Son the Fanatic* (dir. Udayan Prasad, UK, 1997), drawing on qualitative audience interviews conducted in Lahore, Pakistan, and situating them within two decades of subsequent scholarship. The original empirical findings—that Pakistani audiences resist identification with Kureishi's British-Pakistani characters—are reread in light of contemporary debates around post-9/11 Islamophobia, the post-Brexit reconstitution of British multiculturalism, queer postcolonial theory, and the limits of Bhabha's 'third space' as a framework for transcultural film reception. The article argues that the cultural separation experienced by Pakistani audiences is not a failure of aesthetic literacy but a structurally produced response rooted in colonial history and geopolitical realignments that have sharpened rather than dissolved the boundaries between British-Pakistani diasporic identity and 'home' culture. At the same time, it resists pessimistic closure by tracing the ways in which the films' concerns—neoliberal exploitation, generational conflict, queer transgression, and religious radicalisation—have acquired new urgencies forty years after *Laundrette*'s release.

Keywords: *Transcultural Cinema, Hanif Kureishi, Black British Film, Pakistani Audiences, Diaspora, Hybridity, Islamophobia, Post-Brexit Multiculturalism, Queer Postcolonialism.*

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1. Introduction Forty Years On

When *My Beautiful Laundrette* premiered at the Edinburgh International Film Festival in August 1985, it announced both a filmmaker—Stephen Frears—and a writer—Hanif Kureishi—to a British cinema hungry for contemporary social commentary. Produced on a modest budget for Channel 4, the film's frank depiction of a young Pakistani-British man's gay love affair with a white working-class skinhead, set against the entrepreneurial frenzy of Thatcherite London, was unprecedented on British screens. The film eventually ran for six months in cinemas, was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Original Screenplay, and became a landmark text in debates about race, sexuality, and national identity in multicultural Britain.

Forty years later, *Laundrette* retains its canonical status. The film received a 2K digital restoration in 2025 and was re-released theatrically in the UK as part of Cinema Rediscovered on Tour, with Sight and Sound devoting its September 2025 issue to a fortieth anniversary retrospective featuring new interviews with Kureishi and Frears. Ruvani Ranasinha's first full biography, *Hanif Kureishi: Writing the Self* (Manchester University Press, 2023), inaugurated a renewed critical conversation about Kureishi's life and creative practice, while Kureishi's own memoir *Shattered* (2024)—composed in the aftermath of a 2022 spinal injury that left him unable to write by hand—was shortlisted for the 2025 National Book Critics Circle Award for Autobiography and the James Tait Black Memorial Prize for Biography, drawing global attention back to the writer's oeuvre.

This article grows out of an MPhil dissertation in Screen Studies (University of Glasgow, 2005) that examined the transcultural reception of *Laundrette* and *My Son the Fanatic* through qualitative interviews conducted with Pakistani audiences in Lahore. The original research posed a deceptively simple question: what happens to these films when they cross cultural boundaries? What shift occurs in meaning, aesthetics, and affect when the very community depicted on screen—Pakistanis in Britain—watches those representations from a position in Pakistan? The answers the interviewees gave were complex, sometimes contradictory, frequently impassioned, and invariably illuminating about the structurally

produced nature of cultural difference.

Two decades of scholarship and two decades of geopolitical upheaval—9/11, 7/7, the Arab Spring, the Brexit referendum, the 'War on Terror', and the rise of digital media platforms that simultaneously globalise and polarise—make it urgent to revisit those findings. The empirical data retains its value precisely because it was gathered before the dominant post-9/11 frameworks reshaped the terms of the debate. This article therefore performs a dual operation: it presents and preserves the original research while subjecting it to sustained theoretical re-examination in light of developments in postcolonial film studies, queer theory, and the sociology of Muslim identity in Britain and Pakistan.

2. *Laundrette* in Context: Thatcherism, Channel 4, and Black British Cinema

My Beautiful Laundrette emerged from a specific institutional and political conjuncture. Channel 4 was established in 1982 with a statutory remit to cater to tastes not served by existing broadcasters, and to foster independent production. Its early commissioning culture was receptive to films that engaged with marginalised communities, racial politics, and unconventional sexualities in ways that the BBC and ITV could not—or would not—attempt. The Workshop Declaration of 1982 provided a structural framework for grant-aided, non-commercially driven filmmaking, enabling organisations like Sankofa Film and Video and the Black Audio Film Collective to produce work that understood Black British cinema as a political and cultural project rather than merely an entertainment genre.

Laundrette was rooted in the socio-political climate of Thatcher's London—a product and critique of enterprise culture simultaneously. Christine Geraghty's monograph *My Beautiful Laundrette: BFI Film Stars* (2005) remains the most detailed account of the film's production contexts and critical reception, tracing how Kureishi and Frears's shared interest in 'the complexities of culture and class and [their] oblique approach to exploring the state of the nation' made their collaboration particularly effective at capturing the tensions of the era. John Hill's analysis of British cinema's engagement with Thatcherism emphasises that the significance of this relationship lay not in straightforward

ideological critique but in the 'ideas and ideologies which the films of the period suggest'—a point that helps explain how *Laundrette* can simultaneously celebrate and critique entrepreneurialism through the ambivalent figure of Nasser, the Pakistani businessman who toasts 'Thatcher and your beautiful laundrette.'

Stuart Hall's theorisation of Black British cinema in the late 1980s provided the critical vocabulary for understanding what *Laundrette* was doing culturally. Hall distinguished between two moments of Black cultural practice: a first moment characterised by the assertion of a unified Black identity as a counter to racism, and a second moment—the one *Laundrette* exemplifies—in which there is a recognition of 'the extraordinary diversity of subjective positions, social experiences and cultural identities which compose the category of Black identity.' This second moment refuses easy representational coherence: *Laundrette* does not give its audience a stable, unified image of Pakistani-British life but instead presents competing, contradictory, and generationally differentiated subjectivities.

The strategic use of 'Black' as a political umbrella term in 1980s British cinema—encompassing African-Caribbean, South Asian, and other non-white communities—was always contested terrain. Kobena Mercer observed that the filmmakers who gathered under this rubric were negotiating terms of agreement based on 'common experiences of marginalisation' rather than on a shared cultural heritage. Sarita Malik's subsequent discomfort with the term's capaciousness—her preference for 'Black and Asian' when referring to those specifically from the Indian subcontinent—anticipates the more substantial fragmentation of 'Black British cinema' as a critical category that has occurred in the decades since. Recent scholarship in the *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* (2024) has tracked how the digital revolution and platform diversity have further multiplied the sites of 'Black British/British Asian diaspora screen media,' making a single unifying critical framework increasingly difficult to sustain.

3. Pakistani Audiences in Lahore: The Original Research

The empirical foundation of this article rests on private screenings of *Laundrette* and *My Son the Fanatic* conducted in Lahore, Pakistan, in July 2005, followed by in-depth qualitative interviews

with three groups of participants. The first interviewee was Syed Mohammad Anwar, a former director of the Current Affairs division of Pakistan Television and lecturer in television history at the National College of Arts. The second was Humera Shahid, a Member of the Provincial Assembly of the Punjab. The third group comprised academics from Government College University, Lahore, including the Chairman of the English Department, a lecturer in English, a lecturer and MPhil student in Postcolonial Literature, and an English Department student.

The choice of interviewees was deliberately heterogeneous: a broadcast media professional, a political representative with legislative power, and university academics working in postcolonial literary studies. This diversity was intended to capture the spectrum of what Anwar described as the three types of Pakistani audience for such films: 'art critics, educated affluent class, and the general public'—while acknowledging that the third category could not, by definition, be accessed through private screenings. The methodological limitation is real: these interviews tell us how educated, cosmopolitan Pakistanis receive Kureishi's films, not how the 'general public' would. Yet this is itself significant, because it demonstrates the depth and sophistication of the resistance to identification even among those best positioned, by education and exposure, to engage with the films on their own terms.

The consistencies across the three groups were striking. All interviewees identified the gay relationship in *Laundrette* and the depiction of a Pakistani man as both pimp and passive gay partner as the primary obstacle to any public viewing in Pakistan. Anwar was explicit about the institutional barriers: no official at Pakistan Television could countenance showing such material, regardless of government pressure, because 'we have to respect the social norms and bindings.' Yet he was equally emphatic that private viewing was another matter—'this is a difference between the level of tolerance at individual level and socio-cultural level'—a distinction that anticipates what subsequent sociological research on Muslim communities in Pakistan and Britain would theorise as the gap between formal normativity and lived practice.

Humera Shahid offered the most nuanced reading

of the film's gender politics. Her close attention to the scene in which Tania bares her breasts from behind a window—'she does not come in the open and rather does it from behind the window'—identified what she called 'a typical Pakistani girl's psyche': the desire to transgress simultaneously with the compulsion to conceal transgression. This reading is more sophisticated than many academic commentaries, precisely because it emerges from an embodied cultural position the academic literature tends to describe only from the outside. Shahid also identified the generational structure of the film with precision: the two brothers' inability to resolve their conflict between Pakistani values and British opportunity as the source of genuine tragic weight.

The academics at Government College University offered the most explicitly theorised responses. Dr. Waseem Anwar's reluctance to accept the gay politics of the film—I think, sometimes by highlighting issues like that (gay talk) you isolate them—resonated with the broader Pakistani cultural consensus, while Saira Dogar's account of having watched *Laundrette* with a radically different affective charge in Pakistan than in Britain—I watched *Intimacy* in the UK, but it was not as shocking as watching this movie here, in Pakistan—pointed to the way in which the same text can produce entirely different affective experiences depending on the context of reception. Her observation that 'the English language itself becomes a barrier' in reaching wider Pakistani audiences added a pragmatic dimension to the more theoretical discussions of cultural separation.

4. The Politics of 'Black': Race, Category, and Pakistani Distinctiveness

One of the most persistent and historically consequential debates to emerge from both the interviews and the academic literature concerns the adequacy of 'Black' as a descriptor for South Asian communities in Britain. The Pakistani interviewees—without exception—rejected the category of 'black' as applicable to themselves, though for reasons that differed interestingly from the theoretical objections advanced in the academic literature.

Faiza Dar's observation—that 'the term black has a history of slavery, whereas in India we have a history of imperialism, not of slavery'—articulates a distinction that Stuart Hall's account of the

Caribbean experience of colonialism makes central to understanding the specificity of Black Atlantic identity. Hall's argument that the Caribbean experience was constituted through 'the experience of a profound discontinuity: the people dragged into slavery, transportation, colonisation, migration, came predominantly from Africa' entails that the term 'Black,' in its most politically precise usage, names a specific historical trauma that is not shared by South Asian communities whose relationship with Britain was mediated through imperial administration rather than enslavement.

Paul Gilroy's observation, cited by Sarita Malik, that 'West Indian culture is weak, Asian communities suffer from a surfeit of culture which is too strong,' points to a structural asymmetry within the umbrella category of 'Black British.' Asian communities—and Pakistani communities in particular—maintained robust, internally differentiated cultural and religious institutions that both sustained community coherence and constituted a barrier to the kind of integration into British popular culture that some Afro-Caribbean communities experienced more readily. This 'surplus of culture' is, of course, a double-edged formulation: it names both cultural vitality and what Gilroy elsewhere analyses as the communitarian closures that can inhibit political alliance-building.

The theoretical debate has continued in the decades since the original research. More recent scholarship has moved toward articulating specifically South Asian, and specifically Pakistani, frameworks for understanding diasporic identity that do not require the subordination of cultural particularity to a pan-ethnic political category. Rajinder Dudrah and Janet Wilson's 2024 special issue of the *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* on 'Diaspora Screen Media' demonstrates the extent to which contemporary scholarship has moved beyond the Black-Asian binary to attend to the multiplicity of diasporic positions—including, crucially, the way in which digital platforms have created new diasporic publics that did not exist when *Laundrette* was made.

The Brexit referendum of 2016 added a new dimension to these debates. Research on 'Post-Brexit Britishness and the Black diaspora' has shown how the Leave campaign's rhetoric of

national sovereignty and 'taking back control' was received by many British-Asian communities as directed against them—a perception reinforced by the sharp increase in hate crimes targeting perceived 'foreigners' in the immediate aftermath of the referendum result. The 'hostile environment' immigration policies pursued by successive British governments from 2012 onwards, culminating in the Windrush scandal of 2018, demonstrated that the multicultural settlement that Laundrette had both celebrated and critiqued was never as secure as its cultural representations suggested. The book-length study *British Cinema and a Divided Nation* (Edinburgh University Press, 2021) analyses how post-2016 British cinema has registered these tensions, documenting a new wave of films grappling with belonging, exclusion, and national identity that speaks directly to the concerns Kureishi raised four decades earlier.

5. Kureishi's 'Insider/Outsider' Position: New Perspectives

Hanif Kureishi's position as both insider and outsider—too Pakistani for the English, too English for the Pakistanis—was a structuring tension of his early career, and it has remained a critical preoccupation of scholarship on his work. His famous account of being told in Karachi that 'We are Pakistanis, but you, you will always be a Paki'—the slur weaponised against him, turning the insult of his English racism back upon him in his supposed homeland—encapsulates the double dispossession that grounds his writing. He could claim neither belonging without condition.

Ruvani Ranasingha's biography *Hanif Kureishi: Writing the Self* (Manchester University Press, 2023), the most comprehensive account of Kureishi's life and work to date, sheds significant new light on how biographical experience was transmuted into the screenplay of *Laundrette*. Ranasingha emphasises that Kureishi's 'insistence on the importance of recognising the continuities between the colonial past and the neo-colonial present' was not merely academic but grounded in his own experience of being positioned as simultaneously exotic and suspect in both countries. The biography's reconstruction of the film's genesis—Kureishi writing the script in his uncle's house in Karachi in February 1985—underscores the productive irony at the heart of the project: a film about Pakistani displacement in

Britain written on Pakistani soil by a man who felt equally displaced in both places.

Trinh T. Minh-ha's theoretical framing of the 'insider/outsider' position—in which the black artist who 'speaks for' a marginalised community is always already ventriloquising for the white institution that has authorised their voice—retains much of its force. But it requires updating in light of the changing institutional landscape of British film culture. The 'Workshop Declaration' model that enabled the first wave of Black British cinema in the 1980s has been succeeded by a regime of 'creative diversity' that, as Sarita Malik argued as early as 2015, risks incorporating difference into the logic of marketability rather than transforming the structural conditions of production. The 2024 *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* article on 'diasporic cinema and public film funding' develops this critique through a study of a contemporary Belgian filmmaker of Turkish and Albanian descent, demonstrating that the institutional pressures Minh-ha identified are structural rather than exceptional.

Mahmood Jamal's charge that Kureishi produced 'caricature and the reinforcing of stereotypes of their own people for a cheap laugh' has been revisited by subsequent critics with more nuanced conclusions. The question is not whether the stereotypes are present—they undeniably are—but whether the film's structural logic reinforces or subverts them. The critical consensus that has emerged in the decades since, most clearly articulated in the work of Sara Upstone and John McLeod on 'extra dimensions, new routines' in contemporary Black writing of Britain, is that Kureishi's strategy of simultaneous inhabitation and critique of stereotypical positions produces a dialectical instability that resists the fixity Jamal feared. Nasser is both a stereotype of the avaricious immigrant businessman and a critique of the Thatcherite system that produces such a subject; Omar is both an exploiter and a subject of exploitation; Johnny is simultaneously a reclaimed working-class figure and a figure of whiteness dislocated from the certainties of its own racism.

6. Queer Postcolonialism and the Transgressive Erotics of *Laundrette*

Perhaps the most significant theoretical development in Kureishi scholarship since the original research was conducted is the emergence

of queer postcolonial readings of *Laundrette* that situate the film's sexual politics within a broader analysis of how heteronormativity, nationalism, and colonial power structures are mutually constitutive.

The argument has been made most forcefully in work that reads Omar and Johnny's relationship not as a merely private love story but as a 'political site that is *potentially* liberating in transgressing race and class boundaries'—a formulation Ranasinha developed in her 2002 monograph on Kureishi and has refined in the 2023 biography. More recent scholarship has gone further, arguing that the film depicts 'hegemonic homes that expound classist and heteronormative ideals supported by neoliberal capitalism' on the one hand, and on the other, characters like Omar and Tania who function as 'queer agents whose non-heteronormative sexual practices trouble such exclusive homes, and thus create new home spaces for belonging.' On this reading, the film's queer politics are inseparable from its postcolonial politics: both involve a refusal of the nation-state's demand for normative belonging.

Radhika Mohanram's reading of the scene in which Nasser and Rachel dance in front of the window as Omar and Johnny make love inside the laundrette—the 'discourse of illicit sexual desire can only be slid secretly behind the discourse of permitted desire'—has been elaborated by subsequent critics working within affect theory. Brian Massumi's framework of 'parables for the virtual' has been brought to bear on Kureishi's work to argue that desire in *Laundrette* functions as an 'unconscious power with revolutionary potential, intimately intertwined with identity formation, particularly in the context of colonial history.' The implication is that the film's queerness is not merely a representation of gay sexuality but a formal and affective strategy for disrupting the colonial grammars through which race, class, and nation are naturalised.

Humera Shahid's objection to the scene—her sense that the director was 'trying to place a gay sex scene in a normal perspective, as if he is showing a normal thing that is nothing extraordinary'—is, paradoxically, an accurate description of what the film is trying to do. Her discomfort arises precisely because the film refuses to treat homosexuality as exceptional, deviant, or requiring special justification. From

within a Pakistani cultural framework in which, as she accurately reported, 'I have not seen two men kissing before,' this normalization was experienced as a form of aggression rather than liberation. The queer postcolonial literature helps us understand why: normalization of non-heteronormative sexuality in British cinema was itself a historically specific achievement, occurring 'during the homosexual panic engendered by the AIDS crisis' of the mid-1980s, when—as the Criterion Collection's retrospective essay notes—'the fact that the boys' love affair was not a problem was radical in itself.' To an audience for whom this historical conjuncture was entirely alien, the film's stance could only appear as imposing alien values.

7. *My Son the Fanatic*, Radicalisation, and the Post-7/7 Landscape

If *Laundrette*'s forty years have largely been a story of canonical entrenchment and theoretical elaboration, *My Son the Fanatic*'s twenty-eight years have been marked by an increasingly troubling contemporaneity. Kureishi's screenplay—inspired by the fatwa against Salman Rushdie and by interviews with young British Muslims who turned to religious fundamentalism despite being raised in secular Britain—proved prophetically accurate about the generational and cultural dynamics that would produce the 7/7 bombers in 2005, less than a decade after the film's release.

Kureishi's own post-7/7 commentary—his reflection that 'The West was a dream that didn't come true' for the second generation of British Pakistanis who found in fundamentalism a 'sense of identity and solidarity' that secular liberal Britain had failed to provide—was written at precisely the moment of the original research, in a Guardian column published on July 4, 2005. The research interviews capture the Pakistani response to this claim in real time: Anwar's observation that 'the number of the extremist elements in the country is very small, but they are well organised and have hijacked the system, whereas the silent majority in Pakistan is peaceful and tolerant, but they cannot afford to confront these organised groups' describes a dynamic that has remained consistent across two decades of Pakistani politics.

Subsequent academic work on Islamophobia in British cinema and media has provided more

rigorous theoretical frameworks for understanding both the film's achievement and its limitations. The scholarship on 'securitized citizens'—analysing how the 7/7 bombings produced a changed relationship between British Muslims and the state through processes of securitisation and racialisation that interacted with Islamophobic discourses—demonstrates that *My Son the Fanatic* was not simply prescient about individual psychology but about the structural conditions that would generate religious radicalisation as a response to systemic exclusion. The scholarship on the shift from 'Islamophobia to neo-Islamophobia' in post-9/11 cinema (Bajuwaiber, 2025) is relevant here. Where classical Islamophobia constructed the Muslim as a visible outsider threat, neo-Islamophobia internalises the threat—the enemy is now the Muslim citizen, especially the Muslim youth who is 'too Western to be authentically Muslim and too Muslim to be authentically Western.' This is precisely Farid's position in *My Son the Fanatic*, and the film's achievement is to show how this structural double-bind, rather than individual pathology, generates the retreat into fundamentalism. Kureishi's critical relationship with Western liberalism—his willingness to ask whether liberalism 'has turned into a monster in the process of destroying a monster'—anticipates the more rigorous critiques that have been developed in the decades since.

The film's Pakistani critical reception in the 2005 interviews was notably more engaged than its reception of *Laundrette*. Dr. Waseem Anwar found *My Son* more relatable than *Laundrette* precisely because 'it relates more to the contemporary problem of fundamentalism in Britain, as well as in Pakistan,' and noted that by 2005, 'we have more audiences for these topics than in 1997, who may accept watching this movie.' This differential is significant: the film's engagement with Islamic radicalisation had acquired new audiences not despite but because of 9/11 and 7/7. The Pakistani interviewees recognised themselves, and their society, in the film's analysis of fundamentalism—even if they resisted identification with its other elements.

8. Transcultural Theory Revisited: From Third Space to Platform Pluralism

The theoretical framework most commonly brought to bear on the transcultural reception of

diaspora cinema is Homi Bhabha's concept of the 'third space'—the interstitial zone of cultural encounter in which the coloniser and the colonised negotiate, producing hybridity that subverts colonial domination by deconstructing essentialist binary oppositions. The research findings both engage with and complicate this framework in ways that anticipate more recent critiques of its applicability.

Recent scholarship has subjected Bhabha's third space to sustained critique on two grounds. The first is that its emphasis on the fluidity of identity and continuous negotiation of cultural enunciation may inadvertently reproduce a form of neocolonialism by trapping formerly colonised cultures in an endless 'us and them' paradigm without providing the resources for independent self-determination. The second is that its relative inattention to material conditions—to the political and economic exploitation that underwrites cultural encounters—limits its usefulness as a framework for understanding the structural inequalities that shape transcultural reception. Both critiques resonate with the research findings: The Pakistani audiences' refusal to identify with the British-Pakistani characters in Kureishi's films was not a liminal, hybrid, third-space negotiation but a structurally produced insistence on separation grounded in colonial history, Islamisation, and the social conservatism of Pakistani civil society.

The concept of 'transcultural crossing over,' which the original research employed, has been refined and complicated in subsequent film studies scholarship. The 2025 *Frontiers* article on 'Cultural Bridges in Film' synthesises two decades of transnational cinema scholarship to propose that the most useful framework for understanding cross-cultural film reception is not hybridity but 'cultural affinity'—the 'affective links between audiences and transnational literature based on common historical, linguistic, or diasporic backgrounds.' On this model, the Pakistani audiences' resistance to *Laundrette* and *My Son* is not anomalous but predictable: the films' cultural affinities are with British audiences who share the historical experience of Thatcherism, AIDS panic, and multicultural politics, not with Pakistani audiences for whom these are alien contexts.

The digital revolution—and particularly the emergence of social media platforms and

streaming services as primary sites of global film distribution—has fundamentally altered the landscape of transcultural reception since the original research was conducted. Humera Shahid's prediction in 2005 that 'crossing over of the boundaries is not that vital because of technology' has been partially vindicated and partially refuted. Platform globalisation has dramatically increased access to foreign films for Pakistani audiences, and recent research on 'Global Currents and Local Narratives in Contemporary Pakistani Cinema' (2025) demonstrates that Pakistani audiences now consume international film and television extensively. Yet the same research finds that 74.8% of respondents consume Pakistani films 'at least once in a while,' and that audiences prefer 'a hybrid cinematic model that merges global aesthetics with local themes' rather than the displacement of local culture by Western content. Globalisation has not produced convergence; it has, as Anwar's more pessimistic 2005 reflection suggested, reinforced the sense of 'otherness' on both sides.

The recent Journal of Postcolonial Writing (2024) special issue on 'Black British/British Asian diaspora screen media' identifies the digital revolution as having created new diasporic publics that do not correspond to the geography of physical diaspora. British Pakistanis who consume Pakistani drama serials via streaming platforms, Pakistani audiences who watch British-Asian content on YouTube, and second-generation British Pakistanis who maintain intensive social media connections with communities in Pakistan are all participating in forms of transcultural circulation that neither the concept of 'crossing over' nor Bhabha's third space adequately captures. The article by Keisha Bruce on Black British girlhood in these new media ecologies points toward a more intersectional framework that attends to the interplay of gender, generation, and platform in shaping transcultural identifications.

9. The Films' Continued Relevance:

Neoliberalism, Class, and Belonging

Perhaps the most striking feature of *Laundrette*'s fortieth anniversary reception is the extent to which the film's analysis of neoliberalism—its critique of Thatcherite enterprise culture's corrosive effects on community, solidarity, and moral life—has acquired new resonance in a

context of deepening global inequality and the rise of populist nationalism.

The film's final image—Omar and Johnny flicking soapsuds at each other in the trashed laundrette, their small business destroyed, their relationship surviving precariously—is, as the Criterion Collection's retrospective essay argues, a 'final positive image of hybridity, the cares of the day forgotten with its soapsuds.' But it is a deliberately minimal, fragile hopefulness: 'Britain's rich are still getting richer and its poor are still getting poorer.' The laundrette has been trashed; Nasser and Rachel have parted; Tania has disappeared. The film does not offer a utopia of multicultural coexistence but a tentative, qualified, materially grounded moment of connection.

This qualified hopefulness is precisely what makes *Laundrette* more relevant, not less, to the post-Brexit moment. The Brexit vote was partly driven by the same white working-class communities from which Johnny comes—communities that felt abandoned by the same neoliberal economic policies that *Laundrette* criticises, and who found in nationalist rhetoric a language for their dispossession that the multicultural left had failed to provide. *Laundrette* anticipates this dynamic in the figure of Johnny's skinhead gang: white working-class men whose racism is shown not as essential to their character but as a response to economic marginalisation. Johnny's relationship with Omar involves precisely the kind of cross-racial solidarity that Brexit politics would undermine three decades later.

My Son the Fanatic's analysis of the first generation of Pakistani immigrants—men like Pervez who 'manages to destroy everything' in his attempt to assimilate into liberal Britain—remains equally prescient. The film's insistence on Pervez's sympathetic dimensions, his genuine love for Bettina and his genuine bewilderment at his son's radicalisation, refuses the binary of good Muslim (integrated, secular) and bad Muslim (radicalised, traditional) that has structured public discourse about British Muslims since 9/11. Kureishi's achievement is to show that Pervez's liberalism is as much a response to structural conditions—the economic precarity of immigrant labour, the racism of his white clients, the loneliness of displacement—as Farid's

fundamentalism is.

10. Conclusion: Transcultural Reception and the Persistence of Separation

The research findings from Lahore in 2005 tell a story that remains structurally consistent twenty years later, even as its specific contours have shifted. Pakistani audiences resist identification with the characters in Kureishi's films not because they lack cultural sophistication or aesthetic literacy—the interviewees were, in most cases, highly educated and internationally aware—but because the films' cultural references, political contexts, and affective registers are grounded in a British experience of multiculturalism, Thatcherism, and queer politics that has no direct equivalent in Pakistani cultural life.

The Islamisation of Pakistani society under Zia-ul-Haq in the 1980s—the historical backdrop that shapes the interviewees' attitudes—produced a profound conservatism around sexuality, gender relations, and the public role of religion that was, in many ways, the exact inverse of the liberalisation that was occurring in Britain at the same moment. Where *Laundrette* was celebrating the emergence of a new, post-Thatcherite multicultural Britain in which gay sexuality could be represented positively, Pakistani society was being remade in the image of a purified Islamic identity that made such representations anathema. This is not simply a matter of individual attitudes; it is the sediment of a specific historical conjuncture that has continued to shape Pakistani civil society in the decades since.

At the same time, the research complicates any simple narrative of cultural closure. The interviewees' engagement with the films was sophisticated and partially identificatory: Anwar's recognition that 'things shown as they are' in *Laundrette* was 'realistic'; Shahid's nuanced reading of Tania's psychology; Dr. Waseem's acknowledgement that 'given a vent people would go and watch such movies in the cinema'; Saira Dogar's capacity to inhabit multiple viewing

positions simultaneously. These are not the responses of an audience sealed off from the films by impermeable cultural walls but of an audience engaged in a complex, partial, contested process of negotiation with material that challenges some of their most deeply held values.

Recent scholarship on 'post-ethnic' approaches to identity in Kureishi's work (following the publication of *My Ear at His Heart* and, more recently, *Shattered*) has argued that Kureishi's memoir and late autobiographical writing have opened new dimensions in his critical reception. The memoir's account of how and why characters were created has led scholars to propose that 'affective terms such as desire and sexuality can be used to re-imagine the ways in which identity is experienced' in the films—an approach that gestures toward a 'distinctly polycultural, even post-racial' reading of Kureishi's work that might, in different contexts, find new audiences.

Whether those audiences will eventually include Pakistani viewers in Pakistan remains uncertain. What the research confirms is that transcultural reception is not a smooth process of global homogenisation but a contested, structurally determined encounter between films and audiences whose different historical positions produce fundamentally different affective and interpretive frameworks. The 'transcultural crossing over' of *Laundrette* and *My Son the Fanatic* into the cultural space of Pakistan does not efface the differences between British and Pakistani experiences of modernity but reveals their depth. Forty years after *Laundrette*'s release, and twenty years after the original research was conducted, this depth remains as significant as ever—a reminder that the question of who gets to speak about whom, from where, and for whose benefit, is never merely aesthetic. It is always already political.

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