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*The South Asian Diaspora through the eyes  
of British Indian Writers:  
representation and construction of a hybrid  
identity*

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## **Introduction**

The collective consciousness usually associates the term *diaspora* with the Jews; even though this is not the only population subjected to a series of migration and resettlement processes during centuries, it remains the most famous case. Indeed, history has seen other great diasporic events marked by the beginning of the colonial period, such as the Black Diaspora, started with the slave trade; and South Asian Diaspora, as a result of the end of the British Empire of India and the following independence and partition of the country, in 1947. Bearing in mind that the migration from the colonies of the former Empire involved different parts of the Western World, this work will mainly focus on the diasporic movements of South Asian people - including Indians, Bangladeshis and Pakistanis – towards Great Britain. Since the reasons that moved Indians people to leave their mother country were different and not always forced - in comparison to Jewish people and Black people - these produced in the migrants a different diasporic consciousness, which brought them to idealize and mystify their homeland in comparison with the new country of settlement. The discomfort of this first generation of migrants exploded when they had to face the fact that their sons did not inherit the traditional spirit of their fathers and started to be “westernized”.

During the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in Great Britain, a new generation of writers, descendants from the Indians of the British Raj, started dealing with this issue and began to write about their origins and the controversial relationship between their two cultures: the British part against the Indian. Writers such as Monica Ali, Hanif Kureishi and Glen Duncan, describe truthful stories of migration

and rediscovery of identity, which take place in the real scenario of a more and more globalized Britain – and London in particular. These stories deal mainly with two group of characters: the homesick first generation of migrants opposed to their children, a mixed generation with a “beige” skin color (thinking about Kureishi’s *The Buddha of Suburbia* character, Karim) and a hybrid culture. Starting from the works of these British Indians authors, this thesis aims to trace and portray the process of inclusion and melting of two different cultural system in relation to the reaction of the first generation of migrants against the new “hybrid” generation, born and raised in Britain with an eastern background.

This work is divided into four chapter. The first one is dedicated to the theories and studies on diaspora, the definitions of the phenomenon and how it has evolved in relation to the changes of the modern society. This chapter contains also the historical account of the Colonial India under the British domination, which context is important to understand the reasons for the huge migration – toward the Britain but also the United States, Canada and Australia – that derived from the decolonization of the Subcontinent. The final part of the chapter introduces the area of interest of the work of the British-Indian writers, with short reports on the authors and the works chosen as the matter of study for this dissertation. The second chapter examines the debut novel of Monica Ali, *Brick Lane*, which talks about the closed Bengali community settled in the Tower Hamlet district, East End of London. In this context, we will see – from the point of view of the protagonist, Nazneen – how this ethnic minority managed to create a sort of city-state of Bangladesh inside London, and the

conflict derived from the increasing penetration of the Western culture in its boundaries.

The following third chapter is dedicated to Hanif Kureishi and his two works, *Borderline* and *The Buddha of Suburbia*, which are respectively the script he wrote for the play debuted in 1981 at the Royal Court Theatre, and his first novel.

*Borderline* is set in the Asian district of Southall, that during the seventies and early eighties became the hotbed for riots and demonstrations in opposition to the discrimination of the British society against the Asian community. Here the Pakistani population try to survive the racist and violent attacks of the fascist groups that rapidly are spreading around London. In *The Buddha of Suburbia*, instead, Kureishi threatens more directly the theme of hybridity by telling the story of a boy from the suburbs of London, who is half British and half Indian. This is a topic close to the author, as basically the protagonist, Karim, is his alter-ego. Karim will introduce us to the transgression of a punk London under the background of the social riots of the seventies.

Finally, the last chapter regards the Anglo-Indian community of England, a hybrid minority that for long time had lived in the shadow, but today, its members are trying to talk about their people and their past. The novel chosen to represent this community is *The Bloodstone Papers* by Glen Duncan, the story of an Anglo-Indian writer, born in Britain, that decides to put order into his life starting from the recovery of his family history, which origins traces back to India during the years of the Partition.



# 1. Overview of Diaspora and the South Asian migration movements

## 1.1. Definitions and phases in Diaspora Studies

The term *diaspora* derives from the Greek and it means ‘to disperse’. It refers to any movement of a large number of people – of the same ethnic group – from their homeland, and their dissemination and resettlement in one or various countries.<sup>1</sup> It first came to denote the dispersion of Jews, which is why it is usually seen as the model of diaspora; though the growth and development of other diasporic phenomena have made necessary a wider definition. In fact, according to Khachig Tölölyan, historic events have changed the image of migration process:

The term that once described Jewish, Greek and Armenian dispersion now shares meanings with a larger semantic domain that includes words like immigrant, expatriate, refugee, guest-worker, exile community, overseas community, ethnic community.<sup>2</sup>

The reasons that lead people to migrate in mass and become diasporic communities can be of different nature: in the past, we saw cases of political and religious persecutions – as happened to Jews for centuries – and deportations of slaves from Africa, in the colonial period, caused an African diaspora. However, diasporas can be the result of other phenomena, such as financial crisis, epidemic diseases or civil wars.

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<sup>1</sup>Ashcroft et al., *Post-Colonial Studies - The Key Concepts*, Routledge, London, 2000.

<sup>2</sup>Tölölyan Khachig, “The Nation-State and Its Others: In Lieu of a Preface”, *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies*, Volume 1, Number 1, Spring 1991:4



Robin Cohen<sup>3</sup>, identifies four phases in the evolution of the term *diaspora* that prove the theory of Tölölyan. As said before, at first the term was deployed capitalized and only in the singular (Diaspora), to talk about the dispersion of Jews. From the 1960/70s diaspora studies started to include in the small circle the experiences of Armenians, Africans and Irish. At this point these people were said to share traumatic events caused by oppressors that made those groups the victims of human cruelty.

The second phase started in 1980, during these years Safran<sup>4</sup> observed – as assumed later by Tölölyan’s theory – that *diaspora* was used with a metaphoric meaning to denote different categories of people, from political refugees and expellees to immigrants and ethnic minorities. So, the term once designed for a specific and close group, at this stage embraces a variety of people with very different backgrounds, who, though, have in common the migration from their homeland.

The third phase, from the mid-90s, was characterized by a trend reversal that brought to redefine the two main concepts of diaspora studies: the homeland and the ethnic/religious community. This was due to the predominance in this period of postmodernist theories. In the postmodern world “identities have become deterritorialized and constructed and deconstructed in a flexible and situational way; accordingly, concepts of diaspora had to be radically reordered in response to this complexity” (Cohen, 2008:2).

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<sup>3</sup> Cohen Robin, *Global Diasporas: An Introduction*. 2nd ed. 2008 Seattle WA: University of Washington Press, 2008

<sup>4</sup> Safran William. “Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return”, *Diaspora. A Journal of Transnational Studies* Volume1, Number 1 pp. 83-99, 1991.

The last phase is the one we are living in, and it is a phase of consolidation of theories, with a partial return to the first tendencies of the 1960/70s period and an evolution of postmodern influences. Indeed, the concept of homeland is reconsidered and brought back to its predominant role in diaspora studies, as diasporic communities still show a strong connection to their country of origin. Cohen acknowledges that deterritorialization remains a valid idea for few cases of diasporic communities, especially in those groups that underwent repeatedly various migration processes over centuries – that presume a complete assimilation to a new community or nation. Moreover, the new world order, created by the spreading of globalization, has changed the meaning of concepts as *nation* and *borders*, that once designed the essence of diaspora. As the globalized society tends to define people as citizens of the World, no more related to a specific country, we are moving forward to a new concept of society without borders, in which events as diaspora and migrations are losing consistency.

Other scholars have tried to design a neutral definition of diaspora to prevent misunderstandings, such as Walter Connor, who identifies in diaspora “that segment of a people living outside the homeland” (Connor in Safran 1991:83). This construction of the term has been used to study diasporic communities such as the Cubans and the Mexicans in the United States, the Pakistanis in Britain, the Indians and the Armenians settled in different countries (Safran, 1991). Despite the cleanliness of this definition, it is still too wide and it easily generates doubts about the real characteristics of a diasporic community. There are hesitations, for instance, in the inclusion of borderlands in the category. As said before, *border* is a word that is associated with diaspora, but it can be interpreted in different ways: borders, in the

strict meaning of the term, are those between two geographical areas, “two sides of arbitrarily separated and policed, but also joined by legal and illegal practices of crossing and communication”.<sup>5</sup> However, Clifford argues that diasporas are more like the experience of exile, as regards the impossibility of returning home for a time unknown. The difference with communities living in borderlands is that the latest are not necessarily living a diasporic experience. As a matter of fact, in diaspora it is precisely the long distance and separation from the mother country which plays a fundamental role in the building of diasporic culture and consciousness. Another interpretation of the term can be the one related not to actual, physical borders, but to culture. In diaspora, the contact between cultures cannot be avoided, there might be different levels of assimilation depending on the distance between the two systems of culture, on how long a community has been settled and how much it is consolidated into the nation of settlement. All these factors may produce more or less visible borders. About this turnover of interactions Vijay Mishra said:

Diasporic communities are said to occupy a border zone where the most vibrant kinds of interactions take place and where ethnicity and nation are kept separate. In this argument, diasporas are fluid, ideal, social formations happy to live wherever there is an international airport and stand for a longer, much admired, historical process.<sup>6</sup>

The risk in defining diasporas is that all the factors are entangled and – as stated before by Safran and Tölölyan – they may be conveyed into other figures of the migration imaginary so that it is hard to distinguish one phenomenon from the other. Yet, the

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<sup>5</sup> Clifford James, “Diaspora”, *Cultural Anthropology*, Vol. 9, No. 3. Aug., 1994:4

<sup>6</sup> Mishra Vijay, *The Diasporic Imaginary and the Indian Diaspora*, Murdoch University, Asian Studies, 2005:1

same Safran tries to delineate the main characteristics of diasporic figures by collecting together the features of their experience. First, he modifies Connor's definition of diaspora by extending it to expatriate minority communities, then he lists six elements that are common to every diasporic community: 1) their dispersion started from an "original center to two or more peripheral regions"; 2) they preserve a "collective memory" of their homeland which includes traditions, history and goals of their mother country; 3) they can be in a state of alienation from the host country since they believe that they would never be completely accepted in it; 4) their homeland will always remain the "true, ideal home" to which they wish to return one day; 5) the community feeling is so strong that they believe that they all should contribute to preserve and restore their mother country; 6) their "ethnocommunal consciousness and solidarity" always relates to the homeland and it depends on the existence of the relationship with it (Safran, 1991:83).

In the following pages, we will try to test Safran principles as applied to the South-Asian diasporic community of Britain by exploring the works of British Indian writers.

## **1.2. The Indian Diaspora: from the Empire to dispersion**

### **1.2.1 The East India Company**

The history of the relations between the British government and India is linked to trade activities. Thanks to the establishment of a trade company, the East India Company,

increasingly involved in the Mughal Empire<sup>7</sup> and its inner politics, the Crown began to take political control of the entire area of India, which became one of the biggest colonial dominions of Great Britain.

The English East India Company was founded in 1600 as a joint-stock enterprise; officially it was submitted to the British Crown, even though it acted in complete independence for a century. In short time the Company became a great competitor in the Asian market and the Mughal Empire welcomed it, in the belief that it would limit the growth of another trade company, the Dutch East India Company. As Barbara and Thomas Metcalf said, the point of strength of the English Company was “in its engagement with India, not in England itself.”<sup>8</sup> Thanks to that “Britain developed many of the institutions of the ‘modern’ state, among which none was to be more crucial than the joint-stock corporation” (Metcalf et al., 2006:44). Moreover – she continues – during the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the growth of prosperity in Europe contributed to expand the demand of luxury and exotic goods coming from the colonies, such as Indian cloths, indigo and tea, that increased the prestige of the Company too.

However, the engagement of Britain in India during the 18<sup>th</sup> century changed radically, as the Company stopped being only a leading trade system and started to exercise political power in the territory of the subcontinent.<sup>9</sup> Before that, around 1660, the Company had already taken advantage of the gradual weakening of the Mughal Empire

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<sup>7</sup> The Empire takes its name from the Turco-Mongol dynasty.

<sup>8</sup> Metcalf, Barbara D., Metcalf, Thomas R. *A Concise History of Modern India*, Cambridge University press, 2006

<sup>9</sup> Marshall, Peter, “The British Presence in India in the 18th Century”, *BBC History*, 17/02/2011 retrieved 20/02/2017

– which shortly afterwards would decay and be divided into regional states – to change the terms of its relations with India. So far, the trades were ensured by a treaty between the Empire and the British, which allowed the Company to establish warehouse in the main ports of the country, which were managed by local agents. The continuous attacks to these ‘factories’ – as they were called – brought the Company to establish their own warehouse and to “turn to a policy of armed defence”, which caused the first conflicts with the Mughal authorities (Metcalf et al., 2006:47). Other abuses of power were registered in Bengal, the first area of India in which was instituted a sort of colonial regime. Here the Company used to violate regularly the rights of free trade granted by the Mughal, in order to improve their profits (the 75 per cent of exported Indian goods were produced in Bengal). Moreover, the disintegration of the Mughal Empire and the consequent rise of British power was facilitated by the rivalry between the East India Company and the newcomers in the Indian trade, the French. This resulted in a war that lasted thirteen years and ended with the defeat of the latter. Undoubtedly, the Anglo-French conflict allowed the British to establish their influence in Bengal. In 1756, on the offset of the war, the British built fortifications in Calcutta (which was the capital of India in this period), as a defence from the attacks of the French, this was seen by Indian authorities as another abuse of power and brought them to attack in turn the British, causing them a violent defeat. However, the Company reestablished its privileges in the area during the next year, proving once again that its commitment in India was changed (Metcalf et al., 2006), and, as stressed

by Buda: “they found themselves the de facto rulers of a vast province many times the size of England.”<sup>10</sup>

Less than a century after these events, the Emperor Shah Alam was forced to discharge his own revenue officials from Bengal, Bihar and Orissa, where the new governor, Robert Clive, replaced them with English functionaries. From this moment “collecting of Mughal taxes was subcontracted to a powerful multinational corporation – whose revenue-collecting operations were protected by its own private army”.<sup>11</sup> It is important to note that what was received as a victory of the British Crown and the conquest of a new colony, was instead a further evidence of the authority of the Company. Even if the British government was increasingly supervising its activities, “the East India Company continued to trade and many of its servants became administrators in the new British regimes”.<sup>12</sup> Hence, to make more official the state of subordination of the Company to the Crown, in 1783 was created the Board of Control, directly led by a member of the British Cabinet (Metcalf et al, 2006).

### **1.2.2 The structure of the colony**

The reorganization of India into a colony was not easy to fulfill for the Company – and Britain – even if the British had already experienced a colonial system in West Indies and in North-America (Metcalf et al, 2006). The situation in the country was

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<sup>10</sup>Buda, J. K., “The Literature of British India”, *Ōtsuna Women's University Faculty of Literature Annual Report*, Vol. XVII, 1985.

<sup>11</sup>Dalrymple, William, “The East India Company: The original corporate raiders”, *the Guardian* 04/03/2015, (retrieved 27/02/2017).

<sup>12</sup> Marshall Peter, *The British Presence in India in the 18th Century*, BBC History, 17/02/2011 retrieved 20/02/2017

completely new for the Company, which had to rethink their status of trade company; and for the British, because in their previous experience as a colonial power they never had to deal with such a massive native population. In fact, they inevitably had to adopt a 'mutual cooperation' in the area of influence of Britain, since it would have been impossible to manage the colony (which counted more than 300 million of Indians), only with the support of the British officers. Metcalf highlights the change of course in British colonial rules as “Britain’s previous imperial expansion, in the West Indies and North America, had involved the dispossession of the native peoples in favour of settlers from Europe and Africa” (Metcalf et al, 2006:57). The strategy used by the British Government with the natives was then to alternate “a policy of co-operation and conciliation”, with a policy based on intimidation and force.<sup>13</sup> Although part of the administration was still appointed to the Indians, as we saw, at first the Company Government was mainly involved in collecting taxes (Marshall, 2011).

Another basic problem that appeared at the beginning of the Empire, was that the British officers knew very little about India in general (as they used to be interested in trade business mainly), especially they knew nothing about the variety of languages of the country. That was the situation of Bengal, when Warren Hastings became governor of the province (Metcalf et al, 2006).

Since it was clear from the beginning that British and Indian customs were incompatible, it was decided to avoid the British model of government as it was

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<sup>13</sup>Kaul, Chandrika, “BBC History in depth: from Empire to Independence: the British Raj in India 1858-1947”, *BBC History*, 03/03/2011, (retrieved 20/02/2017)



considered inapplicable, and to adapt, instead, the British “regulations to the manners and understandings of the people, and the exigencies of the Country, adhering as closely as we are able to their ancient uses and Institutions” (Hastings in Metcalf, 2006:57). The other obstacle was that India had already a corpus of law, which by the time had seen a series of modifications that had contaminated it with interpretations and false accreditation. Hastings aimed to reestablish this old constitution by restoring it to its first writing. Furthermore, he found that even inside this code, the Hindu and the Muslim communities followed a different regulation, which was based on the *Shastra*<sup>14</sup> for the Hindu and on the *Koran* for the latter. Therefore, Hastings decided to keep this ethnic division at the basis of the new organization of Indian society (Metcalf et al, 2006). However, the ‘restoring policy’ was abandoned by the end of the century, since India was said to be stuck in backwardness and that only the western rules could have led to the development of the colony. This included the adoption of new laws, a new system of redistribution of the lands and a series of changes in education, a task appointed to the missionaries, who had to spread Christianity in order to demystify the country from the superstitions of Indian religions (Marshall, 2011).

### **1.2.3. The transition to modern India**

Different reasons led the British Parliament to take control over the Company. First of all, the ambitions of expansion of the Colonial Empire, which was suffering the loss of the North American territories, and the will to put a regulation over the “illicit”

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<sup>14</sup> The Hindi book of precept and rules.

activities of the Company – that, as we saw, was literally managing its area of influence in India as an actual colony. During the eighteenth century, the regulation system adopted by the Government was to make a sort of trade license renewed every twenty years. The last concession expired in 1853 and it represented the formal conclusion of the activities of the East India Company. However, officially the British Crown was over India in 1858, after two years of resistance and conflicts with the Indians, which go by the name of the 'Great Rebellion', the 'Indian Mutiny' or the 'First War of Indian Independence' (Kaul, 2011). The causes of the rebellion today are still not clear, yet we do know that it was started by a group of Indian soldiers that proclaimed to be led by the Mughal Emperor – even if we know that, by this time the Emperor had no power at all and he was too old to lead a revolt (Buda, 1985).

On the other hand, the British Empire of India never succeeded in incorporating the entire country in its colonial dominion:

Two-fifths of the subcontinent continued to be independently governed by over 560 large and small principalities, some of whose rulers had fought the British during the 'Great Rebellion', but with whom the Raj now entered into treaties of mutual cooperation. (Kaul, 2011)

Furthermore, Kaul stresses that as a matter of fact, the *Great Rebellion* produced a deep racial gap between Britons and Indians, which would persist until the end of the British Empire of India; also sharpened by the other internal fights between Hindu and Muslim communities, that would have brought to the Partition in 1947 into India and Pakistan. The India Act of 1858 ratified the last offices of the East India Company and the passage to the British Government, with a new attitude of hostility towards the natives, in order to prevent further rebellions (Buda, 1985).

Historically, India was a source of economic benefits for Britain regarding the providing of goods and, in addition, the help of Indian soldiers resulted decisive during the two World Wars. On the other hand, India too did benefit British domination since the improvement of trades would have been possible only by the development of infrastructure, the railways:

Canals and irrigation works, shipping and mining; the commercialization of agriculture with the development of a cash nexus; the establishment of an education system in English and of law and order creating suitable conditions for the growth of industry and enterprise; and the integration of India into the world economy (Kaul, 2011).

However, as Kaul said, the condition of India after the independence in 1947 showed a different scenario as Britain was criticized of having left the country poorer than before, mainly because of the high taxation system.

The first step toward independence was accomplished with the foundation of the Indian National Congress in 1885, which represented the main instrument of opposition to the Raj (Kaul, 2001). Founded by a group of middle-class intellectuals, during the years between the two World Wars it started collecting consensus over the masses, becoming a popular movement. Despite that, in 1907 the factionalism inside the party brought to the collapse and to the creation of a moderate and an extremist wing. Other oppositions inside the Congress were the one between the “pro-changers” – who were trying to fight the dominators from the inside, by changing the constitutional structures of the Raj – and the “no-changers” – who did not want to get involved with the Empire institutions. Furthermore, during the ‘20s, part of the Congress led by Mahatma Gandhi, started to conduct a policy of non-violence in order to fight the British domination, that in part brought to the awakening of the subdued

population, yet, most of the time these “silent revolutions” were repressed by the colonial army (Kaul, 2011).

On the other hand, the actions of the Congress, put the bases for Independence, and Gandhi’s doctrine contributed to build a national consciousness in the Indian population, at least until it was overpowered by the ethnic conflict.

The Independence act of 1947 meant for India a series of changes in the order of the country, first because its geographical boundaries were reestablished, as in 1948 the country was divided into a Hindu country – India – and a Muslim one – Pakistan. This exacerbation of the ethnic conflicts – worsened by the end of the Empire and the change of government – was also the cause of the greatest migration from the South-Asia area; many people from India and Pakistan moved to the UK and the other countries members the Commonwealth – were they settled and gave origins to new communities. As Arsala Nizami said, “along with entailing the largest human migrations on the face of earth” the partition “also induced miseries, fatalities and human crimes.”<sup>15</sup> Indeed, the period between Independence and the Partition had represented for India years of blood: violence and rapes were everyday episodes and is was estimated that more than a million of people were killed during this period (Pandey, 2001). At the basis of such a violent conflict there is the fact that when the boundaries of the new countries where decided, part of the Hindi population – and vice versa part of the Muslims – discovered to be located in the wrong side of the country,

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<sup>15</sup>Nizami, Arsala, “Role of Diaspora in Indo-Pak Peacebuilding”, *Global Research Forum on Diaspora and Transnationalism conference proceedings*, 2015:5

so the migration into the new nation was partially forced.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, the partition did not take into account the multiplicity of the languages of India, causing discrimination also in the different minority language communities. In particular, in Pakistan, the choice of Urdu as the official language pushed the Bengal community to the secession and, in 1971, they gave birth to Bangladesh (Poggeschi, 2010).

On the other hand, in the new India, the end of colonialism kept a door open also to the Anglo-Indians question, a category never really considered but whose status was put into discussion after the departure of the British dominators. Before the 1911 Census the term was used to talk about the British in India, then it took a different connotation: “Anglo-Indian” started to denote a new ethnicity, descendant of the British from the male line, but native of India.<sup>17</sup> As reported by Blunt, The Government of India Act of 1935 gives an official definition of the ethnic group:

An Anglo-Indian is a person whose father or any of whose other male progenitors in the male line is or was of European descent but who is a native of India. A European is a person whose father or any of whose other male progenitors in the male line is or was of European descent and who is not a native of India (2005:3)

According to this definition also the descendant of Portuguese colonizers could be Anglo-Indians, yet, it was officially applied only to British descendants.

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<sup>16</sup> Poggeschi Giovanni, *I diritti linguistici. Un'analisi comparata*, Carocci, 2010

<sup>17</sup> Blunt, Alison, *Domicile and Diaspora: Anglo-Indian Women and the Spatial Politics of Home*, Blackwell Publishing, 2005.

Anglo-Indians had plenty of privileges under the Britain domination. They were employed in the British institutions and in transports, railway mainly, and for many years they represented the link between the British and the Indian population.<sup>18</sup>

After the Independence, part of them decided to emigrate to their “fatherland”, UK, as a result of the British Nationality Act of 1948 in which it is declared which category of people are considered citizen of the United Kingdom. In the first part, the second article of the Act says:

Any person having the status aforesaid<sup>19</sup> may be known either as a British subject or as a Commonwealth citizen; and accordingly in this Act and in any other enactment or instrument whatever, whether passed, or made before or after the commencement of this Act, the expression " British subject " and the expression "Commonwealth citizen " shall have the same meaning (1948, part I, 1.2).

The following article lists the territories where this principle should be applied, that are all the former dominions of the former colonial Empire, including India and the new country of Pakistan.

As a matter of fact – as we will see through Glen Duncan’s novel, *The Bloodstone Papers* – the Anglo-Indian question provoked a different migration process that is hardly defined under the umbrella term of “diaspora”, in part because Anglo-Indians have rarely created closed communities around the world, so that the ethnic consciousness is less rooted in these people.

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<sup>18</sup> Almeida Rochelle, “Immigrants, Refugees, or both? Migration Theory and The Anglo-Indian Exodus to Great Britain”, *International Journal of Anglo-Indian Studies* Vol. 15, No. 2. 2015. 2-24.

<sup>19</sup> The status of “British subject” as reported in the first article of the section: “Every person who under this Act is a citizen of the United Kingdom and Colonies or who under any enactment for the time being in force in any country mentioned in subsection (3) of this section is a citizen of that country shall by virtue of that citizenship have the status of a British subject.” (British Nationality Act, 1948.)

### 1.3. Cultural heritage and literature: introducing British Indian writers

The label *British Indian literature* refers to the production of authors who write in English but whose origins are found in India or in the countries of the former British Empire. Following Ashcroft's definition, we can say that it is included into the larger category of postcolonial literature:

Postcolonialism deals with the effects of colonization on cultures and societies. As originally used by historians after the Second World War in terms such as the post-colonial state, 'post-colonial' had a clearly chronological meaning, designating the post-independence period. However, from the late 1970s the term has been used by literary critics to discuss the various cultural effects. (Ashcroft et al, 2007:157)

It is not clear whether those labels must be considered strict categories or not, since it is difficult to find precise characteristics and writing strategies common to each author.

What is clear is that the three authors analyzed in this dissertation – Monica Ali, Hanif Kureishi and Glen Duncan – come from similar backgrounds and they live in England, they share a diasporic culture linked to the area of South Asia and the former colonies of Britain in India, they use English to write about their own diasporic experience.

However, the same Hanif Kureishi does not hesitate to define himself as an 'English writer', even if he recognizes the dualism of his own culture:

English literature has changed enormously in the last ten years, because of writers from my background [...] you know, there are many, many of us, all with these strange names and some kind of colonial background. But we are part of English literature.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Kaleta, Kenneth C., *Hanif Kureishi: postcolonial storyteller*, University of Texas Press, 1998 p. 3

This vision of English literature in change is an issue that does not concern literature exclusively, but it is a direct consequence of the evolution of a postcolonial British society which can no longer rely on its traditional values. After decolonization and the first immigrant wave, that brought to Britain people from all over the British colonies (including India but also people from the Caribbean) – with all their physical and cultural diversity – the supremacy of the white man is put into discussion. The Mother Country is now called to face and accept this new process of melting of colors and cultures into a new English society, composed by plurality instead of the individualism of identity promoted by Thatcherism. This change did not come without struggles and, actually, it is still in process. As Stuart Hall stated in 1988, he found that there are two significant shifts in what was called the representation of ‘black experience’ in Britain: the first moment is political and cultural, it started when the term ‘black’ began to denote “the common experience of racism and marginalization in Britain”; meaning a category which Hall called “a new politics of resistance” including communities and ethnic groups “with very different histories, traditions and ethnic identities”. The cultural part is characterized by the predominance of white cultural discourse opposed to the “unspoken and invisible other” embodied by black cultures in Britain. The shift happened when this unspoken, invisible other began to show its diversity and it “cannot be represented without reference to the dimension of class, gender, sexuality and ethnicity.”<sup>21</sup> So, they cannot be represented anymore as a whole. Each ethnic group has different characteristics, culture and tradition which are brought into the arts

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<sup>21</sup> Hall, Stuart, “New Ethnicities”, in K. Mercer (ed.) Black Film, British Cinema, BFI/ICA Documents (1988)



to share the new identity of England: there is no more a black or white world, but rather clusters of ethnics and values. A statement in James Clifford's work *Diasporas*, shows the double consciousness of diaspora cultures towards their attitude of inclusion/exclusion, and in particular refers to the black experience in Britain:

The black diaspora culture currently being articulated in postcolonial Britain is concerned to struggle for different ways to be "British" – ways to stay and be different, to be British and something else complexly related to Africa or the Americas, to share histories of [...] hybridization, resistance and political rebellion (Clifford, 1994:308).

Only by acknowledging the changes of British culture and society it will be possible to construct a new multiculturalism in Britain. It means that the existence of a "white ethnicity" must be accepted – as Stuart Hall said before – among the others within British society, and that all these ethnicities together constitute hybridity, an essential component of the new nation.<sup>22</sup> A step forward was made in 1998, with the redaction of the *Parekh Report*, whose aims were "to analyse the current state of multi-ethnic Britain and propose ways of countering disadvantage and racial discrimination in order to make Britain a more vibrant multi-ethnic society" (Olssen, 2004:4). In fact, the Report was an attempt of "The Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain" – created to promote racial justice in Britain – to redefine the concept of 'Britishness' outside the borders of ethnicity, which is now more blended into sub-groups such as the 'Black British' and the 'Asian British'.

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<sup>22</sup>Guerra Sergio, "The Impressionist e Brick Lane: postetnicità e nuovo multiculturalismo critico nella narrativa diasporica del nuovo millennio", *Rivista di letterature moderne e comparate*, Firenze, n°1. 2012. 59-72.

British Indian writers take part in this process of renewal of the representation of the black experience – with reference to their experience, as part of the segregated category – contributing to rewrite the canon of English literature. These authors build stories of people never seen before: their faces do not look like the typical English faces, but they act as proper Britons, who live in a London that tastes of the East. London, multiethnic city par excellence, is chosen as the scene of most of British-Indian writers' literature and:

The writers of the Diaspora seem to have perceived and registered the different reactions the city of London and British culture had to the progressive penetration of alien and heterogeneous cultures in its social and cultural web. And to have expressed various levels of their own reactions and adaptability to the stimulus and pressures received by London's cultural and social environment.<sup>23</sup>

Thus, the ethnicity issue becomes predominant and reveals its deep involvement in British society. They share fictions which perfectly describe the discomfort of the new generation of Britons, who struggle to be recognized as British people even though they were born and raised in Britain and they have never been into the country of their fathers. Moreover, they are in conflict even with the other part of their culture, embodied by the figure of their parents, who try to keep alive the Indian side of their sons sometimes with extreme behaviors and ambiguity - as in *Brick Lane*, Chanu, Bangladeshi father of Bibi and Shahana (who were born in London), lets the girls wear

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<sup>23</sup> Faraone, Mario, “‘Take It Easy, You Can’t Learn Everything the First Time You Land’: Perception, Appropriation and Redefinition of London by some South East Asian and Caribbean Diaspora Writers”, *Proceedings of the International Symposium Diversity, Gender and Discrimination in Spaces*, 2011:87.

western clothes when he feels shame of his people behaviors, while showing an integralist attitude towards British prejudice and racism.

But the ethnic theme is not the only link between the works of Ali, Kureishi and Duncan. As we go through the novels we find other connections that help to outline the figure of the Indian migrant, the community settled in Britain and the features that exemplify the inner working of inclusion/exclusion in British society. The generational gap is one of the recurring topic in British Indian's literature since it is also frequent and intense in diasporic communities. This is because in the sons of immigrant people – the second generation – the sense of inclusion in the community tends to diminish in favour of the culture of the new country of adoption or, on the opposite, to become radical (as happens to Karim in *Brick Lane*). On the other hand, the first generation keeps strong feelings for the country of origin (Adesh Pal et al., 2004). Indeed, in the imaginary of the migrant the concept of “home” is reshaped: home is not the place in which one lives, it is “living here and belonging elsewhere” (Clifford, 1994). The Homeland is another of the main themes because, as was pointed out by Safran (1991), it remains one of the fundamental principles in diasporic communities. Even for British Indian authors, the theme of returning home is a recurring thought for the protagonist of their novels, which most of the time remains a long-term dream due to lack of resources, the assimilation in the host country and even fear to find a completely different environment in which they can no longer live.

### 1.3.1. About the authors

#### Monica Ali

Monica Ali was born in Dhaka, Bangladesh, in 1967, of an English mother and a Bangladeshi father. When she was three years old she moved to England with her family.<sup>24</sup> Together with Glen Duncan, she belongs to a younger generation of British-Indian writers. Her first novel, *Brick Lane* – published in 2003 – was well received by the critics. It was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize and won five awards, including the British Book Awards Literary Fiction Award, the British Book Awards Newcomer of the Year and the Guardian First Book Award.

As the other authors, Monica Ali's works belong to British multicultural literary scene, and they were included in a frame of studies that was called 'New Critical Multiculturalism': a new way of analysis of the multicultural issue that acknowledges the previous failures in the matter, of the end of the eighteenth century, and tries to re-elaborate what were its main aim: the belief in a harmonious society, founded on recognized diversities which can live together with the other realities of a nation. (Guerra, 2012)

However, the spirit of inclusion promoted in *Brick Lane* was not instantly perceived by the people of the real Brick Lane district – where the biggest Bangladeshi community of London lives. The release of the novel, in 2003 did not seem to bother them, yet three years later – when the district became the set of the film adaptation –

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<sup>24</sup> Monica Ali in britishcouncil.org (retrieved 25/02/2017)

the community reacted with marches and manifestation against it, so that the troupe had to change place in order to complete the film. They even set up a public burning of the book to protest because they perceived the novel as an accusation of backwardness and ignorance towards the Bangladeshi culture.<sup>25</sup>

Meanwhile, the incredible debate that emerged from those events was decisive for the success of the author, that continued to be read, translated and commented also thanks to the protests.

### **Hanif Kureishi**

Hanif Kureishi was born in Bromley in 1954. He is a playwright, screenwriter and novelist. His writings deal with different features of the modern multi-ethnic society: the marginalisation of minorities and the difficulty of relations in western society. Kureishi first built his reputation as a playwright, *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1984) was first a script for the stage and then became a screenplay for the film adaptation. His most famous novel, *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990), won the Whitbread Prize for Best First Novel.<sup>26</sup>

As reported on his website, Kureishi's father was Indian, but most of his family moved to Pakistan after the partition of the country in 1947.<sup>27</sup> He later came to London to get

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<sup>25</sup> Guarducci, Maria Paola, "Solitudini londinesi in Sam Selvon e Monica Ali", *Quaderni del Dipartimento di Letterature Comparete*, 5, 2009, Roma, Carocci, pp. 33-43. 2009

<sup>26</sup> <https://literature.britishcouncil.org/writer/hanif-kureishi> retrieved 28/02/2017

<sup>27</sup> Biography - Hanif Kureishi [www.hanifkureishi.co.uk](http://www.hanifkureishi.co.uk) retrieved 27/12/2016

a law education “by the old colonial power. He married here and never went back to India.”<sup>28</sup>

The connections between Kureishi’s life and his works are undeniable. After reading about his childhood, it is clear that most of the stories he wrote took inspiration from episodes of his life. For instance, in his plays and novels it is not uncommon to run into characters that seems stereotyped figures of his time – such as the skinheads in *My Beautiful Laundrette* and in *The Buddha of Suburbia* – that, instead, are inspired by real people.<sup>29</sup> As a kid, he says he was not fully conscious of his own origins; he used to meet part of his Pakistani family in England, that he describes as “confident people who took me to hotels” and “restaurants, often in taxis” (Kureishi, 1984:73). However, he tells he could not imagine what the life of his uncles and cousins in India might be. Then, after a teacher showed him a picture of poor Indian peasants, he started to be involved in the ethnic issue. He soon realized that the *ius soli*, the right to citizenship based on the country of birth, is not a sufficient proof of Britishness. In fact – as the same Kureishi (1984) said in *The Rainbow Sign* – being Pakistani, or half-blood, was not easy in 1960’s Britain, since they were rejected by the society, they had a struggle with the language and in finding decent jobs. These were the years of Enoch Powell, member of the British parliament, who became famous after pronouncing, in 1968, the so-called ‘Rivers of blood’ speech, in which he expressed strong repulsion and opposition to the immigration from the Commonwealth nations, and he proposed

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<sup>28</sup>Kureishi, Hanif (1984), “The rainbow sign”, *My Beautiful Laundrette and other writings*, Faber and Faber, 1996:73

<sup>29</sup> ‘Johnny’ of *My Beautiful Laundrette* was a school friend of Kureishi (Kureishi, 1984, p.74)

to stop the income flows of immigrants and the re-emigration of the newcomers .<sup>30</sup> Kureishi was deeply moved by Powell's and the Conservative party racist campaign, and rejected Duncan Sandys<sup>31</sup> statement of 1967 in which he addressed the sons of immigrants born in Britain as a "generation of misfits". Besides, Kureishi replied to that comment by saying: "I wasn't a misfit; I could join the elements of myself together. It was the others, they wanted misfits; they wanted you to embody within yourself their ambivalence" (Kureishi, 1984:75). As a member of the second generation immigrants, Kureishi's works were then embraced as an innovation in British literature, since he has always wrote about a reality of Britain still fairly explored, whose protagonists are the children of immigration. His approach to arts has always been recognized has his distinctive sign, Robert Mccrum wrote about him:

He has always performed in many dimensions (short stories, essays, screenplays), projecting a mischievous air of jeopardy and transgression. [...] Books were essential to his assimilation. It was through his life as a writer that he began to discover who he was and to reconcile the warring parts of himself. The doubleness persisted. He would be suburban and metropolitan. Arrogant and shy. An entertainer and a spectator. A bad boy and a good son. A professor and a hooligan. Provocative and complicit. Hankering after the academy, yet living on the street. Juxtaposing high art and popular culture. Quoting Beckett and Kafka, but celebrating *Carry On* films, reggae and pop music.<sup>32</sup>

All these thoughts and beliefs are gathered into Kureishi's works, and will represent the basis of the analysis of the texts we are going to consider: *The Buddha of Suburbia*, and the script of the play *Borderline*.

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<sup>30</sup> Enoch Powell, "Rivers of Blood", *The Telegraph.uk*, retrieved 26/02/2017

<sup>31</sup> Other member of the Conservative party.

<sup>32</sup> Robert Mccrum, *Hanif Kureishi interview: 'Every 10 years you become someone else'* in *The Guardian*, 18/01/2014, retrieved 11/08/2017

## **Glen Duncan**

Glen Duncan was born in Bolton in 1965. He is the fourth son of an Anglo-Indian family, and he is the only one of his brothers who was born in the United Kingdom instead of India.<sup>33</sup> He has a formation in philosophy and literature at Lancaster University. In 1990 he moved to London where, before becoming a writer, he worked in a bookshop.<sup>34</sup>

Since 1997, the date of publication of his first work, *Hope*, Duncan has written ten novels. He has explored a variety of genre in literature, from fiction to fantasy, and some of his novels have become movies: *I Lucifer* (2002) and *The Last Werewolf* (2011), the last one is the first chapter of a fantasy trilogy about werewolves. Moreover, he writes under the pseudonym of Saul Black, and in 2015 it has been released his “first” novel, a thriller called *The Killing Lessons*.<sup>35</sup>

Even by experimenting different genres in writing, there is a kind of *fil rouge* that works as a link between all the novels of Glen Duncan. In particular, his Anglo-Indian roots influence the choice of a specific topic and his way of writing. During an interview for *The Guardian* he said about himself:

"As an Anglo-Indian kid in Bolton, I was basically in a minority of one. That was a source of misery, but at the same time one of the effects of receiving the message that you don't belong to the club is that you watch

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<sup>33</sup> Glen Duncan (2007), *Young Man Behaving Badly*, The New York Times, Lives, (retrieved 09/04/2017)

<sup>34</sup> Writers – Glen Duncan, [www.literature.britishcouncil.org](http://www.literature.britishcouncil.org) (retrieved 09/04/2017)

<sup>35</sup> Lisa Campbell (2015), Killing Lessons author revealed as Glen Duncan, [www.thebooksellers.com](http://www.thebooksellers.com) retrieved 09/04/2017



the club with detachment. The fact that no one quite knew who I was, was a major contributory factor in starting to write."<sup>36</sup>

As Kureishi, during his childhood he felt he was a misfit, yet writing became a cure and a mean to talk about himself and his undiscovered world (Duncan in Skidelsky, 2014). This perspective is revealed especially in *The Bloodstone Papers*, his most intimate and personal novel, partially autobiographical, in which he traces the paths followed by his parents, their life in India and what means to be members of the Anglo-Indian community, until they decided to migrate to the so-called “fatherland”, England. History, real life and fiction are fused together in a postcolonial scenario, where we experience the double-nature of the ethnic issue through the perspective of Anglo-Indians: being misfits both in their mother country, India, then in England.

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<sup>36</sup>Glen Duncan in William Skidelsky, *Meet the man in black*, The Guardian, 14/03/2014 (retrieved 09/04/2017).

## **2. Bangladesh - Monica Ali, *Brick Lane***

### **2.1. About the novel**

The debut novel of Monica Ali *Brick Lane* was published in 2003. It is a multicultural novel that deals with a variety of controversial topics, not only related to the ethnic issue: diaspora and the complicated relation with the mother country, identity, human rights, gender issues, generational gap and father-daughter relationships are some of the other themes treated by the author. Nazneen, the protagonist of the story, embraces all these situations, as a personification of all the matters of the modern multiethnic society.

The novel covers more than thirty years of history, and it is focused on two essential historical contexts: Thatcherism, after the new British Nationality Act of 1981 became law, putting an end to the right of citizenship of people coming from the former colonies; and the World Trade Centre attack of 2001, in the United States, that caused a fracture in the already tense relationship between the Muslim community and the British xenophobic groups, around the Brick Lane area (Guarducci, 2009). As we will see, the author is interested in depicting the isolation of the Bangladeshi community of the Brick Lane district, and the slow tendency of some of its members to get out of this situation of confinement. However, the tension between the two groups, besides representing the real ethnic conflicts of the new century, could be seen as the peak of contact between the Muslim and Western world. Indeed, even in its violence, it can produce changes and new perspectives in contrast with the static picture of the Brick Lane community described at the beginning of the novel.

“Any novelist can simply tell us what a character thinks. Ali has decided to do so with only one character, Nazneen. To the very end of the book we stay inside her head”.<sup>37</sup> *Brick Lane* tells the story of a girl, born in a Bangladeshi village, who – after her mother committed suicide – is forced by her father to marry a forty years old man she does not know; and to leave her family and her country to start a new life with her husband, in London. What might be perceived as a story of submission of a woman to the men of her family, on the contrary becomes a tale of emancipation and freedom from the stereotypes tied to South-Asian culture (Guerra, 2012). Indeed, Cormack underlines that “the novel is particularly of interest as an examination of the double bind that female migrants face, treated as alien by their host nation and as commodities by the men in their own communities.”<sup>38</sup> In these terms, the novel could be described as a Bildungsroman, a novel of formation in which the protagonist, Nazneen, follows a path of personal growth, passing through difficulties and moment in which she has to put into discussion her traditional values and beliefs. *Brick Lane* follows Nazneen’s story through three main plotlines: Chanu’s attempts to take the family back to Bangladesh, the love affair with Karim and the conflict with the usurer Mrs. Islam. (Cormack, 2006)

The structure, instead, can be divided into three parts, depending on where the story is set, and on chronological events. There is a prologue about the childhood of Nazneen in Bangladesh, before the marriage, the life in London and a third section that follows

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<sup>37</sup>Mullan, John, “Public faces and inner spaces”, *The Guardian*, 11/06/2004 (retrieved 15/03/2017)

<sup>38</sup>Cormack, Alistar, “Migration and the Politics of Narrative Form: Realism and the Postcolonial Subject in *Brick Lane*”, *Contemporary Literature*, Vol. 47, No. 4 Winter, 2006. 700

the movements around Bangladesh of Nazneen's sister – Hasina, the only linkage she still has with her mother country – through her letters. However, the main scene is based in London, in the council estate of Brick Lane, the district where the Bangladeshi community is settled. The estate represents the centre of Nazneen's life: it is the place where most of the daily activities take place, and a meeting point for the women of the community while their husbands work. Therefore, as the story goes on, we realize that Brick Lane and the estate are nothing more than a dislocation of a Bangladeshi village, where customs and rules seem unchanged, but that the new generations of British-Bangla are slowly pushing into a state of mutation that goes towards the assimilation into British culture or multiculturalism. Shahana and Bibi, daughters of Nazneen and Chanu, and the young Karim, emerging leader of the “Bengal Tigers” movement and later Nazneen's lover, represent this new generation. Actually, the three characters act in opposed roles in the story, since the girls are struggling to be identified as British, and Karim is rediscovering his origins and fighting for his rights as a Bangladeshi-Muslim young man in London, even though he has never seen his country of origin. Along with Nazneen, the story turns around the events of other characters: each person contributes to help or to influence her path in different ways. Besides, we would make a mistake in judging some of *Brick Lane*'s characters only as antagonist, as one of the virtue of Monica Ali's writing is that she succeeds in creating empathy even around the most repulsive character. Nazneen's husband Chanu, could be an example of that, as John Mullan wrote:

One of the successes of *Brick Lane* is a triumph of characterization that can be understood in just these terms. Chanu, begins as someone the reader is invited to resent. His marriage to Nazneen has been arranged. She does

not know him before she becomes his wife. He has been foisted on her and us. We are given plenty of reasons to be irked by him. He is self-important; “rolls of fat” hang low from his stomach; he lectures his children; he makes his wife cut his corns. [...] Yet he slowly becomes human. (Mullan, 2004)

The perception of Chanu’s humanization process happens always through Nazneen’s words: besides his rolls of fat, she feels blessed because her father chose for her an educated man that at least does not beat her, as happens to the other women of the estate. Chanu’s actions are not the actions of the typical Muslim husband, besides respecting his culture and traditions, he tries to embrace aspects of both cultures and, page after page, Monica Ali breaks all the stereotypes and destroys the idea of ‘orientalism’ associated to Chanu.

Other main characters such as Rupban and Mumtaz – Nazneen’s mother and aunt, respectively – even though we read about them only in the first part of the novel – they are decisive characters in instilling in the protagonist the faith in Fate and superstition, that will affect most of her life; at least until she realizes that she is a free woman, and that she is the only owner of her life. Indeed, as the midwife and her mother believed she was born dead, from the very first moment of her life Nazneen was pushed into the arms of Fate, when they decided not to take her to the hospital. As her mother said: “we must not stand in the way of Fate. Whatever happens, I accept it. And my child must not waste any energy fighting against Fate. That way, she will be stronger.” (14)

Rupban keeps a central role in Nazneen’s life even after her death: she appears in the shape of a ghost, as an undefined entity, in her daughter’s dreams, when Nazneen is going through difficult moments such as the loss of her first baby, Raqib, or when she discovered from her sister’s letter that *Amma* had committed suicide. Here, the storytelling does not lose credibility since “the first visit of Nazneen’s mother is

explained by the fever that followed it; the latter is merely a bad dream. The angels on *Brick Lane* are simply ghosts produced by Nazneen's guilty conscience" (Cormack, 2006:716).

The new reality she is experimenting, together with the encounter with the other women of the estate in Brick Lane, slowly lead Nazneen to a new consciousness and awareness of her status, first as a woman, then as a mother. Especially the figure of Razia represents the first example of "dissident" woman in the estate, the first who tries to undertake the road of assimilation to the host society and transmits in Nazneen the spirit of emancipation.

However, emancipation and freedom do not come without struggle and sacrifice, so that Nazneen will soon have to face her past and decide if she belongs to London and the western world, or to go back to Bangladesh and what she had left behind as a young woman.

### **2.1.1. Structure and the use of English as a lingua franca**

We must spend few words about the narrative structure of the novel and the role of the narrator. *Brick Lane* does not have a consistent outline, since the three sections we have already identified are not separated blocks and do not follow a regular scheme. For instance, Hasina's letters irrupt in the storytelling without any kind of notice, sometimes they appear with only few brief sentences inside a chapter, intersected with Nazneen's story; other times the author decides to dedicate real chapters to the letters. On the other hand, Cormack (2006) believes that this strange architecture is actually what makes the novel more realistic. Indeed, Nazneen is always worried about her sister's situation and she desperately waits for her news, so Monica Ali reports the

actual moment she receives the letters as if it was happening for real. In this way, the reader has the feeling of being inside the story, and starts empathizing with the mood of waiting of the protagonist. In the same way, the pauses from a letter to another could be symptomatic of what is happening in the life of the sisters. For instance, the death of baby Raqib causes a sudden interruption of Nazneen's mail and starts a long chapter where the author gathers all Hasina's letters from May 1988 to January 2001. This entire chapter is dedicated to the narration of the events that Hasina tells in first person through her letters and there is an interruption of the plot of Nazneen. However, these mails still have an addressee and, even if Ali does not report Nazneen's replies, the reader knows that the correspondence is still alive thanks to Hasina, who reports facts of her sister's life as they were having a constant conversation.

Another matter that Cormack (2006) points out about *Brick Lane's* structure, is the way the narrator – thus, the author – had decided to deal with translation and the language issue. Talking about a novel that tells a story of migration and diaspora, a reader might expect frequent code switching from English to Bengali and vice versa, and consequently, different styles of writing. This is not the case of Ali's novel, since the only language present in the book is English. Thus, the author had to use different strategies to represent a more realistic scenario. On the one hand, the choices of Monica Ali can be easily explained by the fact that the novel is mainly set in Brick Lane district, the Bangladeshi community has little contacts with other cultures and ethnic groups of London or with the British community; thus, the multicultural side of

the city, of course is important as a background element, but it is not what the author wanted to focus on.<sup>39</sup>

Even Guarducci (2009) argues that the diasporical phenomenon described in *Brick Lane* perseveres on the multilingualism aspect – for instance, the institutional signs on the roads of Brick Lane are bilingual, and Nazneen does not understand a man on the street who speaks to her in an Indian language – but there is no contact between the other languages and ethnic groups. On the other hand, it remains to analyze how *multilingualism* is respected and how *hybridity* is represented through one language and thus, how can we distinguish the level of assimilation in the first-generation migrants and the second-generation members since we cannot rely on the use of different codes.

First, when we talk about translation here, we do not refer only to transposition from a language to another, but to the *translation* of the entire cultural system that the migrants bring with them to Britain, in comparison with the new system that they have to understand once in the host country. A language – in our case English – can be manipulated in order to explain and report one cultural background, points of view and thoughts that originally belongs to another cultural system.

Cormack (2006:708-709) selects the following passage of *Brick Lane* as an example:

Chanu liked to keep [the television] glowing in the evenings, like a fire in the corner of the room.... A man in a very tight suit (so tight it made private parts stand out on display) and a woman in a skirt that cover her bottom gripped each other as an invisible force hurtled across an oval arena. The

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<sup>39</sup> Marino, Elisabetta, “From Brick Lane to Alentejo Blue: Cross-Cultural Encounters in Monica Ali’s Writings”, *BAS/British and American Studies*, Timisoara, Romania, vol. XIV, 2008, pp. 51-58.



people in the audience clapped together and then stopped. By some magic they all stopped at exactly the same time. The couple broke apart. They fled from each other and no sooner had they fled than they sought each other out. Every move they made was urgent, intense, a declaration.... [The woman] stopped dead and flung her arms above her head with a look so triumphant that you knew she had conquered everything: her body, the laws of nature, and the heart of the tight-suited man who slid over on his knees, vowing to lay down his life for her. [...] “What is it called?” said Nazneen. Chanu glanced at the screen. “Ice-skating,” he said, in English. “Ice e-skating,” said Nazneen. (36-37)

This passage is composed by two different elements: there is the narrator’s intervention that explains what Nazneen sees on the television and a piece of dialogue between Chanu and Nazneen, everything held in English. The first part is the pure description of Nazneen’s thoughts, and the reader is called to reconstruct piece by piece the protagonist’s point of view. The narrator could have chosen to simply write down that she was looking at a couple of ice skating athletes, and the reader would have understood immediately. But that is not what happens in Nazneen’s mind. She is staring at something which is not familiar to her, and tries to give it an explanation. So, on the one hand, the narrator gives us a sort of translation because we suppose that Nazneen is thinking in Bengali, but he does not *translate* into English the real meaning of what she is looking at. Ali’s intent is to push the reader into Nazneen shoes. She fails in translating western culture into her cultural system (Cormack, 2006), and with a simple description we can feel all the struggle.

Whereas, the dialogue between wife and husband shows the double use of English as substitution of spoken Bengali, when Nazneen asks “what is it called?”, then the reader perceives that she tries to talk in English when she mispronounces “ice e-skating”. Finally, Cormack concludes that:

What becomes clear is that the effect of realism is generated by an act of control that *translates* all experiences and indeed words into an English register; the appearance of mimesis is generated through an elementary refusal to depict things as they might in fact be. Translation as productive impossibility has been replaced by an unproblematic rendering of one culture's signifying systems into another's. Rather than encounter a mode of representation that is fragmentary or provisional, we find a voice that confidently synthesizes different experiences to one identifiable reality. (2006:710)

As a matter of fact, the author adopts the strategy of the omniscient narrator that acts as mediator from the protagonist's subconscious to the reader, and translates her thoughts into English in order to make it understandable (Guarducci, 2009); however, in Hasina's letters the use of the same strategy cannot be interpreted in the same way. Indeed, the letters are totally written in English, but the purpose of its use is not immediately clear. The mails represent the parallel world to Nazneen reality in London and, indeed, Hasina's story is specular to what happens to her sister. However, here the double use of English – as a substitution of Bengali – is used in a different way comparing to Nazneen reported thoughts. Nazneen's English is the perfect translation of the Bengali, it is fluid and clear, whereas Hasina writes in bad English, as a Bengali native speaker that is learning the language. The question that arose is then: why would she write in English to her sister? If the theory of English as a substitution of Bengali still works, the use of bad language is not clear. Cormack gives two possible explanations to this strategy: Hasina could have actually written the letters in English, making an effort to write in a foreign language; or they could be a “free translation from illiterate Bengali” (2006:716). The first case would make the novel more realistic, meaning that would represent the true attempt of the girl to get closer to her sister's

situation. The second theory instead, lays to the more likely possibility that we are in front of a manipulation of the narrator/author.

## **2.2. The diasporic imaginary in *Brick Lane*: homeland, connection and alienation**

Monica Ali analyses the diaspora topic from two points of view: the personal and the Bangladeshi community level. In both cases, the unit of analysis – as we saw in Safran theory – is *homeland*: the perception of the mother country and the strategies adopted to fill the sense of emptiness left after migration are something that each character has to deal with, not in the same way, and so happens at the community level.

Going back to chapter 1 and Safran's criteria of analysis, it is easy to find every element of diaspora that he theorized in *Brick Lane* as well. First, the Bangladeshi diaspora started from the original centre of Bangladesh, to the peripheral zone of Brick Lane. The community keeps a collective memory alive, which is based on their culture and traditions, that are still preserved and practiced by their members. So, the community feeling is strong and it always relies on the homeland, in the perspective of return. However, as Mishra stated, "as a general rule [...] diasporas do not return to their homeland" (2005:2). This is true for *Brick Lane* too, if we think about diaspora as a collective phenomenon – the Bangladeshi community of Brick Lane remains a living reality of England – but in the fiction, the myth is broken by Chanu's experience: he is the one who breaks the rule and decides to go back to Bangladesh for real.

However, Chanu's path is not the only way possible to survive diaspora, and Monica Ali shows the readers many different points of view and different ways of reaction of

the characters to their status of emigrated persons in a foreign, western country. Thus, it shows that within the Bangladeshi community, despite its integrity and cohesion, coexist more identities, all of them gathered together into the big container that is Muslim and Bengali culture; which from the outside might appear as a homogeneous and static group, in constant opposition to western society, that aims to recreate the reality of the homeland in a foreign country, yet if we take a look at each single member of that group, we discover a variety of approaches and way of living that are surprisingly uncommon in what we classify as 'South-Asian culture'. Then, diaspora might remain the central element in the creation of a strong communal feeling, as something shared by all their members, which belongs to everybody, but it also has a more intimate sense, that each person needs to internalize in his own way. Here is the source of all the conflicts in *Brick Lane*: all the characters trying to find their place in the world, to build their own identity, within the boundaries of their homeland, inside a community, in England or back in Bangladesh.

This picture painted by Monica Ali confirms the real situation of many multiethnic suburbs of London in which the immigrants have created communities. As stressed by Iulia Rășcanu:

The emigrant/(im)migrant *connects* by creating networks within and outside *the ethnic/religious community of which s/he is part of as a diasporic* individual. Examples such as Southall, a suburb in London or Brick Lane, a street in London, speak of the emigrants/(im)migrants' tendency to *connect* by creating communities that share cultural practices, religion, language, as well as by re-creating spaces that are familiar to what they used to know before migration. The city's actual architecture may also be altered because of the immigrant communities or groups' need to

give shape to their need of ‘connectedness’ and to diminish feelings of ‘alienation’.<sup>40</sup> (2014:212)

Here Rășcanu refers to the dichotomy of *connectedness/alienation* as a pattern that belongs to every diasporic community, but that can work in different ways depending on a series of factors existent in the host society – such as the politics of incorporations adopted by the government – and on the migration experience of each migrant. The general rule says, that “being more connected to a country or to a culture implies getting more alienated to another” (2014:2011), which is how works in the logic of other oppositions, such as West/East or good/bad. However, Rășcanu highlights that different variables can occur in the migrant experience, and can imply more connection or alienation to the mother country and the host society. Usually, before leaving the mother country, the migrants develop positive or negative expectations “forged by their exposure to the various media” (2014:212), that produce in their mind a distorted image of the country of adoption. Once they arrive in the new country, the contact with the other culture always produces a negative or positive shock, first due to the distance between the two cultural systems, and also because of those false expectations. Only by experiencing the new culture by themselves, the migrants start fixing the distorted image they produced, if the positive expectations are confirmed or the negative are replaced by positive events – such as finding a good job, being respected and accepted by the native people – in this case the feeling of alienation is reduced; on the other hand, “when they face instances of racism and discrimination” (2014:212), the

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<sup>40</sup>Rășcanu, Iulia, “Reflections on Connectedness and Alienation the Case of South Asian Diaspora (N)S In Great Britain”, *Synergy* volume 10, no. 2/2014

alienation is higher and, as a consequence, the connection with the mother country grows. This can represent for the migrants a sort of reconciliation with the homeland – as it is the place they had to leave because of wars, misery and diseases – but at the same time it can lead to the idealization of their country, as an out of reach utopic promised land.

Indeed, the idealization of the mother country is a common process in diasporic communities, even though it is not always the consequence of a strong alienation from the host culture. Idealization can be the result of the years of distance from the mother country, indeed, according to Vijay Mishra (2005:9), “it should be clear that diasporas construct homelands very differently from the way in which homeland peoples construct themselves. For an Indian in the diaspora, for example, India is a very different kind of homeland than for the Indian national”. This means that, if we compare the homeland perception of a migrant before and after the start of his diasporic experience, we will find that it has changed.

Idealization in *Brick Lane* is represented in more than one plot, and in those cases, it is not generated by the same degree of alienation/connection with the mother country. For instance, if we look at Chanu and Karim, both idealize Bangladesh and their traditions as something that needs to be preserved and spread in the community and especially within the new generations – Chanu tries to teach his daughters Tagore’s poetry, Karim leads a Muslim movement called ‘Bengal Tigers’. However, their purposes are not moved by the same feelings and background, starting from the fact that Chanu belongs to the first generation of immigrants, unlike Karim who was born in Britain, from Bangladeshi parents. So, in the first case we are in front of the perfect

example of alienated migrant as: after struggling to be part of the western society as ‘an educated man’, by taking distances from the backwardness of his homeland, and after being rejected by the same society, Chanu starts reconsidering Bangladesh as the place he wants to live in. His alienation from Britain is so deep that, at the end, he is ready to sacrifice his family – not without pain – for his own benefit, and go back to his country alone.

However, the first impression that we have of Chanu is quite the opposite. At first, he seems more alienated from the Bangladeshi community in Brick Lane than the host country, as his needs of approval by western people was higher when he first arrived in England. In the first chapters, we discover that he desperately wants to get a promotion at his work place and that he reads and studies a lot in order to look more educated in the eyes of the English people, trying to prove that he has nothing to do with his compatriots of the Bangladeshi community. Yet, it soon appears clear that his ambitions will remain dreams, and even Nazneen looks skeptical about her husband strategies to get promoted: “he thinks he will get the promotion because he goes to the pub with the boss. He is so stupid he doesn’t realize there is any other way of getting promotion” (37). His illusion continues when he shows to his wife the numerous degrees he achieved, but the reader suddenly realizes they won’t lead him to nothing:

This one is from the Centre of Meditation and Healing in Victoria Street. Basically it is a qualification in transcendental philosophy. Here’s the one from Writer’s Bureau, a correspondence course. I applied for some jobs as a journalist after that. And I wrote some short stories as well. I have a letter from the *Bexleyhealth Advertiser* somewhere. I’ll look it out for you: “we were most interested in your story, *A Prince Among Peasants*, but unfortunately it is not suitable for our publication. Thank you for your interest in *Bexleyhealth Advertiser*.” It was a nice letter, I kept it somewhere. (42)

Even the title of his story, *A Prince Among Peasants*, may be interpreted as a metaphor of his situation: he feels a Prince among the Bangladeshi Peasants, both in Dhaka and in the Brick Lane community; whereas he sees London as a means of (missed) redemption.

On the other hand, as the story goes on, the reader realizes that Chanu's alienation works in both directions: he is an outsider within the Bangladeshi community as well as in Britain. He is not involved in the community life because he feels that it has been corrupted by the western society, and the only way to escape from this is to go back to the mother country. This vicious circle is the leitmotif that marks every behavior and relationship in Chanu's life. For instance, the only relations he keeps with his people are themselves ambiguously corrupted persons. Mrs. Islam and Dr. Azad are both prominent actors of the community but with completely different values, as the first is an old Muslim lady that preaches for benevolence and the mutual help while being a usurer; whereas Dr. Azad is the only friend of Chanu, probably because he looks at him as a model: another Bengali educated man that succeeded to become a Doctor in London. However, the same Dr. Azad had to surrender to western customs and to adapt his own views. Chanu does not want to settle for a compromise from the start, and plans the return of his family to Dhaka since the marriage with Nazneen. He is still a fan of English culture, but he despises the customs of the English people. For this reason, he does not want for his sons to grow in such a corrupted country, so different from his world view:

Back home, if you drink you risk being an outcast. In London, if you don't drink you risk the same thing. That's when it becomes dangerous, and



when they start so young they can easily end up alcoholic. [...] We will be in Dhaka before Raku is in any danger. (110)

Chanu's criticism does not concern only corruption, but also the insufficient and at the same time extremists attempts of part of the community to react to the racism of English society. For example, the Bengal Tigers of Karim respond to the attacks of the neo-nazi movement of Lion Hearts with the same violence; Chanu thinks that it can only increase the hate and the stereotypes towards the Bangladeshi community, especially after the World Trade Center attack. All these factors contribute to make feel Chanu inappropriate in his diasporic experience, pushing him back to his *homeland*.

The same homeland that Karim does not know but that he tries to reproduce within his commitment in the community, through the tales of his father and maintaining a love affair with Nazneen, that perfectly embodies the stereotype of the Bangladeshi woman: religious, devoted to family and "unspoiled", as Chanu used to call her.

How did Karim see her? The real thing, he said. She was the real thing. A Bengali wife. A Bengali mother. An idea of home. An idea of himself that he found in her. [...] "I wasn't me, and you weren't you. From the very beginning to the very end, we didn't see things. What we did – we made each other up." (454-455)

Karim's idea of home is blurred. He re-elaborates the diasporic experiences of others as they were his own, trying to keep alive that contact with the mother country that he never had. Once again, this aspect is revealed only by the end of the novel. As a matter of fact, Cormack noticed that "Karim is the first person Nazneen has met who seems to 'fit in' with the location" (2006:704). He seems perfectly confident in his Western clothes, talking English, and at the same time receiving "Salaat alerts" – that reminds him the prayer hour – on his mobile phone (Cormack, 2006). Suddenly we are in front

of a successful example of hybridity. What is not immediately clear after the description that Nazneen gives us, is precisely that her point of view still lacks of experience and lucidity, it is a naïve judgment. She notices his stutter in Bengali as it is her mother tongue, but he seems perfectly fluent in English probably because Nazneen's English is not so good. Finally, the same Karim reveals that he stammers only when he gets nervous, as happened when he first met Nazneen:

“But do you only get nervous in Bengali? Why don't you stammer in English?” he raised his eyebrows. He stroked his beard. “But I do. Maybe you don't notice in English.” [...] Was it true? People said all sorts of things that were not true. But it seemed possible that she simply had not noticed, or – more than that – had decided not to know. (453)

The situation turns upside down after Nazneen realizes that Karim was in love with the idea of her, as she was attracted by his Western side, the sense of freedom and, at the same time prohibition, that she never felt with Chanu and that makes her understand that she can be independent. Indeed, the break-up with Karim finally gives her the strength to choose also to stay in London with her daughters, because she realizes that the word *home* has many nuances and, after so many years, it has assumed a different meaning for her. At the end Nazneen has found her new identity and she embraces it “without the stable compass points that her national and religious backgrounds have created, and without merely assimilating to the masses (Cormack, 2006:706).

### 2.3. Nazneen and the shock of arrival

*Brick Lane* opens with two quotations about fate. The first from Ivan Turgenev: “Sternly, remorselessly, fate guides each of us; only at the beginning, when we’re absorbed in details, in all sorts of nonsense, in ourselves, are we unaware of its harsh hand.”

The second, from Heraclitus, says: “a man’s character is his fate”.

As a sort of prophecy, Monica Ali seems to suggest that the story that we are going to read has already an end: nothing could be done to change the destiny of their character; neither can they hope to change their fate with their own hands. In this mood of premonition, the narrator introduces us to Nazneen, first daughter of Rupban and Hamid, who seems already predestined to a life of silent consents and obedience to the decisions of others. On the other hand, after reading a few pages the reader discovers in advance something about the future of the newborn, that suddenly contradicts the theory on predestination:

What could not be changed must be borne. And since nothing could be changed, everything had to be borne. This principle ruled her life. It was a mantra, fettle and challenged. So that when, at the age of thirty-four, after she had been given three children and had one taken away, when she had a futile husband and had been fated a young and demanding lover, when for the first time she could not wait for the future to be revealed but had to make it for herself, she was as startled by her own agency as an infant who waves a clenched fist and strikes itself upon the eye. (16)

We have already told about the story of “How You Were Left To Your Fate” (15): the tale of Nazneen’s mother about the day she was born, with so little chances of survival, without any medical support. That was the first decision that was made in her place or, from another point of view, is the first chance for Nazneen to decide by her own to

surrender to life or not. What is clear is that the protagonist, consciously or not, is deeply influenced by the belief in fate, and it will affect her decision during most of her life, both in Bangladesh and London. Only experience and the self-consciousness achieved during the time will release her from the trap of destiny.

This long process starts with the diasporic experience that Nazneen undertakes by marrying Chanu and moving to London. Progressively, she will necessarily leave part of her cultural background, traditions and patterns – including the belief in fate – that are no longer suitable in a western country, so different from her hometown. Besides the first impact with the new culture usually involves a strong shock in the migrant, in Nazneen case there is a significant difference in the representation of her shock of arrival compared to usual first diasporic experience. Indeed, the protagonist of the novel arrives in London at the age of seventeen, in the middle of the eighties, when in the Brick Lane district there was already a deeply rooted community coming especially from Bangladesh (Guarducci, 2009). As we said before, Brick Lane is an area of the British capital in which the mark of the ethnic group is extremely evident. It is so deep that we could talk of displacement of a country, as the population not only have brought to the new town culture and traditions, but they have also tried to reshape the landscape and the architecture of the place they are living in as they were in their country (Rășcanu, 2014). A consequence of those changes is isolation from the host culture and then the formation of a sort of ghetto. Hence, as stressed by Elisabetta Marino, Monica Ali in *Brick Lane* underlines:

The absence of a real encounter between the mainstream and the ethnic community, which remain mutually segregated, thus highlighting the character of “encapsulated” and “closely knit” that, according to literary

critic and sociologist John Eade (1997), is one of the most remarkable traits of the Bangladeshi enclaves in the UK. The world of *Brick Lane* is therefore thoroughly monocultural, with virtually no mention (or just a few hints) of anyone who does not share a Bangladeshi background. (2008:2)

Therefore, the shock produced in Nazneen when she arrives in Brick Lane is not intense as happens in usual diasporic processes – when first-generation migrants move to another country – as she continues to be surrounded by people and things which are familiar to her or that, at least, are inside the boundaries of her cultural scheme. Moreover, she spends most of her time in her house or about the neighborhood of her estate; Chanu provides her with everything she needs, as going out alone, without husband, might be judged badly by people. As Chanu says to Nazneen: “why should you go out? If you go out then people say: ‘I saw her walking on the street’. And I will look like a fool. Personally, I don’t mind if you go out but these people are so ignorant. What can I do?” (45).

So, the girl has little chances to come into contact with the western culture and experience it, yet, at the same time she is isolated from her community: after six months of staying in London she still feels lonely, although surrounded by people in panjabi-pyjamas and despite her estate is full of signs in Bengali; even if she keeps on cooking Bangladeshi meals as the perfect Bengali wife does, she is still living on the other side of the world, where nobody knows her, except the husband she has just met. Two episodes seem to suggest that instead of seeking for a shelter in her *ghetto* and what is closer to her, she is trying to clash with the other London and its people: the tattoo lady episode and the moment she voluntarily gets lost in London.

The tattoo lady is one of the rare examples of England in the Brick Lane district; Nazneen sees her, from her house, sitting in front of the window; she feels attracted by

her diversity, by the “look of boredom and detachment” that she wears every day. She imagines that one day she could cross the street and talk to her, but suddenly her dreams are broken by the time she realizes she only knows two words of English: *sorry* and *thank you* (19). In that moment Nazneen experiences her first shock discovering the boundaries of communication; for the first time she is not free to use her own language as potentially she could do in Brick Lane (since even the contact with the members of the community are rare). This episode leaves Nazneen in a state of deep loneliness as the narrator tells us: “she could spend another day alone. It was only another day” (19). In this new country her values, her culture and the fact of living with people who share the same background are not enough to survive or at least, do not help her in feeling less alone (Guarducci, 2009). Language is the first barrier to overcome, to be more independent, to achieve a new consciousness and then a new identity. It is the first step through *hybridity*. In other words, language represents the way out of isolation, and that moment shows that even Brick Lane is not free from contamination. Despite the superficial segregation of the community, it would be impossible to deny that western culture is penetrating in the area and that, slowly, people are changing their habits in order to adapt and move forward from their status of migrants. Examples of contamination – e.g. Razia, Mrs. Hazad – are progressively marked in the novel and, as Nazneen meets new people, she starts herself a process of opening that helps her to overcome the shock.

The second episode is linked to Hasina. After discovering that her sister had left her husband and that she was moving to Dhaka, Nazneen unconsciously starts running, and in a short time she found herself out of Brick Lane; for the first time, she reaches

the City without her husband and she gets lost. After spending a few hours without a destination, she starts feeling all the pains of her impetuous action; she is tired and hungry and she realizes that the reason why she did it was that she was empathizing with her sister:

She has got herself lost because Hasina was lost. And only now did she realize how stupid she was. Hasina was in Dhaka. A woman on her own in the city, without a husband, without family, without friends, without protection. Hasina had written the letter before she left. (58)

Guarducci (2009) describes this moment as a necessity for Nazneen to live the same experience that her sister was living. She feels that she could help her by being in the same situation, despite she was already lost: “But how would she go home? That was the point of being lost. “She, like Hasina, could not simply go home. They were both lost in cities that not pause even to shrug” (59). Thus, for a moment, the plotline of Nazneen and Hasina intersect, revealing that one story is specular to the other (Cormack, 2006); Nazneen is not merely reproducing Hasina’s situation but she is actually living the same experience amplified, in another country. Alone, without a coat, she starts examining the situation and she discovers that nobody in the street sees her:

But they were not aware of her. In the next instant she knew it. They could not see her any more than she could see God. They knew that she existed (just as she knew that He existed) but unless she did something, waved a gun, halted the traffic, they would not see her. (56)

Lonely and invisible, Nazneen observes that the life outside Brick Lane follows different rhythms: everybody in the City has his own mission to accomplish and no time to lose in watching what it is going on around them. Finally, she receives a glance from a woman, a smile that looks more like compassion than a friendly gaze, though

(57). Thus, we could suppose that in that moment Nazneen reaches a peak of alienation towards London and its people that makes her wish to be back in Bangladesh and reunite with her sister. Therefore, the emphasis of the shock is directly proportional to the level of alienation from the host country and the connection to the homeland theorized by Răşcanu (2014). Nazneen experience is then an example of reaction to that alienation, since over the years and thanks to her daughters – who inherit their hybridity by birth – she finally understands and accepts the diversity of western culture, embracing it without forgetting her Bengali identity.

## **2.4. Hybrid theory: the second-generation immigrants and the generational gap theme.**

### **2.4.1. Previous studies on assimilation and the boundaries of *Britishness*.**

Besides Nazneen's plotline, Ali's investigation on the identity of diasporic community continues with the analysis of the contrasts between the first and the second generation of Bangladeshi immigrants. The focus of interest is in the approach of the latter generation to their condition of hybrid persons: what is *homeland* in that case; how they react to British society and what is their level of assimilation into the same society; what kind of relationship they keep with the culture of their fathers and if they feel a connection with it. These are the questions that the novel suggests and that tries to answer, exploring different situations and variables, and by observing the real context of British multicultural society. Monica Ali belongs to this hybrid generation.



As pointed out by Solomos,<sup>41</sup> the fact that the first generation had to face the consequence of the war and overcome the racism of the Western society, cultural differences and financial problems still affect the second generation despite their rights as British citizens. Solomos supposes that different factors can influence their distress, such as:

“the persistence of language and cultural differences, the existence of identity problems amongst the second generation, the educational attainment of the descendants of immigrants, the geographical areas they settled in, the particular occupational and industrial sectors the first immigrants originally found work in, and their own aspirations, preferences and choices”. (2013: 562)

In his research, Solomos examines second-generation immigrants of different ethnic groups, but there are plenty of studies about British Indians and Pakistanis that investigate their level of identification with British society and the bicultural aspects in those groups. Many argue that second-generation biculturalism encourages the creation of new identities containing elements of both of their cultures and, Ballard<sup>42</sup> in particular found that, just like in bilinguals “code-switching”, among British-Asians there is a tendency to switch from patterns of a culture to another, depending on the situation. However, the cause of struggle in that generation is provoked by the identification of points of clash in their cultures, those aspects that are perceived by the society as opposed to the principles of West and East cultures. (Ballard, 1994)

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<sup>41</sup> Solomos, in Töngür, A. Nejat, “Rebellion: second generation Bangladeshi immigrants in Brick Lane by Monica Ali”, *The Journal of International Social Research*, Volume 6, Issue 26 Spring 2013, pp. 561-567.

<sup>42</sup> Ballard, R. (Ed.). *Desh Pardesh: The South Asian presence in Britain*. London: Hurts & Co. 2004

Sleszynski<sup>43</sup> wrote about second-generation assimilation process in the United States already in the twenties and, although it might sound far from the Britain of *Brick Lane* over the eighties and the beginning of the new millennium, his analysis still remains useful to understand the new global society and shows that eventually, the assimilation process follows a common course in different countries. Moreover, North America has always been a land of migration, and the States are one of the first countries in which norms and regulations were adopted to manage migration waves (Poggeschi, 2010). Sleszynski refers to the community of immigrants of the United States as “foreign colonies” (1921:157), a description that has some similarities with Brick Lane and others ethnic districts of Britain. Indeed, as in the UK, at the bases of the foreign communities in the US there were a common language and religion. According to Sleszynski, in close communities the penetration of the English language and customs was difficult, but in some case it was promoted by local politicians – if there were any – and taught in the parochial schools. As a matter of fact, the integration process during those years was still at its early stage, and more waves of migration were supposed to reach America over the next decades, due to the two World Wars; therefore, the communal identity was strong and prevalent over Western culture. However, Sleszynski argues that many scholars had always considered second-generation immigrants as one group, regardless of their origins, since they:

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<sup>43</sup> Sleszynski, Thaddeus, “The Second Generation of Immigrants in the Assimilative Process” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol 93, Jan. 1921, pp. 156-161

Are born in America, because they understand and speak English, their assimilation is taken for granted. Closer observation and analysis, however, reveal the fact that this is not altogether true. There are several more or less distinct groups among these people, depending on the different attitudes and reactions they may have to the highly organized life of the foreign communities which has in some way influenced the lives of nearly all of them (1921:156).

Comparing with their foreign community instead, the contact with the American culture let this generation acquire new experiences and a different way of thinking:

Because the young people of the second generation mingle more or less with Americans, gain a knowledge of American traditions and institutions and speak English fluently, they come under influences that have not touched their parents. As a result, there is an inevitable reaction on their part to the standards, interests and attitudes found in the foreign colony (Sleszynski, 1921:158).

Thus, he identified five categories and degrees of assimilation within members of second-generation of different ethnic groups, who in most cases were born in the States, or they had lived only for a short period in their mother country. He called the first group "*conforming to standards of foreign colony*" (Sleszynski,1921): which includes those people that stay inside the community and that have no contacts with people of the host country. Usually, this situation arises in big families living in economic hardship: the young has to leave school after first grade in order to get a job and help their family. Moreover, the development of this condition is more likely to happen in closed communities, already isolated from the bigger community.

To the second group, on the contrary, belong the people that have nothing to do with the foreign communities, since they have always lived outside, or they have lost contact after moving. In the first case, they probably had never learnt the language of their parents; in the second, they forgot it because they have no chance to keep in touch with their relatives or other people of their ethnic group. The assimilation in that case

is total or they could even be considered natives. A third group has the same characteristics of the second one, but with a difference:

Those people have no social or economic interests in an immigrant community. They are the artists, writers and musicians to whom the members of their own nationality point with pride as being of the same race with themselves. They belong entirely to the larger community. (1921:159)

Sleszynki added that nevertheless they do not hide their origins even though they have always lived as Americans.

The fourth and fifth group are the people who most embody the *hybrid* essence, since not only they know and respect the culture and traditions of both communities and speak the language of their father as well as English, but they are also active members in both societies. Moreover, among the members of the fifth group there is the will to improve the relationship between their communities, by erasing the differences and the barriers that impede the communication and lead to the isolation of the smaller community.

In another interesting study, this time about second-generation immigrants in the UK, Vadher and Barrett<sup>44</sup> have defined the boundaries of *Britishness* in British-Indian and Pakistani young adult, re-elaborating the work of Jacobson (1997), in which she found three guidelines to describe how Pakistani people in particular, feel in relation to their “being British”. The selected items were *civil*, *racial* and *cultural* boundaries: the first one is related to the rights of the second-generation as British citizens, which basically

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<sup>44</sup> Vadher, K. and Barrett M., “Boundaries of Britishness in British Indian and Pakistani Young Adults”, *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology* 26 March 2009, pp. 442–458.

determines whether a person has British citizenship or not. The second depends on the individuals' roots and if one has British ancestors, "consequently being 'white', making it difficult for visible minorities to locate themselves inside this boundary" (Vadher and Barrett, 2009:444). This was confirmed also in Vadher and Barret study – that includes also British Indian participants – when in examining the perspectives on threat and racism, the individuals declared that they felt that white British people did not perceive them as British simply because they "did not represent the prototypical British person" (2009:449), even though they were born in the UK. The cultural boundary marks those people who have always had, assumed or felt closer to those behaviors and habits that are typical of the British people. The individuals in this case, have difficulties in defining themselves as British, mainly because in this last boundary they include the religious discourse; since most of the selected people by Jacobson were Muslims, this factor was perceived by many as a reason of division between the two cultures (Jacobson in Vadher and Barrett, 2009).

Vadher and Barret's research brought to light many other and more specific boundaries as an extension of those three criteria used by Jacobson. This addition became necessary in order to describe more closely the perception of each person in relation to Britain, as looking at the previous studies they found that:

The identifications and cultural practices of British Indians and Pakistanis are fluid and context-dependent, and that these individuals are actively engaged in negotiating multiple cultures and identities in the course of their everyday lives. It also suggests that the sense of being British is not a unidimensional factor which can be captured effectively using a single linear scale. Instead, British Indians and Pakistanis appear to use a number of definitional boundaries to position themselves in relationship to Britishness (2009:445).

For instance, the inclusion of boundaries such as the *instrumental* permitted to define Britishness not only in relation to citizenship or skin color, but also to those other rights and possibilities that Britain is giving to the second generation, in comparison to the nation of origins. As a matter of fact, some acknowledged the benefits of being British also in basic rights, such as having access to medical assistance or free education, things that are not assumed in a country such as Pakistan or India (Vadher and Barrett, 2009). The same arguments can be found also in *Brick Lane*, when first-generation immigrant Razia makes lists of the pros of England and cons of Bangladesh:

If you don't have any job here, they give you money. Did you know that? You can have somewhere to live, without any rent. Your children can go to school. And on top of that, they give you money. What would happen at home? Can you eat without working? Can you have a roof above your head? (273)

On the other hand, other boundaries such as the *historical*, in some case works as a boundary of exclusion, as many perceived disrespectful the fact that British history does not consider the contribution of people of other nationality in building British society. The same attitude can be seen at the basis of Karim's fight against ethnic discrimination, that brought him to organize a protest march.

Despite the difficulty of applying the same procedure of study of Vadher and Barrett or Sleszynski to the individuals of *Brick Lane*, it is possible to see if some of the boundaries of Britishness appear in the novel, and if any of the features of the assimilation process occurs in Ali's second generation too.

#### 2.4.2. From critical perspectives to the novel

As Sleszynski's different ethnic groups in the United States, the second-generation immigrants in *Brick Lane* as well cannot be configured as a homogenous group, despite their common roots. First because of their age difference, they have different interests, necessities and they are exposed to different situations; then because they manifest their conflict against different entities: their parents, the Bangladeshi community or British society.<sup>45</sup> However, the reason of this collision has common origins in the clash between Western and Bengali/Muslim cultures, which seem destined to an eternal incompatibility. Moreover, the bicultural system in which these young people live in, is consequently in contrast with both the older generation and their community, which are far from accepting the influence of the English lifestyle, as the identity of their children results more in a mix of elements of Bengali and British cultures.

The second generation is developing a different self-consciousness and it is gaining experiences that are far from the view of their parents and, at the same time, they are contributing to change the face of Britain in its process of multiculturalism. The older generation fears the dispersion of their culture and traditions, but also the corruption of the system of values that they are trying to transmit to their children. Despite the apocalyptic view, Chanu really succeeds in describing the situation of the younger generation and the consequences of what he defines as *the tragedy of immigrants*:

I'm talking about the clash between Western values and our own. I'm talking about the struggle to assimilate and the need to preserve one's

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<sup>45</sup> Töngür, A. Nejat, "Rebellion: second generation Bangladeshi immigrants in *Brick Lane* by Monica Ali", *The Journal of International Social Research*, Volume 6, Issue 26 Spring 2013, pp. 561-567.

identity and heritage. I'm talking about children who don't know what their identity is. I'm talking about the feeling of alienation engendered by a society where racism is prevalent. (113)

Aiming to go back to Bangladesh before his children grow, he thinks he would be able to avoid this situation and to grow his kids according to his culture rules. However, although the reality of facts might be close to the one he describes, his approach to education does not release his two daughters – Shahana and Bibi – from the second-generation condition, instead it will affect the nature of father-daughters relationship until he decides to move to Dhaka alone. Finally, he would have to admit the truth of Mrs. Azad's words:

Why do you make it so complicated? [...] Fact: we live in a Western society. Fact: our children will act more and more as Westerners. Fact: there's no bad thing. My daughter is free to come and go. Do I wish I had enjoyed myself when I was young as well? Yes! (113)

Mrs. Azad's daughter wears short skirts and dyes her hairs like a British girl; she goes to the pub and speaks English fluently and probably it has become her first language, since she uses it even at home with her parents. Her mother did not choose to contain her daughter's assimilation process as her first has adopted western behaviors.

On the other hand, Shahana and Bibi are not allowed to wear jeans or western clothes and to speak English at home, or at least in front of their father since as soon as he is gone the girls turn to English, even though their mother is not fluent as they are. Then, clothes and language become mediums of protest for Shahana, as she uses English to provoke Chanu in refusal to the imposed lectures about the *Tagore* and Bengali culture, or every time he forbids her to do something. The biggest stress for Shahana is that she is conscious of the fact that her father is preparing his daughters for the return to Bangladesh, which is why she hates Bangladesh so much and everything linked to that



country. It is not by coincidence that the sentence she always repeats when she argues with Chanu is “I didn’t ask to be born here” (181) referring to England, or that she talk about “kidnap” when her father shows his plans for the future. In the same way she has no hesitation in declaring that she is “from London” (296), in response to a curious young man who took a picture of the whole family during a tour of London.

Shahana’s identity – for what we can see from the novel – clearly tends towards the British side, and she will prove that until her father understands that she could not follow him to his *homeland*.

This does not mean that the use of a more compliant attitude would not cause any trouble or identity crisis in these children. For instance, the son and daughter of Razia, Tariq and Shefali, have two different reactions in processing their hybrid condition – even though their mother does not force them to strictly follow their traditional roots. As the British culture absorbs them daily, they attend English schools and meet up with white people, Shefali choses to follow the path that any other young British would choose: she wants to go to university, but after spending a sabbatical year, which provoke the shock of her mother (Töngür, 2013). On the other hand, her brother Tariq tries to survive the pressure of school exams, becoming a heroin addict. Indeed, drugs dependency – especially heroin – is painted as one of the central problems that affects the Brick Lane area. Particularly widespread among the young people of the community, the older generation blames the Western society as only guilty of the issue, not considering that the increasing social unease among the second generation is a consequence of the inner conflict between East and West. Even Karim considers the

spread of drugs to a sort of conspiracy of the British against the increasing prosperity of the Bangladeshi community:

Ten years ago, this place was clean [...] but then, what happened, this area started going up. And the City started coming out towards Brick Lane. You got grant money coming in, regeneration money. Property prices going up, new people moving in, businesses and that. And we started to do well man. [...] That is the start of it. No coincidence. S'like what happened in America when the blacks got organized. Black Panthers, all that. You've got to keep them down, keep them quiet. (311)

Karim is an outsider of the second-generation group, as he is the only member that feels more Bangladeshi than British, although he was born and he has always lived in London.

His character is in evolution, as when we first meet him in the novel, he is described as a young British-Asian who has chosen to embrace the faith of his father (he wears jeans, speaks English using slang, the only sign of Islam is the *Salaat alert* he receives on his phone). By the end of the novel his devotion results more in fanaticism, starting from the change of look: he wears the traditional Panjabi-pyjama and he lets his beard grow. Karim's anger is due to the attacks of the gangs of the English suburbs, which want to spread hate towards the ethnic community with violent riots, public disorders and racist leaflets against "immigration, Islamification of the neighborhood, and multiculturalism in Britain, and shunning Islam as *a religion of hate and intolerance*" (Töngür, 2013). His commitment as leader of the Bengali Tigers increases, especially after the attack to the Twin Towers, and he tries to push the other members of the group to react to the continuing provocations of the Lion's Heart movement. The Lion's Heart messages are explicit attacks to Muslim culture, and they try to persuade English people that the existence of ethnic groups in their cities can bring only

disadvantages, as they think they are stealing jobs to the local people. After the World Trade Centre attack in September 2001, the situation becomes tense, as the Muslim population residing in the Western part of the World has to reply also to the illogical accusation of terrorism. Karim is so involved in that dramatic moment, he perfectly understands that this act would affect also the community of Brick Lane: “Who benefits? [...] no Arab nation benefits. No Muslim, anywhere in the world. We are the ones who’re going to suffer. You got to ask, who benefits?” (382).

Karim’s experience is different from the other members of the second generation because he is facing a racist society that does not recognizes him and the other young people of his group as British, but as children of immigration. Thus, as Töngür observes, this generation has found in Islam the “identity and unification they desperately need” (2013:566), which leads them to rediscover the values and culture of the older generation, and to the mystification of the *homeland*. Islam is a shelter from the pains and discrimination of the British society, but also a means of reaction. Indeed, the Bengal Tiger march, at the end, has at least attracted the attention of British people to the discrimination issue of the suburbs and, maybe, it has put the basis for the establishment of better life conditions for the younger “children of diaspora”, such as Shahana and Bibi.

### **3. India/Pakistan - Hanif Kureishi, *Borderline* and *The Buddha of suburbia***

#### **3.1. *Borderline*: about the play**

Even though Kureishi has made his fortune as a novelist and screenwriter, he moved his first steps in theatre, as a playwright. *Borderline*, his first plays, was performed in 1981 by the company of the Royal Court Theatre, where the following year he became writer in residence. During the eighties and the beginning of the nineties, he wrote *Outskirts* (1983) and *London kills me* (1991), in which the choice of topics such as the generational conflict and the ethnic issue emerged as characteristic traits of Kureishi's production<sup>46</sup>. Moreover, the scripts Kureishi wrote for theatre represent one of the first examples of literature by the second generation immigrants - born and raised in Britain - with an Asian background.<sup>47</sup>

The plays were gathered in two collections: *Outskirts and Other Plays*, of 1992: and *Hanif Kureishi: Plays One*, published in 1999.

It would be impossible to talk about Kureishi's works without any reference to the *Black British Culture*. In the first chapter, we talked about the representation of the "black experience" in the two moments described by Stuart Hall in 1988. The term *Black British Culture* was first used during the sixties, related to the cultural production of the black people with a diasporic background, but it was designed mainly for

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<sup>46</sup> Moore-Gilbert, Bart, *Hanif Kureishi*, Manchester University Press, 2001

<sup>47</sup> Sergio Guerra, *Borderline di Hanif Kureishi e il suo rapporto con la Black British Culture*, in *Linguae & Rivista di lingue e culture moderne*, 2008, pp. 61-74

Caribbean migrants. Over the eighties, the term was extended to diasporic subjects of different origins – including India and South Asia in general – and thus to the productions of the sons of diaspora born in the UK (Guerra, 2008). During the first phase, a positive image of black people and their community was promoted with slogans such as “black is beautiful” or “black power”. According to Hall, on the one hand, this moment encouraged the emergence of the representation of the ethnic issue, however on the other, it contributed to create new stereotypes such as the representation of the black man as a victim against the white racist oppressor. That is why the second phase aimed to paint the *Black British Culture* as a diversified phenomenon including different cultures and ethnicities, in order to destroy the false image created of the immigrant figure, and to describe the *black experience* as it is. Once we stopped pretending that the ethnic issue does not exist we must erase the politically correct halo created around the topic (Hall in Guerra, 2008).

As a promoter and performer of the *Black British Culture*, with *Borderline*, Kureishi aims to fulfill this second moment, by presenting the diasporic community of Pakistan in the Southall district, during the troubled period of the social and ethnic riots of the end of the seventies and the beginning of the eighties. His purpose is to paint his society, as a British citizen with Pakistani roots, without filters: he puts on stage characters that differ for generation, background and experiences that can give a complete overview of the reality of diaspora and of the hardness of living in Britain especially during the seventies. Kureishi admitted that at the time of the first representation of the play he was extremely nervous because:

It was, as far as I knew, the first play by an Asian to be produced on the main stage at the Royal Court, a theatre known for its innovation and daring. The only other black playwright I knew was Mustapha Matura, whose work I'd admired. But his work was poetic; he was no social documentarian.<sup>48</sup>

Not only had Kureishi the privilege to be the first Asian author on a British stage but he was the first British-Indian author to present a work about a diasporic community still little known.

The play consists of two acts, respectively of seven and five scenes. In the first act the author introduces the main characters and presents the tense situation of the Asian district; for each plot he reserves about two scenes. The second act instead, is dedicated to the explosion of the riots, in terms of conflicts fought on the streets of Southall, but also in terms of family conflicts – which involves Amina's and Haroon's families.

The characters can be divided into three blocks, as Kureishi wanted to report different situations of the Asian community: the first generation – Amjad, Banoo and Haroon's father (whose name is never mentioned) – in contrast with the second generation – Amina, Haroon, Yasmin and Anwar. The third group is represented by Ravi, who is living his first experience as a newcomer in England and in the piece he gives the “perspectives of the outsider to comment on the depressed state of the nation in this period.” (Moore-Gilbert,2001:37)

Other important characters around the sphere of Ravi's plotline are Anil (his only contact in London) and Susan, a journalist who is recording the experiences of the Asian people in England for a radio programme. She represents the *fil rouge* that links

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<sup>48</sup> Hanif Kureishi, “Fear and paranoia”, *The Guardian*, 22/04/2006, (retrieved 17/07/2017).

all the plotline of the play, as with her interview she is going to record the witnesses of each character.

Finally, the riots topic is at the basis of Yasmin and Anwar's story, which follows the events inside the *Asian Youth Front* and the involvement of the Pakistani youth in the protests.

### **3.1.1. Police on my back: the good and the bad Englishmen**

Behind *Borderline's* plot there is a specific historical fact on which Kureishi focused his attention while writing the script of his play. Indeed, in 1979, Southall became the stage of a particular episode which saw the Asian community directly involved in the social riots of those years. As the same Hanif Kureishi reported to the Guardian:

In April 1979, the police allowed the fascist National Front to hold a meeting in Asian Southall. Two weeks earlier the residents met the Labour home secretary, Merlyn Rees, to ask him to ban the Front's meeting. On the day before the march, 5,000 people went to Ealing Town Hall in support of banning the National Front's meeting, handing in a petition signed by 10,000 residents. Local factories also agreed to strike in protest. Rees refused to give way. It was a question of free speech, even for fascists. (Kureishi, 2006)

The fascist meeting was followed by a public demonstration set up by the Asian people of the district together with the Anti-Nazi League. During the protest, Blair Peach, a thirty year old teacher, was killed after the intervention of the anti-riot team called "Special Patrol Group" – already known for their violent attitude (Kureishi, 2006). Although many proofs and witnesses suggested the involvement of the police in that episode, the sentence that acknowledged the murder of Blair Peach – probably by the

hand of an officer – arrived only in 2010.<sup>49</sup> This event shocked the entire community and caused a fracture in the already divided public opinion on the controversial ethnic issue.<sup>50</sup>

The 1979 riot was only one of a series of protests that set London on fire in those years, and the election of Margaret Thatcher as Prime Minister (in the same year) led to its peak of spreading. Indeed, *Borderline*'s first performance coincided with the year of another great riot, this time involving the Brixton area in South London. The “Bloody Saturday” of April 1981, saw the clash between the Metropolitan Police and the Afro-Caribbean community of Brixton, that reacted over their extremely hard economic and social conditions. As written by Cindy John, what shocked the public opinion was “the unexpectedness of events. On the surface it seemed that black people were well-integrated into the fabric of UK society”.<sup>51</sup> However, the riots were the consequence of a series of political choices adopted by the Government after the huge migration towards Britain of the post-war years, which British people believed had produced unemployment, causing an increasing closure against the black community blamed for this lack of jobs (John, 2006).

Moreover, the worsening of the relations between the Metropolitan Police and ethnic groups was caused by the abuse of the “Sus” law, an order included in the “Vagrancy

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<sup>49</sup> Paul Luis, “Blair Peach killed by police at 1979 protest, Met report finds” *The Guardian*, 22/04/2010, (retrieved 17/07/17)

<sup>50</sup> It was not the first time that the police allowed a manifestation of the National Front, already in 1977 the Battle of Lewisham became sadly known for the clash between the fascists, the anti-NF and the police.

<sup>51</sup> John Cindy, “The legacy of the Brixton riots” *BBC News*, 05/04/2006, (retrieved 26/07/2017)



Act” of 1824, which allowed the police to stop and potentially arrest any “suspected” person.<sup>52</sup> Only in the first days of April 1981, in the name of the Sus law, the police stopped more than 1000 black people (John, 2006). The premises for the Brixton uprising of 1981 were then well defined, and its start was only a matter of time.

As a result of the three days of disorders, 300 policemen and 65 people injured<sup>53</sup>, the “Sus” law was finally repealed at the end of the same year, after “the evidence collected throughout the 1970 documenting the discretionary, arbitrary, and discriminatory uses of this Act by the police against the black population of the inner cities” (Brogden, 1981:44).

With *Borderline*, Kureishi reproduced the same atmosphere of suspicion and anxiety that terrified London during the riots. In his play, the increasing acts of violence and racism against the ethnic minorities are affecting everybody inside the Pakistani community. Moreover, as stressed by Moore-Gilbert, the economic crisis that affects the country during the seventies, entails “a loss of hope in the future which is reflected in the large number of Kureishi's characters who suffer from frustration, helplessness and lethargy, or – by contrast – resentment and anger.” (2001:38)

Therefore, the riots – like the economic decline of those years – work as a background, but also as protagonists of the piece, since they constantly influence the life of all the characters, even of those who do not want to be involved in the protest. For instance some members of the first generation that, as Haroon’s father, profit from the misery

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<sup>52</sup>Brogden Anne, ‘Sus’ is dead: But what about ‘Sas’? in *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, Volume 9, Issue 1, 1981:44-52.

<sup>53</sup> Davey Ed, “Brixton riots 30 years on: What has changed?” In *BBC News*, 10/04/2011, (retrieved 26/07/2017)

of their community. This man exploits his own people by employing in his restaurant only immigrants, not because he wants to help them, but rather because “they have stronger arms” and “they eat less” (Yasmin, 147). His only interest are the incomes of his restaurant, and he is ready to go against his people or whoever will try to contrast the manifestations of the fascist and the whites, if they will threaten his business (113). Similarly, Anil denounce his friend Ravi to the immigration authorities – who has just arrived in England – when he appears in front of his door, as he does not want his friend to discover the truth about his life in England. Other people just try to go on with their lives, even though their white neighbours are no more friendly regarding Pakistani people, who even fear to leave their houses. As in the dialogue between mother and daughter Amina and Banoo, we grasp the worries of the mother about going out in normal days:

Amina: Mama, why do you like the rain?

Banoo: When it rains there's less people on the road. Then I like to go out. I take my umbrella and do the shopping.

Amina: Is that why you like rain, Mama? [...]

Banoo: Then I feel free. (Act 1, scene 3:106)

Amina's family has felt in his skin the effects of racism and now, after many years of living in the UK (as Amina was born in England), Banoo does not feel safe anymore and wants to go back to Pakistan, while her husband Amjad does not want to surrender to “some bad British faces” even after being attacked by their white neighbours:

Banoo: I think we should go back.

Amjad: don't start this argument again. You can't leave a place because you don't like a few people's faces.

Banoo: Amjad, it's not the faces. It's the brick and stones through the window. And we're afraid to go out.

Amjad: We'll stay in. (103)

What emerges from the different reactions of the first generation is that the Pakistani minority of Southall, described by Kureishi, is not a cohesive community. It seems, instead, that the individualism at the basis of Thatcher's ideology is spreading among the ethnic groups as well as the English citizens.

On the other hand, the aim of Kureishi was exactly that of describing a society that is heterogeneous – as it is in real life – and free from all the stereotypes linked to it. The good migrant, with his positive expectations and ready to serve Britain, is then opposed to the selfish and greedy one. The picture of the immigrant as a victim is overturned but still present as a proof that both are sides of the same coin. Ravi and Amjad are victims, the first because of his inexperience and naivety, the second probably because he belongs to another mentality and he is unable to understand the changes of English society. Haroon's father and Anil in turn, represent that part of society that does not look at the benefit of their community but only to their advantages.

In the same way, we have to go beyond the dualism of *the good and the bad Englishman* and reconsider it as one entity, as both are inseparable parts of the modern society. Amjad in particular, insists on the idea of the *good Englishman*, acknowledging the existence of "few bad Englishmen" (166), if they were only a stain of British population. Therefore, his judgement on the racist acts that the Asian community is suffering is so influenced by his extremely positive opinion of British people, that he even denies the existence of any "racial trouble":

Susan: have you had any racial trouble?

Amad: Nothing.

Susan: Really?

Amjad: We all do. But it's nothing. One or two. (123)

However, Amjad is not the only immigrant that tries to cover the violence, indeed Susan's records show that other people inside the community are reluctant to denounce or share their negative experience, because they are scared or because they do not trust the white journalist:

All the people I have spoken to have been beaten or burnt or abused at some time. You speak to them, they say they like England, it is democratic, or just, or good. And then say what's been done to them here. Such viciousness in England. [...] I will try and make a good programme. People don't know what it's like in their own country. (140)

Amjad does not want to lose his hope in English society, which has welcomed him and his family as its children when they left Pakistan. England might be racist, there might be few bad people but at least the law works, that is the thought of Amjad. He has seen the development of the country, he feels he had contributed to its improvement and now he cannot believe that it is moving backwards:

Susan, we were talking about the law, British law, basic justice. I meant the law here genuinely tries to protect men from grievous abuse. But...I can remember what it was like before. And the day Churchill died, that winter, the English neighbours in Ealing came to us. We watched his funeral. You see he was our man too. You trusted things here though they fell down sometimes. Two weeks ago I went to the police about my court case. See this bruise here? Let me say...there are a few bad Englishmen. Some who are uncompassionate. But most are good. Most have treated me respectfully. (166)

Amjad's positions towards Britain and its culture is ambiguous, because on the one hand he is grateful for what he has found by migrating to the UK, as in the new country he feels free and he has made his fortune; however at the same time he does not want to lose his traditions and see his family corrupted by the bad values of the West. Therefore, this closure he reveals, does not help him to understand and accept the

changes and the hard times of Britain. Even the police have mocked his aggression, as Banoo reminds her husband that when the officers came to their house they suggested to Amjad to “go the hospital in a rickshaw”. (107)

Despite that, Amjad’s decision to charge his aggressors retracts the stereotype that see the Asian immigrants as passive victims of white discrimination (Moore-Gilbert, 2001); opposed to her wife Banoo that confessed only to Susan that she has been harassed by some white men on the street (124).

The Asian community is being attacked on more than one front, the older generation seems incapable to protect itself and to stay close; the last chance is the new generation that can count on different experiences of life, a fresh view of the world, and a strong will to be accepted as members of the British society.

### **3.1.2. Second generation in comparison: Brick Lane like Southall.**

Now that we have started talking about Kureishi’s work and *Borderline* in particular, it is appropriate to make a comparison with Ali’s *Brick Lane*, as many of the topics treated by the authors are coincident. In some way, we can say that without Kureishi’s works, Monica Ali’s novel would have not existed, as the author with Pakistani roots was one of the first figures to propose British Indian literature inside the *Black British Culture* discourse.

The influence of Kureishi in *Brick Lane* is even more evident if we think that, so far, in the analysis of the play we have already spoken about riots , discrimination problems and community identity; themes that are all at the basis of Ali’s novel. Furthermore, the choice of many characters of *Brick Lane* seems inspired by Kureishi’s; for instance,

Chanu has lots of aspects in common with Amjad: the same respect for English culture and law on one side, and the deep bonding with the values of their mother country on the other. The combat spirit of Karim for the good of the community is traceable in Yasmin and Anwar's efforts in leading the *Youth Movement*.

As a matter of fact, the main topic that links Ali's work to Kureishi is the tale of the second generation immigrants, a condition to which the authors are close to, as they are both children of the South-Asian Diaspora. Their origins and the period of writing might be different, but the comparison of their works shows that the condition of distress that affected Kureishi generation during the eighties and the early nineties, did not change for the Millennials of Ali.

As in *Brick Lane*, the young Pakistani of *Borderline* suffer a conflict that sees their hybrid nature opposed to three entities: English society, their parents and the Asian community of Southall. The "hybrid syndrome" that affects Haroon and Amina is a good example of the clash between cultures and of the difficulty of this generation to find a place in British society. Their cases are different from the other young Pakistani characters – Yasmin and Anwar – who have already overcome the phase of cultural indecision: they are both active members of the Asian community as leaders of the *Youth Movement*, that fight for the acknowledgement of the rights of the Asians in Britain, organizing marches and protests that can include the use of violence if necessary (Guerra, 2008). Yasmin has already lost a battle against her father, who forced her to an arranged marriage by going into a hunger-strike. Kureishi does not tell us how Yasmin's story ends, but we do know that at the time of the play, she is "no longer married to a man" because she has "understood...one or two things about

things” (116). However, neither Anwar nor Yasmin refuse to embrace their origins and culture; as leaders of the *Movement* they aim to improve the community conditions and to stop the racist acts against them.

The alignment of the two teenagers and lovers, Haroon and Amina is not yet defined. On one side, we have Haroon: brilliant student and promising writer, he used to write for the *Youth Movement* journal and he is finishing his first novel. From the first act we grasp that he used to be pretty involved in the *Movement* cause, but he is determined to leave Southall and the community life to continue his studies in London, as he feels no longer represented by the values of his culture and religion. He feels no longer capable of bearing the closure that all the fights and the tension has caused to his people:

Haroon: I’m cramped her.

Amina: You are? You are?

Haroon: And you. All of us. Shut in for safety. Strong and solid now. But stifled here together. Here my brain feels like a tight ball. The tension. The fighting does that.

Amina: We call it self-protection here. I s’pose you want white education. You called it the white lie before. You said that they’d whitewashed history. You’ll be playing polo next. What about the Indian poets? You read them to me. [...]

Amina: And after the riots, when we first went out, I felt so happy.

Haroon: We boiled over. (117)

Then, when Amina confesses to Haroon that she will not oppose to the arranged wedding that her father is organizing for her, he says this is the reason why he hates the place he lives in and the people: “the out-of-date ways. This ridiculous religion. You’ve got to say no” (137). Amina feels betrayed by Haroon’s change of beliefs, first because for her it meant the end of their relationship, as he decided to break up with

her to go to London; then because, in front of all the pains her family is suffering because of the discrimination of white people, she cannot believe Haroon is turning his back to the community.

However, the old-fashioned traditions of the Asian community are not the only problem in Haroon's life, as he has to deal with his father, the aggressive "businessman" that for the benefit of his restaurant and the improvement of his profit tries to obstruct the choices of his son. Indeed, the reconciliation of Haroon with the *Youth Movement* is not a matter of redemption but instead it reveals to be a revenge against his father's oppression.

Haroon accepts to help Yasmin and Anwar in organizing a picket in front of his father's restaurant – where the council's members use to eat during their meeting – only to damage his business. Indeed, his beliefs still do not seem to coincide with those of the *Movement*, as Haroon's vision and solution for the racial issue keep being completely different from the one of his friends. He thinks the movement does not use the proper ways to denounce the discrimination of the white society, and that Asian people should raise their voices not with the protests, but with education on one side and with the institutional dialogue on the other:

We've got to engage in the political process. Not just put out fires when they start them. Yasmin and Anwar – they're brave. But they're separatist. I say we've got to get educated. Get educated and get inside things. The worm in the body, Amina. (118)

I'm telling you, we've got to be properly influential in this country. Join parties, sit on committees, work for paper (150).



Haroon looks at the actions of the *Movement* as primitive and useless, the riots will not put the focus on the discrimination problems of the Asians in Britain, but they will only foment the stereotypes and the segregation of the community:

Anwar: We've got to do things here, now! Protect these people here, now. You're too theoretical.

Yasmin: Go and join the Labour Party. Go and collaborate with that stagnant racist organization.

Haroon: You people, you come from villages, you've still got village mentalities, and English people will always treat you like fucking villagers. (150)

Haroon's philosophy reminds to the *Brick Lane's* character Chanu, that during the Bengal Tigers meetings calls to order Karim and the other members of the movement that aim to respond to the attacks of the fascist group with the same spirit of violence and provocation approaches they used. Here the difference with Chanu lays in Haroon's temper: despite his good intentions, during the picket he over reacts throwing a chair through a window of the restaurant, revealing the inner conflict that is slowly pushing him outside the community. Haroon is still a boy looking for a place in the world, his lack of experience and of a guide – that he cannot find in his parents – are the fatal elements that impedes him to look forward and exit from that situation.

Yasmin's words clearly identify Haroon's problem:

I understand what you've going through, because it's happened to me. To many of us. You've taken all the conflicts inside yourself. But you can't live like that, as if race and contempt and all that was some kind of personal problem you can work through on your own. It'll tear you apart in the end. (149)

Like Haroon, Amina has not managed to achieve her independence from her family, neither she knows how to deal with her English identity. Her parents raised her as a Muslim girl, hoping that she would not grow corrupted by English values. However,

her father does not know that instead she goes out at night wearing western clothes, and that she has a love affair with Haroon. Their family would not accept their relationship as Amina is going to marry another man that her father has chosen for her. The girl has inevitably been influenced by British culture and life-style as she only knows that reality and she has never been to Pakistan. Despite that, her relationship with her parents is not hostile as in Haroon's situation, but it is more a slow estrangement, in which Amina pretends to act as the perfect daughter in front of her father, sneaking out of her room window during the night.

Banoo has discovered her game anyhow, realizing that her daughter has grown up "too English":

We never realized how English she would become. We can't even write English. She understands life here more than us. We have not helped her here. I feel it, Amjad, when she looks at us, like a little girl. She needs help. Advice. But we are useless. Our ways are no good for her. (126)

Unlike Haroon, Amina finds in the *Youth Movement* a shelter from her family drama. Yasmin has become a guide for her, since she has passed through the same difficulties that Amina is facing. Nevertheless, by the end of the play we see that there is a huge gap in the way the two characters relate to their respective situations. Although she feels oppressed by her parents' choice, Amina still respects them and tries to see the reason of her father's decision, while Yasmin – even after Amjad's death – cannot understand the reason why she continues to believe in her father's words.

Yasmin: Why listen to that, then? They're empty men, those kind of fathers. If you pick them with a pin they'll explode like balloons.  
Amina: No I don't believe that.  
Yasmin: Why not? If your father had lived, you'd be washing Farouk's flowery shirts by now.

Amina: At one time, in the old house, my father had loads of English friends. They really liked him. They'd bet on horses and watch TV in the afternoon. [...] We hardly know any English people. And my father said some good things I want to understand. (167)

More than once Amina has been troubled by the prospect of her arranged marriage, as she knows that in order to not disappoint her family she would have to sacrifice her wishes and accomplish Amjad's will. Particularly exemplifying is Amina's reply to her mother's question – after the first meeting with Farouk, her promised husband – who asks the girl if she is satisfied with her future husband, she says that “he is everything a father could want” (156).

The complete submission and obedience of the girl to her father's will recalls to *Brick Lane*'s protagonist Nazneen, who was engaged by her own father in an arranged marriage when she was a young girl, just like Amina. Nazneen shares with the girl the same destiny but they walk through a reverse path: Nazneen from the Bangladeshi village moves to Britain to get married; Amina, instead, is supposed to marry in Britain to move back to Pakistan, where her relatives live. However, unlike Nazneen, the death of Amjad finally releases her from her doom. We can notice that the stories of Ali and Kureishi are bounded by the same endings, as by the end both Nazneen and Amina find their freedom in Britain, and they will build their future by their own, without the help of any man. Both the characters are in evolution, their inexperience in life at first led them to be dependent from other men – their fathers, lovers or husbands – and it is always with the help of another woman (Yasmin for Amina, Razia for Nazneen), that they find the strength to open their mind and gain awareness of themselves.

### 3.1.3. Conclusion

Kureishi paints a community which is angry and unsatisfied about their life conditions in Western society. The Southall community, as others ethnic districts of London, is a group that struggles to live in an environment which is hostile to understand other people's practices and that increasingly refuses to share their own, in order to find a solution. The fights and riots produced from that situation however, are not pure acts of violence aimed at destroying the other part, but rather manifestations of this discomfort and of the differences that lie within the same community. Thus, the protest is not put into effect in a cohesive and unique way, as the movements and associations that try to spread the voice of the British Asians are not cohesive on their insight, but show different points of view, experiences and backgrounds that inevitably influence their way of thinking and their actions. Yasmin, Anwar and Haroon represent that diversity. On the one hand, there are people like Anwar, who look for the fast results, which implies the use of violence. Haroon on the opposite, is the one who choose the long-term solution, as he thinks that the political dialogue is the best way to achieve respect. In the middle we have Yasmin, who acts like a moderator of Anwar's methods. She is the one that understands the incompatibility between the Western and the Asian worlds, and more importantly, she understands that in both sides there are aspects and patterns that should be improved in order to fit in the time and place in which they are standing:

I'm not against things here. I want them to be improved. And for women like us (*referring to Amina*), too much is dictated by other people. By our parents. And tonight by white racists. They have their meeting and we run about like football supporters. (167)

The fight that Yasmin promotes is not *one-side* oriented; things in British society must change for the benefit of everyone, be they white or black. The Multicultural Britain is a reality and – as in Stuart Hall’s vision – Kureishi tries to underline those differences that should be at the basis of a multicultural society, which should guarantee equal rights for everybody and, at the same time, it should protect and support the variety of cultures and social differences (Guerra, 2008).

### **3.2. *The Buddha of Suburbia*: about the novel**

After years of work in theatre, as a playwright and screenwriter, in 1990 Kureishi debuted with his first novel, *The Buddha of Suburbia*. The book won the “Whitbread Award” for the best novel published in 1990, becoming immediately a bestseller that sold more than half a million copies and that has been translated in more than twenty languages.<sup>54</sup> Three years later the BBC produced a mini-series for the television based on the novel, with a soundtrack by David Bowie.<sup>55</sup> Today Kureishi’s novel continues to be printed and read as one of the best examples of contemporary British fiction.

*The Buddha of Suburbia* has been labeled in different ways, as in part it takes the characteristics of a *bildungsroman*, considering that it is a novel of formation (Thomas, 2005). More specifically it has been compared to a *picaresque novel*<sup>56</sup> for its use of the first person as in an autobiography; for its plot, based on the tale of the series of misadventures of the protagonist, Karim; and for the social characteristics of the protagonist, as usually in this genre the main character comes from the lower social classes, as the working class. Moreover, *The Buddha of Suburbia* traces the path of Karim along the London background and the British society of the end of the XX century, which the author describes in details as in the prototypical picaresque novel

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<sup>54</sup> Susie Thomas, *Hanif Kureishi: a reader guide to essential*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.

<sup>55</sup> Simon Robb, “The Buddha of Suburbia by Hanif Kureishi”, *The Guardian* 03/10/2009, (retrieved 11/08/2017)

<sup>56</sup> Spanish genre of the XVI century, which narration is based on the adventures of the so-called rogue villagers *picaros*. *El Lazarillo de Tormes*, novel of the 1554, is considered the work that launched the genre.

*El Lazarillo de Tormes*.<sup>57</sup> On the other hand, Naranjo Acosta (1994) argues that Kureishi has added to the genre the main characteristic of the *bildungsroman*: if the typical “picaros” are static characters, incapable of learning from their mistakes, contrarily Karim is in constant evolution both in the physical and spiritual levels:

Karim, apart from a rogue, is a questing hero. He has embarked upon a pilgrimage, a journey that is going to take him from a suburb to the busiest part of London. [...] Notwithstanding, underneath all the pain and laughter, Kureishi is showing us the experiences of a young man who is looking for himself. [...]

In *The Buddha of Suburbia* there is a double process of pilgrimage. The first one is merely geographical, as the protagonist moves from one place to another. However, there is also what we could call a spiritual pilgrimage, at the end of which Karim not only wants to improve his social status, but also and above all to have a deeper understanding of life. (Naranjo Acosta, 2004: 54-55)

The book tells the story of Karim, first son born from the mixed-marriage between an Indian man and an English woman, Haroon and Margaret. The young man moves his first steps in the suburbs of London during the seventies, and from here he will start the journey that leads him to London and New York, cities that represent for him success and failure at the same time, but also personal growth and self-discovery.

The novel is divided into two sections – named *In the suburbs* and *In the city* – which follow the movements of Karim from the suburbs to the city in a trip between two decades, the seventies and the eighties, in the background of the most vibrant London: at the heights of the social riots against racial discrimination and the cultural and the artistic ferment, between the new-born punk-rock and sexual revolution. Thomas

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<sup>57</sup> Isaías Naranjo Acosta, “Pilgrimage: On Hanif Kureishi’s *The Buddha Of Suburbia*”, *Revista Canaria de Estudios Ingleses*, No. 28, 1994:53-63

defined the book as “an extraordinary rich and multi-layered novel which ranges across class, race, left-wings politics, gender, sexuality, pop culture, literature and the theatre.” (2005:63)

Some of those themes of *The Buddha of Suburbia* already occurred in other Kureishi’s works, such as the impact of new migrants on British society, the arranged marriage and women emancipation in the Asian community. For instance, the story of the false expectation of Ravi, in *Borderline*, is comparable to the one of Changez, who came to England in order to get married and hoping to find a devoted wife instead of the independent woman that is Jamila. On the other hand, the hunger-strike started by Anwar to force her daughter to marry a man that she never met, reminds of Yasmin’s situation. Moreover, the sexual and homosexual liberation interlaced with the racial issue, that characterizes London during those years were already the focus of *My Beautiful Launderette*. The fact that those topics are repeated is not due to the lack of fantasy of the author but first is linked to the choice of different forms of writing and representation (a play, a film and a novel); on the other hand, we can see a sort of scheme in the choice of themes that are in common with the diaspora genre.

In many occasions Kureishi’s work has been compared to the productions of other post-colonial authors such as Naipaul and Rushdie – who share with the writer a similar cultural and diasporic background. However, the author declared that at the time he started writing he did not feel enough represented by those authors; because they were born elsewhere, they did not share with him the mark of *hybridity*. His life, and the one of the other British-Indians was still untold (Kureishi in Mccrum, 2014). Thus, Kureishi creates a character that is far from fictional, but rather autobiographical



in many aspects. The references to his life recur in every page of the novel: from the choice of a hybrid boy of the suburbs as a protagonist, to his ambition to become an theatre actor, passing through the complicate and fluctuating relation with his parents (and his father in particular). The character of the father, Haroon, is built from Kureishi's father figure, even though the author admitted that most of the facts he wrote about him are fictional. Kureishi actually starts from the story of his father to write *The Buddha of Suburbia* as he stated in an interview:

A young man leaves Bombay in the I940s or 1950s. He comes to England and marries an English woman. And all of this takes place in a historical, politi- cal, and social setting. So I looked at my father, and I began to uncover the world in which he lived and developed and had children. This man is very concerned about how his children are going to turn out. They will be neither Indian nor English.<sup>58</sup>

As Haroon, Kureishi's father came from a wealthy family of Bombay that sent him to England to get an upper education. From the wealthy life in a big house with servants and tennis courts, he discovered the misery of the suburbs. Kureishi reports in his novel the first impressions of Karim's father when he arrived in Britain, the broken expectations which many immigrants probably felt in moving after the war from the Indian Empire to the Mother Country. England did not look like the wealthy country he expected to find, but rather the city was "derelict after being bombed to rubble during the war" and Haroon was "amazed and heartened by the sight of the British in

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<sup>58</sup> Amitava Kumar, "Hanif Kureishi, A Bang and a Whimper", *Transition*, No. 88, 2001:114-131, Indiana University Press on behalf of the Hutchins Center for African and African American Research at Harvard University.

England. He'd never seen the English in poverty, as roadweepers, dustmen, shopkeepers and barmen." (24)

The historical and social background in which Kureishi developed his novel thus, is important because it gives an impressive picture of the London of those years, but it does not want to be a detached debate on the post-war period, but rather a tool that helps to contextualize the single characters in the society.<sup>59</sup>

From the beginning of his life, Karim has always been surrounded by different kinds of people, and during his journey he will make new encounters that will influence his choices, helping him in the discovery of himself. The characters he meets are both part of the first and second generation immigrants and white people coming from the most different social contexts. In fact, it has been noticed that during his career, Kureishi has gradually tended to write about the convergence of races and, among his other works, in the *The Buddha of Suburbia* we can see the finest realization of this melting in Karim, son of interculturality.<sup>60</sup> More precisely, the scenario that the writer has chosen for his novel is again a suburban area of London – a separated world completely different from the city; however, this time the story is no more focused on the life of the ethnic community, as one entity, in contrast with English society – as emerged in *Borderline* and Ali's novel *Brick Lane* – but on the life and experiences of the single persons, oriented toward a larger entity, the City, where multiculturalism finds its nest. As a matter of fact, while *Brick Lane* and *Southall* are closed community, inhabited

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<sup>59</sup> "I would like to say that I'm not really interested in politics. What I'm interested in is character. I'm more interested in society than politics, if you can make that distinction" (Kureishi in Kumar, 2001:120)

<sup>60</sup> Moya Jones-Petithomme, "Hanif Kureishi: identité(s) interculturelle(s)", *Etudes Britanniques Contemporaines* n° 1. Montpellier: Presses universitaires de Montpellier, 1992

only by people of the South-Asian minorities, the suburbs that Kureishi describes are populated by mixed people, in which Karim's family becomes the symbol of the encounter of the East with the West. This does not mean that the suburbs of Kureishi are a happy place, where racism and prejudice have been overcome and where the inclusion of the ethnic community has been accomplished, but rather it is the sign of a society in evolution in which it is no longer possible to ignore the existence of the ethnicities that are gradually changing the look of Britain, and where the same concept of *nationality* is consequently put into question. Indeed, if the canons of *Englishness* are changing because of the variety of people, because of the mixture of cultures and traditions, then it is no more possible to talk about assimilation into British society as a standard model. Here is the point stressed in the novel: if the "homogeneous Englishness" no longer exists, "what exactly are immigrants being asked to assimilate into?" (Thomas, 2005:64) Then it would be a mistake to classify *The Buddha of Suburbia* as a mere "ethnic novel, written for or about a particular community" as Thomas suggests reporting Robert Lee's words:

Rather "it proceed(s) from, and inscribe(s) a quite ineradicable and historic multicultural Englishness or Britishness [...] it speaks out of, and to, the absolute centre of 'England', changing the 'script' of what it means to be English." (Lee in Thomas, 2005:62)

Another interpretation of Kureishi's writing is the one offered by Shoene that sees the "social-homogenization" described in the *Buddha of Suburbia* not as a synonym of "anglicization", "but rather genuine polyculturalism" - in the same meaning used by Homi Bhabha to distinguish between *cultural diversity* and *cultural difference* (Shone in Thomas, 2005:65). On the other hand, Moore-Gilbert finds Shoene's interpretation

naïve, and on the contrary he considers the multiculturalism of Britain as a new form of colonialism “which attempts to leaven the ‘dull Saxonism of English culture’ with metropolitan minorities while still maintaining control”. Thus, he suggests reading “the gaping void at the disheartened core of the middle-class suburban Englishness” of the novel, as the “centre’s selective appropriation of ‘alien’ cultures [...] not as a symptom of ‘lack’, but of a confidently enduring neo-colonial mentality” (Moore-Gilbert in Thomas, 2005:63).

In which way we decide to read the relationship among different cultures in Kureishi’s novel, we cannot avoid seeing Karim’s hybridity as a result of this.

### **3.2.1 Fluorescent adolescents: an Englishman called Karim.**

The novel opens with a strong incipit in which the protagonist introduces himself as the product of a miscegenation, “a new breed” as he called himself:

My name is Karim Amir, and I am an Englishman born and bred, almost. I am often considered to be a funny kind of Englishman, a new breed as it were, having emerged from two old histories. But I don't care – Englishman I am (though not proud of it), from the south London suburbs and going somewhere. (3)

The combination of the name of the protagonist with the word “Englishman” immediately creates confusion in the reader’s mind and contrasts with what we have just said about the existence of a defined *Englishness*; however the reaction is suddenly resized by the end of the sentence thanks to the adverb “almost” that refocuses the attention on hybridity (Jones-Petithomme, 1992).

With irony, Karim’s introduction continues with an account of the themes of the novel:

Perhaps it is the odd mixture of continents and blood, of here and there, of belonging and not, that makes me restless and easily bored. Or perhaps it was being brought up in the suburbs that did it. Anyway, why search the inner room when it's enough to say that I was looking for trouble, any kind of movement, action and sexual interest I could find, because things were so gloomy, so slow and heavy, in our family, I don't know why. Quite frankly, it was all getting me down and I was ready for anything. (3)

This passage reveals the main theme of the journey, studded with the other “satellite topics” that are the reason for the beginning of that journey. This seventeen year old boy is presented as unsatisfied and bored by the monotony of the suburbs, moved by a necessity of change and experimenting new things, no matter how immoral and transgressive they will be. If in part it is a desire dictated by the young age of Karim and the typical behavior of a teenager, on the other hand it reflects the condition of distress that he feels by living in the body of a hybrid person. His beige skin, brown eyes and hairs immediately call for the attention of white people, that look at him as an exotic object; but nobody sees his other side at first sight, that his mother tongue is English, that his own mother is a born and bred white English woman and, furthermore, that he has never seen India in his whole life. The best example of how appearance can be deceptive, is the dentist's episode, in which the doctor right before starting the treatment asks the nurse if his patient is an English speaker; Karim promptly replied in sarcastic way: “A few words”. (258)

This does not make him more English than Indian: Karim does not know where life is taking him and what he is going to become, he is not following a defined plan, but keeping all the opportunities that life reserved him as they show up; he is an unshaped person whose personality has not emerged yet.

Karim is not the only character who seems constantly negotiating with his own personality, but he is part of a group of “vacillating people” of which whites and blacks are indistinctly members, which suggests how both parts can feel in uncomfortable their own body, as a condition that affects more than one category of people in the postmodern British society.<sup>61</sup> The leader of this group could be represented by Karim’s father, Haroon. This controversial character is one of the most important figures in Karim’s life, as it is under the influence of his father that the boy will begin his escaping project. In fact, we can say that Haroon started that process of self-acknowledgement and awakening that gradually will spread all over the Amir family. From Haroon’s conversion into an emerging prophet of the suburbs, to Karim’s discovery of theatre, passing through the forced emancipation (the divorce) of his mother Margaret and the silent awakening of the little brother Allie. It is Haroon that Karim blames for his boring life in the suburbs:

“Dad had had an idyllic childhood, and as he told me of his adventures with Anwar I often wondered why he’d condemned his own son to a dreary suburb of London of which it was said that when people drowned they saw not their lives but their double-glazing flashing before them.” (23)

While Karim always defines himself as “almost English”, his father is depicted as a proud Indian man:

Like many Indians he was small, but Dad was also elegant and handsome, with delicate hands and manners; besides him most Englishmen looked like clumsy giraffes. He was broad and strong too: when young he’d been

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<sup>61</sup> Charlie or Eleanor, for instance, are not less frustrated than Karim. On the contrary they are the most complex and depressed characters, constantly unsatisfied and for this reason in continuous mutation.

a boxer and fanatical chest-expander. He was as proud of his chest as our next-door neighbours were of their kitchen range. (4)

Despite the pride in his body, Haroon is a naïve person, who is still capable of getting himself lost in the streets of the South London suburbs, where he has been living for twenty years. However, Karim acknowledges that his innocence somehow attracts women, but he was sure that his father, a person with solid values and respectful of the holy marriage, would have never used his charm to sleep with anyone except his mother. Until this time. Karim describes the moment when the calm of the Amir family was broken as “the day everything changed. In the morning things were one way and by the bedtime another” (3). On that day, Haroon came back from work not in the usual “gloomy mood” and started preparing for the night he would have been consecrated as the Buddha of the (Bromley) suburbs, the night he was asked “to speak on one or two aspects of Oriental philosophy” (5). During that night father and son would both discover something about each other that will change their life: Karim finds out about his father cheating on Margaret with Eva, Haroon sees his son experimenting sexuality with Charlie – Eva’s son.

This moment represents for the two characters a turning point, as the consequence of that night will gradually lead them both far away from the suburbs; but it marks also a change in their relationship as father and son. For both it is hard to accept the truth of what they saw, Karim knows that his parents will probably divorce, and his father is visibly confused about his son’s behavior that he neither knows how to react:

He was disappointed in me. He jumped up and down in anguish as if he’d just heard the whole house had been burned to the ground. [...] I had to stop him yelling before we had Mum out and the neighbours round. I whispered, ‘But I saw you, Dad.’ ‘You saw nothing. [...]’ He said, with

utter contempt. He could be very arrogant. It must have been his upper-class background. But I had him [...] I'll never mention tonight again' I said. 'And nor will you.' (18)

From this scene it is clear that Karim's family is pretty different from the traditional ethnic family and from the others we have met in his previous work, as well as in Monica Ali's novel. First because it is not a proper ethnic family: in a mixed marriage the traditions and customs of both cultures are claimed to contribute to the growth of family, but the balance of values would never be perfectly stable – also because of the influence of the social context in which the family lives. Moreover, Haroon has nothing to do with *Brick Lane*'s character Chanu, who gives lectures to his daughters about Bengali culture, or Amjad, who forbids to Amina to go out in western clothes. The simple fact that Karim and Allie do not speak the language of their father – as Haroon never uses his mother tongue with them – changes the status of their hybridity. As a matter of fact, the apathy that Haroon shows toward his origins meant for their children to grow up in total ignorance about their Indian side. As Karim acknowledges after observing the Indian funeral of his uncle:

But I did feel, looking at these strange creatures now – the Indians – that in some way these were my people, and that I'd spent my life denying or avoiding that fact. I felt ashamed and incomplete at the same time, as if half of me were missing, and as if I'd been colluding with my enemies; those withes who wanted Indians to be like them. Partly I blamed Dad for this. After all, like Anwar, for most of his life he'd never shown any interest in going back to India [...], he preferred England in every way. [...]

He wasn't proud of his past, but he wasn't unproud of it either; it just existed, and there wasn't any point in fetishizing it, as some liberals and Asian radials liked to do. (213)

Probably because he never planned to go back to his country he has never thought about teaching his children something about India. Thus, the difference with Chanu



and Amjad is that they keep a strong bond with their homeland because they had always planned their return and they must prepare their sons for this. Haroon's renewed interest in the practice of yoga and his approach to Buddhism and Chinese philosophy, instead, are more related to the love affair with Eva, as she is clearly attracted by everything "exotic". Haroon is slowly creating a new character based on the stereotypes about the Indians, he becomes "a magician" (31) in front of British eyes and even Karim seems incredulous about his father's performance:

He was certainly exotic, probably the only man in southern England at that moment (apart, possibly, from George Harrison) wearing a red and gold waistcoat and Indian pyjamas. [...] Perhaps Daddio really was a magician, having transformed himself by the bootlaces (as he put it) from being an Indian in the Civil Service who was always cleaning his teeth with Monkey Brand black toothpowder manufactured by Nogi & Co. of Bombay, into the wise adviser he now appeared to be. (31)

Haroon had spent most of his life in England trying to integrate in the society, in order to be accepted by British people, but finally he realizes that despite all his efforts, for them he will always remain only an Indian man. Schoene suggests that his relationship with nationality, being it English or Indian, is always linked to the old colonial discourse of mimicry, as "he started off as the mimic Englishman and, when this fails, he becomes a mimic Indian" (Schoene in Thomas, 2005:66). His artificial personality reveals the huge distress of a man incapable of accepting himself, as even when he could show everybody his pure essence of Indian, the result is an exaggerated and comic character.

The *exotic* is a recurrent theme in the novel that as a baton passes from father to son, affecting Karim's life as well as his career in the theatre. From Eva's exclamation – "Karim Amir, you are so exotic, so original! It's such a contribution! It's so you!" (9)

– to the first important role he interpreted in theatre – Mowgli of *The Jungle Book* – Karim inevitably finds himself closed into the label of “ethnic” and forces into a character – in theatre as in real life – that it is only a mask, the mirror of what British people see when they look at him. Shadwell recruits Karim in his company not for his talent as an actor but rather for his look, as his dark skin, the small stature and the wiry body makes him the perfect candidate to fit in the tiny costume of Mowgli: the savage boy bred by the Jungle animals. (143)

But as soon as he realizes that Karim is not a “real Indian”, his being exotic is not enough for the success of his play. The character must be “authentic”, for this reason Karim has to act with an Indian accent, not as a savage of “Orpington”, neither his skin is enough brown to embody the character, so a huge amount of brown make-up is required. Mowgli’s costume is offensive for both the Indian and the British Karim as it deprives himself of any sort of personality. It puts Karim in the condition of a mercenary artist, that in order to achieve success has to find a compromise with himself:

As she (the designer) covered me from toe to head in the brown muck I thought of Julien Sorel in *The Red and the Black*, dissimulating and silent for the sake of ambition, his pride often shattered, but beneath it all solid in his superiority. So I kept my mouth shut even as her hand lathered me in the colour of dirt. (146)

But the “exotic fever” that affects the ethnic community sometimes happens to find its victims also among the British population. To be “exotic” in London means to be different and interesting but also original and new; that is why Indians seem so attractive in Eva’s and other British people’s eyes. While for Margaret, the unexpected success of her husband, as an Indian prophet for the neighbourhood, is the proof of the

insignificance of her life. Her character is anti-exotic, and she has the power to transform the so unreachable desire of *Britishness* of the migrants and hybrid people into the most futile of the battle. As in this brief dialogue between herself and Haroon:

“But isn’t me that Eva wants to see. She ignores me. Can’t you see that? She treats me like dog’s muck, Haroon. I’m not Indian enough for her. I’m only English.” “I know you are only English, but you could wear a sari”.  
(5)

Haroon’s use of stereotypes about the Indians, here is even more humiliating for Margaret, that clearly knows that the fact of wearing a sari will not change her miserable condition. In divorcing, Margaret surprisingly finds peace, as she finally releases from the shadow of her husband that had always blurred her personality. In seeing her mother at the preview of the *Jungle Book*, Karim declares he had “forgotten how happy she could be” (156).

Going back to stereotypes, the novel seems to declare war – more or less directly – to those that affect the ethnic communities, the Asians included, continuing the work he had already begun in *Borderline*, in which he wanted to describe his community as authentically as possible, free from prejudices but also from the hypocrite representation of the immigrant as a passive victim of the British society.

While the “exotic fever” has turned being Indian into something fashionable; as an actor Karim tries to tell the life of his people in Britain as he knows and as he experienced, but the comments he receives reveal, instead, a British society still bound to the *politically correct* discourse, that even inside minorities struggles to be demolished. In this way, the black actress Tracy finds Karim’s monologue about Anwar – in which he talks about the hunger-strike episode – ridiculous and fanatical:

“I’m afraid it shows black people [...] as being irrational, ridiculous, as being hysterical. And as being fanatical” “Fanatical? It’s not a fanatical hunger-strike. It’s calmly intended blackmail.”

“And that arranged marriage. It worries me. Karim, with respect, it worries me. [...] Your picture is what white people already think of us. That we’re funny, with strange habits and weird customs. To the white man we’re already without humanity, and then you go and have Anwar madly waving his stick at the white boys. I can’t believe anything like this could happen. You show us as unorganized aggressors. Why do you hate yourself and all black people so much Karim?” (180)

Tracy here, commits the worst of mistakes in talking about minorities in general, using the umbrella term “black” and including in it the Asian community. She believes that the black culture must be protected over truth, but while Karim thinks that “truth has a higher value” (181), Tracy does not recognize the authenticity of the reality that Karim is presenting – probably because she is not familiar with that – as she believes he is defending and confirming the point of view of white people. Quite opposite is the position of Karim’s brother Allie, that finds the play that Karim worked on with Tracy “idealistic”, and considers irritating those people who goes along complaining “all the time about being black, and how persecuted they were at school”; they rather “should shut up and get on with their lives.” (267) Allie is persuaded that the condition of Indians in Britain – or at least their own, the hybrids – is privileged, because he believes they are not an oppressed category. But looking back at the school days, Karim had to deal with discrimination, having been called Curryface or covered of spits while going back home.

Moreover we do know that the facts are different, as the attacks to the Asian community are a reality also in the suburbs of Karim’s childhood. The National Front makes his appearance in Kureishi’s novel only by the end of the story, when a group

of fanatics injured Changez, Jamila's husband; but also Anwar – in the past – had to defend himself from some young skin-heads. Like Amjad in *Borderline*, the treatment that Changez receives from the police after the attack is far from respectful of his situation, as they believe that the injuries he reported were self-inflicted.

As we approach the eighties, things are getting worse for ethnic communities, the riots explode in the streets of London and Kureishi as to remind about the event of 1979:

The National Front were parading through a nearby Asian district. There would be a fascist rally in the Town Hall; Asian shops would be attacked and lives threatened. Local people were scared. We couldn't stop it: we could only march and make our voices heard. (225)

But this time Kureishi does not want the riots to steal the scene to other important issues. The marches are mentioned as they were part of the background of London, but as we saw, the fight of the Indian community against discrimination here is not the main point. This is a formation novel, and the spotlight is on another character, Karim, whose lack of perseverance and diversity keep on leading him elsewhere in the world.

### **3.2.2 London calling: the diaspora from the suburbs to the city**

As we said before, the pilgrimage that Karim undergoes has a double nature: it is physical because he moves from the suburbs of London to the City (London and New York); and it is spiritual because each travel brings the young Englishman to profound changes in his way of living and in the way he sees the world. In a certain sense, we can say that Karim is experiencing a sort of diasporic journey, as his father and the other members of the Indian community did in moving from India to Britain. While the cultural shock that Karim has to face in his migrating process might not be compared to that felt by his father the first time he arrived in England, and his expectations

certainly would not be so far from reality as in Haroon's case<sup>62</sup>; Karim knows that he will have to deal with a society that is still not familiar with this new breed of people – the hybrids – but he does feel positive about his future in London, as the new cultural and political ferment that is spreading in the Capital City seems opening the doors to changes and to the acceptance of the different.

It is precisely through the discovery of culture, literature and music, that Karim reaches the decision to move from the suburbs. But not through the culture you learn at school: in his room, when the sun goes down and the neighbours go to sleep, he opens the door to another world; he listens to Soft Machine, Frank Zappa, King Crimson, while reading Rolling Stone magazine or Normal Mailer's pieces about "an action-man writer involved in danger, resistance and political commitment" (62). Then he turns on the television and he sees terrorist groups in Europe "bombing capitalist targets" and a group of psychologists in London saying that one should live his life in his own way instead of listening to the family will.

The room seems to implode because it cannot contain the amount of information that is produced inside:

Sometimes I felt the whole world was converging on this little room. And as I became more intoxicated and frustrated I'd throw open the window as the dawn came up, and look across the gardens, laws, greenhouses, sheds and curtained windows. I wanted my life to begin now, at this instant, just when I was ready for it. (62)

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<sup>62</sup> "When Dad tried to discuss Byron in local pubs no one warned him that not every Englishman could read or that they didn't necessarily want tutoring by an Indian on the poetry of pervert and madman". (25)

Bromley is not ready to bear such an unquiet person, and Karim has no intention to play by the rules of the suburbs. Karim is curious about everything that might be happening outside the monotony of the suburbs, and by being stuck in there he feels that nobody can understand his needs of movement. As his idol David Bowie, he wants to be a chameleon: always open to new experiences and in constant change. As in talking about his sexuality he says:

It was unusual, I knew, the way I wanted to sleep with boys as well as girls [...] I felt it would be heart-breaking to have to choose one or the other, like having to decide between the Beatles and the Rolling Stones. I never liked to think much about the whole thing in case I turned out to be a pervert and needed to have treatment, hormones, or electric shocks through my brain. (55)

Therefore, when Margaret discovered Haroon's cheating and she packed for Chislehurst – at aunt Jean and uncle Ted's house – Karim took the chance to move first to Eva's house with his father, then to London. By choosing his father instead of Margaret, he knows that this would sound like a betrayal and that it is certainly an ambiguous decision for Karim, as he hates his father for leaving the family. However, this time the stakes are too high and he does not want to ruin his future by going to live in Chislehurst, while the alternative is to join in the life of Eva and her son Charlie. As a matter of fact, it is not his father that Karim is following but the opportunity that comes from Haroon's fool decision. As angry as he might be with Haroon, Karim too got intrigued by Eva and more precisely by Charlie. On the one hand, thanks to Eva's contacts Karim will make his debut in London society and he will have his first role in a play; on the other, Charlie is the one who initiates him to the other side of London: the city of punk music, of sex and drugs transgression. More than everything else,

Charlie is the only one who seems to share the same kind of dissatisfaction that Karim felt in the misery of the suburbs.

In a country that is slowly losing hope in humanity, where there seems not to be any guarantees for the young people, violence is spreading rapidly as if it was the last possibility of change. Punk music becomes the voice of the angry and desperate English youth, and the reply to the situation in which Britain is living after “all the ideals of renewals and equality that marked the revolutionary movement of the 1960s have evaporated” (Naranjo Acosta, 1994:57). These are the years of the “No future” refrain of the Sex Pistols’ *God save the Queen* and the protest songs of the Clash that in less than fifteen years had replaced the positive feelings of the Swinging London of the Beatles. The feelings that punk music transmits in Kureishi’s novel, are chaos, anger and hostility. In attending their first concert in London, Karim and Charlie are shocked by the rudeness of the songs, there was no melodic element in what he was listening to but only anguish sounds and shouts:

When the shambolic group finally started up, the music was thrashed out. It was more aggressive than anything I’d heard since early Who. This was no peace and love; here were no drum solos or effeminate synthesizers. Not a squeeze or anything ‘progressive’ or ‘experimental’ came from those pallid, vicious little council estate kids with hedgehog hair, howling about anarchy and hatred. No song lasted more than three minutes, and after each the carrot-haired kid cursed us to death. (130)

While Charlie’s first judgement on the singer of the band was “he’s an idiot”, after living a while in London and discovering that this is exactly the trend of the city, he will also find himself absorbed into punk spirits, becoming himself the leader of a band. The result is not far from what he first disapproved. Naranjo Acosta describes him as a rock star:



A god-like figure whose popularity is based exclusively on appearances, on keeping a given “pose” as long as it is fashionable. This is precisely what he does with punk as his own band grows more and more popular. A grotesque circus is organized around his figure overnight, and he really enjoys it. (1994:58)

On the one hand, Naranjo Acosta argues that it is precisely the way Charlie lives each experience – the way he always pushes things to the limit – that attracts Karim; but on the other, this continue exaggeration of everything is what finally shows to him the real nature of Charlie: his melancholy and extremely sensibility to the world, soon become pathetic and reveal a fake personality not so different from the mask that Haroon has always worn. This explains why Karim decided to go back to London after spending few months in Charlie’s apartment in New York, when transgression has no purpose it can easily turn into boredom.

The other “poles of attraction” in Karim’s course of self-discovery are Jamila and Eleanor: a British-Indian girl and a white British one. Their being extreme opposites is not only a matter of skin-colour or cultural background, and probably it is precisely their contrasting elements that fascinate Karim. Jamila – daughter of Anwar and Princess Jeeta – is Karim’s oldest friend and his first lover; Elinor is the actress that he meets in Pyke’s Company, with whom he starts a complicated relationship.

Thus, the first girl is related to the old life in the suburbs, to its first adolescent experiences, but at the same time she represents the closest contact Karim had with the traditions and culture of his country of origins. Indeed, as his father never made the effort to introduce his sons to his previous life in India and its cultural heritage, it is through the periodical visits to the “Paradise Shop” of Jamila’s parents that Karim

made an idea of the customs of an Indian-Muslim family. Karim describes them as his second family:

I grew up with Jamila and we'd never stopped playing together. Jamila and her parents were like an alternative family. It comforted me that there was always somewhere less intense, and warmer, where I could go when my own family had me thinking of running away. (52)

Jamila might not be a mixed-blood as Karim is, but she does share with her friend the destiny of the hybrid generation that has to deal with two identities or chose between the two. Although she received a more traditional education from her parents compared to Karim, she grew up as a free spirit, revealing soon her need of independence. When she was thirteen she started reading Baudelaire and Colette, and all the literature she could have at Miss Cutmore library. She became strongly feminist and political, especially after her father had a sort of religious crisis and forced her to marry Changez. However, the girl does not want to change her life just because she got married. As a matter of fact, as wife and husband Jamila and Changez continue to live separated lives. After he had the chance to know his son-in-law, Anwar would have to take a step back and admit that the man he chose for Jamila is not what he expected; to use Karim's words, Anwar plans were that:

Jamila would become pregnant immediately, and soon there'd be little Anwar running all over the place. Anwar would attend to the kids' cultural upbringing and take them to school and mosque while Changez was, presumably, redecorating the shop, moving boxes and impregnating my girlfriend Jamila again." (80)

When he arrived in England from India, Changez was more similar to a young Haroon at his first experience in London: astonished by English customs and ready to explore new things, which surely did not include working in a grocery store. Deluded by

married life, he ended up hiring a full-time prostitute who becomes also Jamila's friend.

After the failure of the arranged marriage, Anwar would never recover from the hunger-strike, and his family would never forgive him for his fanatic decisions. By the end of his days he passes his time "smoking and drinking un-Islamic drinks" (208), with Princess Jeeta speaking to him as little as possible. Released from her father's death, Jamila decided to go to live in a community, having a baby with another man and a relationship with a woman, with Changez the miserable always by her side.

As Naranjo Acosta (1994) pointed out, among the other characters Jamila is probably the one who most had to face difficulties in life: the fact of being born in a Muslim family, living in the suburbs of London and growing up with progressive ideas did not make her life easier; however, she has never given up on her ideals, and the strength she proved in reacting over Anwar's attempt to sabotage her life shows how determined she is.

On the other hand, Jamila has never abandoned either her family, as after Anwar died she still wants to take care of him, burying him in a place she loved. Somehow, she has still respect for her father.

By the end of the novel we can say that the relationship with Jamila is the only one that survives in the stormy life of Karim. Beyond the wedding and Karim's pilgrimages outside the suburbs, their bond reveals to be the most authentic and honest he has ever had in his life.

On the opposite side, the romantic situation that links Karim to Eleanor is far from realistic. Eleanor could be compared to Charlie, for their common needs of continues

strong emotions and the research of the “exotic”. She is also the other sphere of attraction of Karim in London. With Eleanor, Karim opens a new phase of his journey, after he closed the period of punk music, drugs experimentations and sex without feelings. This time Karim has decided to seek for something deeper that goes beyond the research of physical sensations: he wants to be in love. Thus, from the moment the girl with the red hairs put her arms around Karim’s neck at the first rehearsal of Pyke’s play, he knows that he had just make his decision. What he does not know is, instead, that he had just got caught into Pyke’s trap.

Eleanor is a middle-class girl in her early twenties, with quite an interesting story on her back, “she had been to country houses, to public school and Italy, she knew many liberal families and people who’d flourished in the 1960’s” (173) such as painters, novelists and she even knows young people with strange names like “Jasper” or “India”.

From the beginning of their relationship Eleanor reveals to be an extremely emotional person, often contradictory in her attitudes, in part due to her dark past linked to her ex-boyfriend Gene, a West Indian actor that died after an overdose. Gene is painted as a martyr of the migrant people: he was a talented actor who had never got the chance to have the work he deserved. He was hired only for minor rude roles, and many times he had to bear discrimination acts and offences by the street. Karim is really moved and in pain for Gene’s story, especially because he cannot stop thinking about the discriminations he had to suffer and on how he had had a tough life, while Karim is achieving so much, so easily, despite his Indian origins:

I was an actor in a play in London, and I knew fashionable people and went to grand houses like this, and they accepted me and invited no one else and couldn't wait to make love to me. And there was my mother trembling with pain at her soul being betrayed, and the end of our family life and everything else starting from that night. And Gene was dead. He'd known poetry by heart and was angry and never got any work, and I wished I'd met him and seen his face. How could I ever replace him in Eleanor's eyes? (202)

The delirious words of Karim reveal all the upset feelings he is keeping inside, not only the fear to lose Eleanor because he does not feel up to Gene's level, but even the guilt he feels in having betrayed his mother.

What Karim does not realize immediately is that for Eleanor he represents only a copy of her lost lover, and she will never give herself to Karim as she did in the past with Gene. Karim wanted to feel the emotions and the joy of love, but at the end he found only pain and a broken heart. But the worst part is yet to come, as by the end we discover that even Eleanor was nothing but a puppet in Pyke's hands. Indeed, when the company of actors had begun with the rehearsal of the play, Pyke wrote some "predictions" about his actors. Karim's prediction confirms what happened in reality:

Karim is obviously looking for someone to fuck. Either a boy or a girl: he doesn't mind, and that's all right. But he'd prefer a girl, because she will mother him. [...] It'll be Eleanor. He thinks she's sweet, but she's not blown away by him. Anyway, she's still fucked-up over Gene, and feels responsible for his death. I'll have a word with her, tell her to take care of Karim, maybe get her to feed him, give him a bit of confidence. My prediction is that Eleanor will fuck him, it'll basically be a mercy fuck, but he'll fall hard for her and she'll be too kind to tell him the truth about anything. It will end in tears. (245)

As Thomas (2005) stressed, by breaking up with Eleanor, Karim refuses in fact the triangular relationship that was emerging between him, Eleanor and Pyke, where the latter had the prominent position of power. However, despite Pyke's prediction, this time Karim was looking for a regular relationship with Eleanor, a kind of bond he had

never felt with women. The fact that he had to share his girl with another man fomented his crisis.

Karim keeps all the experience he achieved during his journey of self-discovery, the people he met and the things they had offered to him as his small treasure, to finally understand that he does not need to climb the mountains to find his identity. After all the things he went through, Karim has learnt that life in the City is not easier than it was in the suburbs. He has to accept that even in the multiethnic London, racism and prejudice have become part of the society. Therefore, after all these struggles, he still has no idea whether his journey ends in London, or if the future will lead him to other places. However, he has finally found his peace surrounded by the people he loves, the same people that have always been by his side from the beginning. His journey in search of his lost identity ends where it all started. Sometimes home is closer than we think.

#### **4. The Anglo-Indian community of Glen Duncan – The Bloodstone Papers.**

The novel at the basis of the last chapter is different from the works previously discussed, as it analyses the diasporic process of a different kind of subject. The same definition of the term *diaspora* used until now – the huge migration of Indian population towards England that has characterized the sub-continent, from the years after the Independence of India, the following Partition of the country, to the second postwar period – should be reshaped for the ethnic group that we are going to analyze. Although their migration started in the same period as the other groups', in talking about the diaspora of the Anglo-Indians we should take into account a significant difference in the composition of the members of the community, and precisely we have to remember their hybrid nature, that traces back to the colonial period of the British Empire of India. Indeed, they were born as the product of the miscegenation between British men and Indian women.

In a report of 1934, about the Anglo-Indian community, Hedin wrote that from 1600 to 1750 – time of dominion of the East India Company – “intermarriage between British residents and native women was encouraged, and the offspring of such marriages were treated as in all respects English”.<sup>63</sup> In creating a mixed-blood race, indeed, the British were convinced to create a stronger link with the native and to

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<sup>63</sup> Hedin, Elmer L., “The Anglo-Indian Community”, *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 40, n. 2 (sep.,1934) 165-179

prepare the new generations “to be the levers of the British Empire”.<sup>64</sup> The notice sent in 1687 to the President of Madras, by the Court of Directors of the Company, said that:

The marriage of our soldiers to the native women of Fort St. George, formerly recommended by you, is a matter of such consequence to posterity, that we shall be content to encourage it with some expense, and have been thinking for the future to appoint a pagoda to be paid to the mother of any child that shall hereafter be born of any such future marriage, on the day the child is christened, if you think this small encouragement will increase the number of such marriages. (Hedin, 1934:167)

During this century, the Anglo-Indian boys, or Eurasian (as they were called before the nineteenth century), were educated as British people and employed at the services of the East India Company soon after they became adults. They used to cover even high positions as officers in the Company institutions. However, Hedin found that the loss of prestige among the new caste, after the 1795, was mainly due to two factors: on the one hand, as the demand for jobs in the Company among the British people was growing – in parallel with the new waves of migration from Britain to India – there was increasingly less space for the Eurasians in the first lines of the Company; on the other hand, mixed-marriage became unpopular as soon as British women too started to come out to India. From this moment, the Anglo-Indian community started being treated as an outcast minority, often rejected by both the British and the Indians. Their conditions did not improve after the British Government took official control of

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<sup>64</sup> Moss, Catherina, “Anglo Indians and the problem of marginality”, *International Journal of Anglo-Indian Studies* Vol. 12, No. 2, 2012:3-14



India, neither during the twentieth century, as testifies this extract of 1928 reported by

Hedin:

The most pathetic of India's minority groups are the mixed-bloods. [...] Call them what you will, there is little chance of mistaking the mixed blood for the pure. Some of the women are almost blond and very pretty. Most of them have an anemic look. They speak in a metallic falsetto with a curious sing-song accent. They always wear European clothes. [...] They are ostracized by both English and Indians. They in turn look down on the Indian with a scorn that is acid with hatred. They always speak of England as "home" though they may never have been there. (Marvin Williams in Hedin, 1934:168)

This passage refers to the fact that the community of mixed-bloods had been called in different ways during the century. According to James, in order to understand the “ambiguous nature of the Anglo-Indian community as an identity”, it is important to trace the story of the different definitions and names that have been given to the community. As a matter of fact, behind a simple name there is the explanation of the interdependent relation between the British and the Anglo-Indians:

The defining terminologies of the community became crucial to the Anglo-Indian identity-making process and to the continuation of their white race privilege that resulted from their British ancestry. Further, the changes in terminology regarding the definition of the Anglo-Indians were reflective of the aspirations for whiteness, which prompted the Anglo-Indians to seek recognition of their British ancestry.<sup>65</sup>

The term “Eurasian” was designed for all those mixed-blood children with a paternal European line. However, this was before the British started expanding their dominion throughout India. Once they had defeated the Portuguese, Dutch and French

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<sup>65</sup> Pais James, Sheila, “The Origins of the Anglo-Indian” *International Journal of Anglo-Indian Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 2, 2010:38-70

competitors, the term gradually changed into “Anglo-Indian” to underline the bond with the Crown, helping them in keeping their status of privileged caste (James, 2010). Moreover, as the nineteenth century was known as particularly hard in terms of discrimination against mixed-blood people, the old name became inconvenient to bear for the community, since it recalled uncertain roots. Finally, the founding of the Imperial Anglo-Indian Association, in 1898, brought to the institutional acknowledgment the title “Anglo-Indian”, in the name of the British origins of the community that, instead, would have not be clear in using “Eurasian” (Carton in James, 2010).

It is important to notice that the modern name of the community was already used to denote the British people settled in Indian (Blunt, 2005). For this reason – as Carton stressed – it is clear that the efforts of the Anglo-Indian community were to declare as clear as possible their relationship with the British, and on the other side, to take the distance from the native Indians. However, despite the new title, the official definition in the Government Act of 1935 still mentions the European descendance as the main requisite to be recognized as Anglo-Indian.<sup>66</sup>

Another sign in the community of their will of integration into British society and of detachment from the Indians, is the fact that they had always tried to keep a high standard of life, despite the poverty and degraded conditions in which they used to live. For instance, the members of the community as painted by Hedin in 1934, are all literate and they keep investing in education at high levels for their sons. There were

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<sup>66</sup>“An Anglo-Indian is a person whose father or any of whose other male progenitors in the male line is or was of European descent but who is a native of India.”

two kinds of schools available at the time: the Indians schools were natives used to go, and the schools with European model, which granted education from the primary to the collegiate stage:

(The) Anglo-Indian parents make desperate efforts to send their children through as many grades as possible. This applies to girls as well as boys and is an index of the struggle to maintain status, a measure of education being, in India, an absolute prerequisite to obtaining employment sufficiently remunerative to maintain even the semblance of European living standards. And the Anglo-Indian fears above all things the loss of his present position on the fringe of the British community, precarious and humiliating as that position undoubtedly is. (Hedin,1934:170)

Consequently, the Independence of India in 1947, followed by the Partition of the country into India and Pakistan, was a serious blow for the Anglo-Indians. Even though officially they did not benefit of any protection from the British, they still could count on few privileges in getting jobs, as they were easily employed in transports and other British institutions. There was the real fear among the community that, after the British Raj of India would be dismissed, their condition as half-caste in the country could worsen, as they would surely be deprived of their actual concessions (Almeida, 2015).

The number of people that from 1947 to 1970 had left India for the countries of the Commonwealth, reflects in fact this fear: Blunt (2005) reports that 50,000 people of the 300,000 Anglo-Indian population accounted in India at the time of the declaration of Independence, had migrated to Australia, New Zealand, Canada, United States and, of course, Britain.

The difficulty in talking about a diaspora of the Anglo-Indians resides in the double nature of their experience, as they were Indian citizens, but formally they could easily

migrate to Britain as direct descendants of the colonizers.<sup>67</sup> Then another problem is more linked to the way they intended their nationality. As stressed by Blunt:

Before Independence in 1947, the spatial politics of home for Anglo-Indians were shaped by imaginative geographies of both Europe (particularly Britain) and India as home. Although Anglo-Indians were ‘country-born’ and domiciled in India, many imagined Britain as home and identified with British life even as they were largely excluded from it. In many ways, Anglo-Indians imagined themselves as part of an imperial diaspora in British India. Indian nationalism and policies of Indianization gave a new political urgency to Anglo-Indian ideas about home and identity. (2005:2)

Today, it is quite a problem to trace the path of the Anglo-Indians in Britain, as they are not gathered in a unite community and neither have they kept a particular interest in sharing their story and culture – considering that the majority of them are Roman Christians and their mother language is English (Almeida, 2015). Consequently, there is still little knowledge about the community and what they have passed through, and because – after years of marginalization – the same members tend to conceal themselves among the population as some of them could easily be associate with British – if they have dominance of Caucasian genes – or Pakistani people.

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<sup>67</sup> Moreover, they could count on the British Nationality Act of 1948, in which it was declared that the people of the former British colonies were considered British citizens.

#### 4.1. *The Bloodstone Papers*: about the novel

With five novels under his belt, in 2006 Glen Duncan astonished his audience by coming out with the book of his conversion, after having dealt with “sexual guilt, dark mortifications of the flesh and reincarnations of the devil”.<sup>68</sup> *The Bloodstone Papers* is the novel of the renaissance, in which the author took a step back from his Anglo-Indian origins and to the story of his family, to focus on identity. The beginning of this story could be summed up with some facts about Glen Duncan’s life:

My family is Anglo-Indian, and of the four children, I’m the only one who wasn’t born in India. Thus the mythic shadow under which I grew up was a narrative of flight and exile, the Indian glory of Those Days (moonlit dances, bootleg liquor, elephants, tigers, steam trains and servants) set against the English dreariness of These Days (miserable weather, poverty, lousy fresh fruit and consistent hostility from the natives). A fertile story, yes — but theirs. I, made in England, felt excluded, miffed, resistant to the idea of even visiting India, a position of increasing absurdity as one by one, backpacking friends returned from the place with the standard anecdotal combo of nirvanic epiphany and toilet horror.<sup>69</sup>

The book was written years after a trip to India that Duncan made, in the middle of his twenties, with his father, after a period in which he confesses he did not know where his life was going. During this journey, he had the chance to meet his father’s friends and finally see the real set of the stories he had always listened from his parents (Duncan, 2007). *The Bloodstone Papers* took inspiration from those stories, from facts of the real life mixed with a fictional action story about how the Anglo-Indians Ross

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<sup>68</sup> Hickling Alfred, “Point of departure”, *The Guardian*, June 2, 2006, retrieved 03/09/2017

<sup>69</sup> Glen Duncan, “Young Man Behaving Badly”, *The New York Times Magazine*, November 18, 2007, (retrieved 03/09/2017)

and Kate Monroe managed to live the last years of the British Raj as half-cast, and how they finally reached Britain.

The storytelling is divided into two main chronological blocks: the life in London of the forty year old Owen Monroe, youngest son of Ross and Kate, set in 2004; and the account of the life of his parents in India, from the years of their childhood to the Partition period. The chapters follow an alternated structure between Owen's present life and his narration of "The Cheechee Papers", the book he is actually writing about his parent. This structure is important because thanks to this chronological variation, the author manages to keep the reader focused and always in suspense.

It is precisely from "The Cheechee Papers" that Owen – a sort of alter ego of Glen Duncan – starts his path through the discovery of his outcast community, the Anglo-Indians; moved by the curiosity of learning more about his own origins and, possibly, of understanding more about himself.

Bolton, 2004: the excuse that leads Owen to write the book comes from an anecdote of his father, that apparently has no epilogue, but which rather hides a mystery still unsolved. Indeed, there is a person that continues to emerge in Ross Monroe's life in India, an Englishman that more than once had caused him troubles until he finally managed to bring his family to England. Ross was a young promising boxer from Bhusawal, who had started building his fortune in Bombay, by working in the railways (as it was meant to be for most of Anglo-Indians) and that had just begun the run for the Olympic Games of 1948 – his ticket to Europe. It was by chance that on the same day he saw his future wife for the first time, he also met a man called Skinner; the Englishman who with a fraud stole the bloodstone ring that Ross had received years

before from his mother. This episode actually is only the first of a series of other misdeeds that see Skinner's involvement and that would mark the future of Ross and his family. The novel plotline is then divided into two sections that reflects the alternated structure of the chapters: on the one hand, we read the hunting for Skinner that Owen begins nowadays after finding a trace of him in London; on the other, there is the real draft of "The Cheechee Papers" that the protagonist is writing, which provides the reader the tale of Ross and Kate in their mother country.

The research becomes a real obsession for Owen, but he does not know what he expects to discover – if Skinner is still alive and he might have the chance to finally find him – and if this research will lead to find the final tile that can put a period in the story of his parents. What is clear is that behind this research there is more than a pending count that Owen wants to solve for his father.

Owen is unconsciously looking for something that might help him to find a meaning to his own existence, and he thinks that in order to do that he has to dig in his past, retracing the history of his family and finding Skinner. In fact, from the beginning he seems unable of dealing and solving his own problems and everything that includes his direct intervention. The writing of the book is just one thing that bothers him. He feels that through the eyes of his parents things look so much easier, as they did not have to go through lots of difficulties that history has decided to put through the road of the new generations. His father is persuaded that in order to write a story there is nothing more that you may need if you already have facts:

"You know the story", Pasha says, not seeing the problem. "So what is there to tell it? You start at the beginning. Go through the middle, then get to the end." (1)

(Owen speaking) They were born before The Camps, The Bomb, The Moon, The Ozone, The Internet, The End of History. For them the big things don't change: God, Fate, Love, Time, Beginnings, Endings. Good and Evil. Therefore my difficulty. (3)

However, Ross Monroe is conscious that the passing of time has turned things different and more complicated on one side, but on the other he thinks that the new generations do not know anymore what is really meaningful in life:

“Things were simpler then. You got married, it was for good. You believed in God, it was for good. The big things meant something to us, you know? We didn't know any different, but we weren't miserable like you buggers today.” “We've got options, Dad” [...] “But y'all are all bleddy<sup>70</sup> unhappy, aren't you?” (403)

The abundance of options is probably the cause of all the things that Owen has left incomplete in his life. The meaning of the hunting for Skinner becomes challenging for him, as something that he has to pursue in order to go beyond his limits and finally prove that he can put an end to one single thing in his life.

#### **4.2. The Anglo-Indian heritage**

The main question on which Duncan focuses his novel is surely ‘what does it mean to be an Anglo-Indian?’ The author is conscious of the conditions in which the people of the community<sup>71</sup> live, that they have been forgotten by the rest of the world and that rapidly they are losing their cultural heritage. The same character that Duncan has created, Owen, even if he has always known to be an Anglo-Indian and he has always listened to the direct witnesses of his parents – first generation immigrants – he does

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<sup>70</sup> Ross speaking English with a strong Anglo-Indian accent.

<sup>71</sup> If we can really talk about the existence of a real “community” in England.



not really know how to deal with his origins, or if his generation is going to keep the heritage of their fathers. The problem is that, as a citizen of Britain, he does not even understand if he has ever felt to be an Anglo-Indian.

During his childhood and adolescence, Owen had felt the stigma of ethnicity on his skin, even though he realized that only years after the event: when his Anglo-Indian girlfriend, Scarlett, and he were called to witness for having seen a boy of their school harassing another one, the principal of the school did not believe them because they were “beige. Bloody Anglo-Indian.” (358) In *The Bloodstone Papers*, the race issue linked to the Anglo-Indians is often described as a matter of skin-colour, and precisely the colour *beige*, which is a color that can be confused, associated with other ethnics, but perfect to represent the mixed-blood of the Anglo-Indians. What seems unfair in the colour *beige* is the weakness of this nuance, that, connected to the Anglo-Indian, becomes synonym of invisibility. In comparing his beige skin with other ethnicities, Owen realizes that he is “not dark enough either to scare the honkies<sup>72</sup> or to expect solidarity from the brothers,” (34). The point here is that apparently there is no chance of social redemption for an unknown minority. This time we are not looking at the usual problem of discrimination, since this minority does not exist, the same British society ignores them:

These old people have my mum and dad pegged as Indian (they come from India, after all) or Pakistani, or Portuguese, or Spanish or Italian or Greek, or indeed Turkish. One lady asked my mum if dad was a Red Indian. Whether you are, I've told them, you're not white, which means the rest is just conversation. (10)

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<sup>72</sup> White people.

Outcasts, without identity, they have inherited a language and a religion from a population that accept their existence only because they do not know that they actually exist. Thus, it is easy to understand the distress of Owen when he says that he feels uncomfortable in starting to write the book since he does not know anything about being an Anglo-Indian.

He acknowledges that he has “gaps” in the historical knowledge, but also in his emotions, as he is afraid to disappoint his parents in writing things that can compromise the already pale image of the Anglo-Indians. His purposes are good, and he even shows to understand the “big deal” behind the Anglo-Indian topic:

Part of being Anglo-Indian [...] is being a member of a race which to all intents and purposes simply doesn't register, historically. Too few of us, you see. We're invisible. What I'm thinking is that this invisibility creates at best a kind of unconcern for the world – since as far as the world's concerned we're not here, never were, so it's not, realistically, “our” world at all – and at worst a ring-of-Gyges relationship to morality. (106)

However, this is still the comment of a detached person, who needs to get into the issue and feel emotionally involved to fully understand what it is like to be Anglo-Indian. Owen's lack of knowledge and experience makes him doubt of the success of the project. Therefore he needs to go through the hunting for Skinner with his father, and finally be part of the story.

Beyond the story of his parents, the writing of the book encourages Owen to seek for historical information about his community. He plunges into the historical archives to delineate the origins of the Anglo-Indians from the first centuries of the colonization of India by the East India Company and later the British Crown, to the dispersion of nowadays. Thus, the understanding of the historical context becomes crucial not only

to tell the story of Ross and Kate but even to understand the source of the discrimination, and why today British people ignore the existence of this minority.

By the time Owen Monroe finally decides to write the story of his parents, he is a professor at University College London, with a parallel career as an author of porn novels who writes under the pseudonym of Millicent Nash, name that he obtained combining the middle name of his mother with his paternal grandmother's maiden name.

He lives in an apartment in London with Vince, his gay friend with whom he shares not only a flat but also a miserable existence made of regrets and complaints.

The hunting for Skinner and the investigation on his lost origins are specular to another chapter of his life that after many years he still struggles to close: Scarlet, the love of his life, his childhood friend and biggest regret. Although he has lost contacts with her for years, he still has difficulties to forget her and to go on with his life. The memory of Scarlet is always by his side, impeding him to engage in a new relationship, as he is aware that every time he goes out with a new girl he is just "killing time until Scarlet comes back" into his life. (170) In the meantime, he continues collecting casual lovers, including Skinner's daughter, the woman he would use to find his father's obsession. Scarlet comes into Owen's life as a comet, but she has shared enough with him to become also the missing tale in his attempt of recovery of identity, as he would not be able to close the whole Skinner's matter until Scarlet goes back to him.

Scarlet went to live with the Monroe family when she was a little girl, because her Anglo-Indian mother Dinah - a family friend<sup>73</sup> - was suffering from schizophrenia. Owen, same age as Scarlet, soon becomes aware of the ethnic affinity that linked him to the girl, as their hands “among the red, white and blue Lego brick had revealed that [they] were exactly the same colour”. (217) During the same day Owen had another chance to think about ethnicity and the difference between him and the other minorities of Britain, as Scarlet tells him that her mother’s boyfriend used to call Dinah “nigger bitch”, he feels confused about the choice of word in this offence:

“A nigger’s a Jamaican” I said. Taxonomy courtesy of Brewer Street. Niggers, nig-nogs, darkies, coons, blackies and choolate drops were one thing, Pakis and wogs were another. Muhammad Ali, for example, was a coon, whereas Mr. Gandhi was a Paki. (220)

This will sign Owen as the first proof of the invisibility of the Anglo-Indians among the British people. But it is by remembering the day Scarlet and he were called as witnesses of a bullying act, that Owen realizes how Anglo-Indians have managed to go on and at the same time being invisible in the Western society:

It was the first time in my life I’d ever had to take personal experience and make it count in the political world, the school. And the world, the school said: It doesn’t count. We don’t believe you. Your money’s no good here. Ergo, we rejected the political in favour of the personal, tragically or otherwise for the rest of our lives. That’s what you’re talking about on the roof, isn’t it? Not caring because you’re not part of it? I think all Anglo-Indians fell like that actually. (358)

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<sup>73</sup> The relation with family is not clear, but Owen and his other siblings call her “aunty”. There is a possibility that she might be the illegitimate daughter of an old friend of Ross back in India, as a child named “Dinah” is mentioned by the end of the “Cheechee Papers” (302)

This last sentence that Duncan has put into Owen's mouth leaves the reader open to various interpretations: on the one hand we could see it as a metaphor of the isolation of the Anglo-Indians from the British world; on the other it could refer to the ability of this community to be confused and melted into British society, both as ethnic minority or English people, depending on how the others want to see them. The first theory is quite easy to contradict, as it is hard to define a real Anglo-Indian community separated from British society. The same Owen acknowledges that "no one's on the Anglo-Indians' side [...] because there aren't enough of us to constitute a side. You need a fucking ethnographic microscope to see us" (40). This is why the second interpretation seems more coherent with Owen's view of the issue and to the real situation.

In both cases there is a sort of isolationistic attitude, which is not totally due to the decisions of the Anglo-Indians people, but rather a consequence of the treatment they had always received by the British since the time of the British Raj.

One last consideration has to be made on the connection between this novel with the other works of the British Indian authors. While it is clear that they are bound by the theme of diaspora, the Anglo-Indian community, protagonist of Duncan's novel, has faced a different process of integration into British society. In particular, thinking about the development of a British identity in those people we can say that they have been privileged because of their English male ancestors, because their mother tongue is English and because, once arrived in England, they have kept part of the benefits (for instance jobs) that were acknowledged by the British government in India. Those could be seen as factors that brought the Anglo-Indians to a faster assimilation – or to

disappear – into British society, however, in comparison with the other hybrid characters, their origins have not favoured them to be fully accepted as British people. Indeed, if we compare Owen’s experience, with Karim’s in *The Buddha of Suburbia* – who has a similar identity profile – we can see that even if they are born in Britain and have British ancestors, they still struggle to prove their *Englishness*. Even though his mother is English, Karim will always be associated first with his father origins; in the same way Owen is addressed as “Paki”, Indian or even *beige*, everything but British.

Surely the *Bloodstone Papers* does not propose a solution for the inconsistency of the Anglo-Indians in Britain, but at least Duncan has managed to turn on the light on an issue never considered before, and to describe faithfully one of the most recent diasporic events.

## Conclusion

The three novels and the play examined so far, deal with the common theme of identity, which each author explores in depth in his own way, taking into account personal experiences, history and the social development of the issue in multiethnic London.

As we saw, there would not exist any discourse on identity without the diasporic waves that had involved the South-Asian populations during the twentieth century. The Indian, Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Anglo-Indian people that came to England in the years after the Partition of India, have brought to the host country culture, traditions and customs that have changed British society. Most of them have created community and given birth to the children of diaspora, the hybrid generation that struggle to find a place in the world as British or Asian people.

Considering again Ashcroft's definition of diaspora<sup>74</sup> and the Greek origin of the term, that means "dispersion" of masses of people, the image that the British-Indian authors gave of the phenomenon is not as static as the definition suggests. Dispersion relates to something lost and never recovered, or a pilgrimage that begins in the mother country and simply ends far from home. However, what emerges from the works of Kureishi, Ali and Duncan is rather a process of continuing mutation: diaspora means action and movement and it is not a one-way journey. As a matter of fact, for most of the characters we saw, the diasporic process started with the migration from India did not end once arrived in Britain. For instance, the members of the first generation of

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<sup>74</sup> "The voluntary or forcible movement of peoples from their homelands into new regions." (Ashcroft et al. 2000:61)

immigrants – as Amjad, Chanu and Anwar – after living for years in the new country, they all manifested the need to go back home, or at least they all started feeling homesick at one point of their life in the West. For those who have always planned to go back to their mother country, the word *diaspora* actually has never had a permanent meaning. Thus, considering that the diasporic populations usually do not make return to their homeland (Mishra, 2007) – which is why we talk about dispersion – the development of the diasporic process is not always a matter of physical movement, but rather spiritual. Indeed, behind the failure of a returning plan, there is still the intention to rediscover origins or to reconsider aspects of culture that once were criticized and were reasons of migration. The migrant, then, earns a new awareness of his identity, he becomes proud of his origins and, as Mishra stressed, his imaginary “homeland exists as an absence that acquires surplus meaning by the fact of diaspora.” (2005:2) It is under the influence of this “surplus” that Chanu – in *Brick Lane* – will find the courage to go back to Bangladesh and to leave his family in London; and it is under the same spirit that Amjad decides to charge his English aggressors. Their nationality is no more something they should be ashamed of. In this view, the word diaspora acquires the meaning of recovery of the cultural memory and renovation of the migrant’s identity.

Different is the case of the Monroe family in *The Bloodstone Papers*, that as members of the Anglo-Indian community they had been condemned to always looking forward to migration, since they have always look at Britain as the *fatherland*. In this case, the physical journey of the Monroe’s from India to England, is already a sort of return to



their home, and then, the end of the journey. Almeida suggests that, as the Anglo-Indians were already discriminated by the Indians in their mother country, they

might be labelled 'refugees' in their attempt to escape from India to migrate to Great Britain on grounds of being afraid for their lives. In such cases, the decision to migrate was as much a matter of ensuring their personal safety as it was to find a better, more comfortable, quality of life in what they believed would be a more welcoming environment. (2015:4-5)

Thus, Ross and Owen's attempt to go back to their origins formally has not the same meaning of the other diasporic experiences depicted. However, in any case it keeps the characteristics of the search for identity we found in the other novels – which is also why we can talk about a diasporic journey for the Anglo-Indians.

On the other hand, the legacy that the first generation has left to their children is something that has not always been welcomed by the second generation. Shahana, Haroon and Amina suffer from the eternal conflict with their parents because they refuse to receive the "doctrine" of their fathers. At first they tend to hide themselves behind their British identity just to go against the values that the older generation desperately try to share with their kids. This explains the exaggerated behaviors they have in manifesting their Britishness, but at the same time it can be seen as the signal of a deeper request of help: they scream for being accepted for what they are, the half-blooded youth who know nothing about life, but need to make their own mistakes in order to understand more about themselves. The same is valid for Karim: even though his father never pushed him to be more Indian, he does feel the pressure of a society that considers him only as the son of an immigrant. The second generation too wants

to recover the wrong image that society has built about them, the children of diaspora are not less British than white people.

In conclusion, even though this journey of self-discovery involves pains and struggles, and many times is not result positive – Anwar in *The Buddha of Suburbia* will die in his homesickness – in general the two generations of migrants presented by the British-Indian authors have faced their diasporic process as a path of growth, conscious of the risk of this trip, but always looking forward to improve their life conditions, to find their own self, and to prove to society that they do exist, not as British, not as Asians, but simply as human beings.

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