

Reading the Subaltern Other: A Postcolonial Critique of Kureishi's *The Black Album*

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Abstract



This paper aims at a postcolonial study of Kureishi's novel, The Black Album (1995). In particular, the study explores how significantly the postcolonial concepts of racism, identity crisis, double consciousness, and unhomeliness inform and influence the narrative and the characterization of the novel. The study is oriented around the research question of how the characters belonging to the Pakistani diaspora in England are turned into subaltern others of the native white inhabitants, and how this, in turn, makes them vulnerable targets of racist violence. Besides, the psychological repercussions of this racist violence on the lives and minds of the characters are investigated. Moreover, the representation of different communities and their concerns are looked into to view how their mutual tensions lead to the conflict that can be broadly categorized as a clash between two conflicting ideologies, that is, Muslim fundamentalism and British liberalism. The qualitative, descriptive methodology has been employed in this paper which relies mainly on close-textual analysis and interpretation. The research is significant as the study of racism and the othering of Muslims is highly relevant in the context of the ongoing debate on Islamophobia in the West and how adversely it affects the Muslim lives there. It is also relatable to the racist violence the black community is facing in contemporary American society.

Keywords: Racism, Identity, Diaspora, Double Consciousness, Unhomeliness, Kureishi

Introduction

Kureishi is a Pakistani Anglophone playwright and novelist. He is a critically acclaimed author who writes on themes of immense contemporary significance. He describes how people attempt to redefine their positions regarding vital concepts such as belonging, ambivalence, hybridity, racism, eroticism, religious fanaticism, and xenophobic patriotism (Diler, 2011, p. 2). He relates it with the questions of ethnicity and identity and explores the historical opposition built around the idea of the Orient and the Occident. *The Black Album* (henceforth TBA) deals with the hyped controversies between the East and the West and systematically analyses how these affect the lives of the individuals who face this stand-off. It narrates the story of a Muslim student of Pakistani origin who, while living and studying in London, gets entangled with a group of radicalized students of his ethnic background. Moreover, he pursues an intimate relationship with his teacher, Deedee Osgood, a lady of liberal values and a controversial figure among the students. The novel addresses the issues of white racism, religious fundamentalism, identity crisis, and censorship. It elucidates what happens when two opposing cultures clash and what repercussions it has for the characters who are caught at their crosscurrents. Kureishi is chosen particularly because he is sensitive to and critical of both the white racism as well as the religious fundamentalism in the Muslim youth belonging to the Pakistani diaspora. The present article focuses on the following research questions.

1. How are the characters belonging to the Pakistani diaspora in England are turned into subaltern others of the native white inhabitants, and how this, in turn, makes them vulnerable targets of racist violence in Kureishi's novel, *The Black Album* (1995)?
2. How does the racist violence lead to the identity crisis of the characters belonging to the Pakistani diaspora in the novel and the related development of double consciousness and unhomeliness in them?

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Theoretical Framework

The framework employed to conduct this study is the postcolonial theory. Certain key postcolonial terms related to the theory have been selected on the criterion of their applicability to the text of the novel. The concepts chosen for application include racism, identity crisis, double consciousness, and unhomeliness.

Postcolonial theory is perfectly pertinent when we come to study a text that takes its characters from the community of immigrants who, while living in the diaspora, come in conflict with the native dominant community and experience racist discrimination and persecution. Postcolonial theory targets and tries to bring to the fore the forms of neo-colonial suppression and the political tyranny that continue to dominate the modern world (Young, 2001). Postcolonial theory is a powerful tool to highlight the myriad ways in which the people belonging to political minorities are subjected to various forms of oppression (Tyson, 2006). It also explores how individuals and communities resist colonial oppression and how they devise mechanisms to undo its dehumanizing socio-cultural impact.

Racism can be described as an extremely prejudiced scheme of dividing human beings into racial lines. It discriminates between the communities based on the color of their skin and works to naturalize the supposed superiority and inferiority of the races, arguing that the physical properties of the human beings belonging to different color groups shape and determine their intellectual beings (Ashcroft et al., 2007). Moreover, racism foregrounds "the unequal power relations that grow from the socio-political domination of one race by another and that result in systematic discriminatory practices" (Tyson, 2006, p. 360). Kureishi insists on the decisive role of race and religion in creating divisions in Britain and holds them responsible for the history of enslavement, abuse, and disempowerment of the masses (Kureishi, 2005).

The question of racism and the problematic relationship between the east and the west is a crucial aspect of the postcolonial study. According to Bhabha, the colonial past of Third World countries, the history of slavery of their people, and their attempts to come to terms with it gave birth to postcolonial perspectives. He refers to "the discourses of "minorities" within the geopolitical divisions of East and West, North and South" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 171). These discourses challenge the ideology and narratives of the Anglo-American orientalist as they tend to normalize the hegemony of the western discourses over the native versions of the subject races. It leads to unjust and unequal development and the discriminatory re-telling of the histories of the indigenous people. They are turned into subalterns others who are unable to speak and incapable of representing themselves.

The postcolonial concepts of double consciousness and unhomeliness are central to the understanding of the identity crisis that the characters experience by living at the crossroads of two opposing cultures. The colonial subject is characterized by his double consciousness or double vision. His consciousness perceives the world in a way that focuses on the conflicting division between the hostile cultures. Specifically, it deals with the colonized individual's response to the antagonism between the culture of the colonizer and that of the native subjects (Tyson, 2006).

The African American writer, W. E. B. DuBois is credited for introducing the concept of double consciousness in his celebrated book, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903). The idea describes individuals who experience inner conflict, suffer ambivalence, and find themselves at the mercy of the psycho-social influences of the two opposing cultural forces (Tyson, 2006).

Unhomeliness is defined as the state of the individuals, especially colonial or former colonial subjects, who lack a "stable cultural identity" (Tyson, 2011, p. 250). This is characterized by the failure of these people to completely identify with the ruling culture which they find appealing, yet external to them as well as their indigenous culture which they consider inferior and feel ashamed of. Hence, they find acceptance in either of the two cultures, which creates in them a sense of unhomeliness. Its root cause is the "colonized consciousness" (Tyson, 2011, p. 250). Unhomeliness, being a cultural state, differs from the physical phenomenon of homelessness. Therefore, the use of "unhomely" is preferred over "homeless" where unhomeliness refers to the sense of being rejected by both the conflicting cultures, without being accepted by either of them. While discussing the use of the phrase, "the unhomely", Bhabha argues that "it captures something of the estranging sense of the relocation of the home and the world in an unhallowed space" (Bhabha, 1994). Therefore, he does not equate being un-homed to being homeless, as he finds that socio-cultural life cannot be neatly categorized "into private and public spheres" (Bhabha, 1994).

Literature Review

Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980) explores the postcolonial concerns of identity crisis which is the consequence of the empire's colonial enterprise. On the one hand, he being the representative of the empire cooperates with Colonel Joll, when he comes to take charge of the town in response to the rumors of barbarian revolt against the empire. Initially, he proves himself a loyal subject of the empire and works to protect its imperial interests. On the other hand, when Colonel Joll takes barbarians prisoners and tortures them to the extent of blinding the barbarian girl, the Magistrate decides to go against the empire by choosing to take care of the girl. Later, he even crosses the border to reconcile her with her people and suffers imprisonment on that account. By returning the girl to her people, he asserts his association with the barbarians and confirms his dissociation with the empire. However, the Magistrate once again assumes charge of the town as a faithful servant of the empire when Colonel Joll is defeated by the barbarians and leaves the town. This shows how his identity is built and rebuilt concerning his relationship with the empire and the barbarian girl. Moreover, the colonial torture others the barbarian girl and turns her into a subaltern exactly the way the Muslim characters of the Pakistani diaspora are othered by the racist violence at the hands of the white men in England.

Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990) depicts racism as a prevalent trait of British society. The characters suffer and report racist discrimination in the novel. Karim's father talks about discrimination between the white and the non-white in the financial sector, especially regarding jobs and promotion. The narrative highlights the economic inequity observed in the English society with these words, "the whites will never promote us, Dad said, 'not an Indian while there is a white man left on the earth. You don't have to deal with them—they still think they have an Empire when they don't have two pennies to rub together (Kureishi, 1990, p. 27). Karim's words show the deep-rooted racist discrimination, the arrogance of the white people, and the traces of bygone imperialism in them. It problematizes the question of identity as well. Karim suffers identity crisis and unhomeliness as a result of living in the inherently racist British community. He finds himself unable to belong either to the east or to the west. In the opening paragraph of the novel, he is introduced as "an Englishman born and bred, almost" (Kureishi, p. 3) and as "a new breed as it were, having emerged from two old histories" (Kureishi, p. 3). Originally Karim is Indian, but culturally he finds himself "almost English". He experiences unhomeliness as he finds home in none of the two cultures and emerges as a "new breed". This feeling of hopelessness and sense of abandonment is called unhomeliness by Homi K. Bhabha.

Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2008) also shows at work the postcolonial concepts of identity and unhomeliness. Changez, the protagonist of the novel, expresses his experience of unhomeliness. He lacks a uniform identity. He is not certain whether he belonged to New York, Lahore, both, or neither of them (Hamid, 2008). He undergoes unhomeliness as he does not fit in either of the cultural spaces represented by Pakistan and America.

Moreover, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2008) describes and condemns the growth of racist discrimination in the wake of 9/11. Changez faces racism for growing a beard, is singled out at the American airports, and is bullied for not conforming his appearance to the predominant American pattern. The Muslim homes, shops, and religious centers are raided by the FBI, and Pakistani cab drivers become targets of violence for no reason other than their religious identity (Hamid, 2008, p. 107). The racist violence, witnessed and reported by the narrator of the novel, shows a dictatorial dystopia that is bent upon rooting out the subaltern other.

Shamsie's novel, *Home Fire* (2017) also dwells on unhomeliness and identity crisis in considerable detail. In the novel, the characters belonging to the Pakistani diaspora fail to find acceptance in British society. Conversely, these characters are incapable of identifying themselves with the Pakistani culture. The character of Pervaiz can be taken as a case study of unhomeliness in the novel. After he joins ISIS, he is stripped of the right of citizenship by the British government. He gets murdered in Turkey while on his way back to Britain as he finally decides to dissociate himself from ISIS. Even his corpse is not allowed to return to Britain and burial there despite the extenuating circumstances he dies in; rather, his dead body is expatriated to Pakistan. It is instructive to note here that Pakistan is used as a dumping ground by Britain to dispose of the dead bodies of the undesired individuals who are no longer worthy of a decent burial in Britain having violated its law. This shows Britain's neo-colonial attitude towards Pakistan, one of its former colonies, and the relation of unequal

powers between the two countries where the latter is supposed to do the bidding of the latter. Aneeka's view towards Pakistan is interesting in this regard. When she is informed by a representative of the Pakistan High Commission about Parvaiz's death, she says, "He wasn't one of yours, she told the man; we are not yours." (Shamsie, 2017, p.184). She is dismissive of their Pakistani identity and strives till her death to win the right of burial for her brother in Britain and to assert their British identity as opposed to their Pakistani identity. Ironically, it is Pakistan where she meets her end in her lover, Eamonn's embrace.

To sum up, the above-discussed works are chosen for literature review because all of them, one way or another, deal with at least some of the themes and issues which are explored in this article. Their selection is also significant as these have helped to place my research in a proper postcolonial context. The intertextual references and quotes from these texts have been relevantly embedded in the study. These have enriched the critical insights I bring to the study and have considerably broadened its perspective.

Textual Analysis

This section attempts to apply the selected postcolonial concepts to the novel's text and analyze and interpret the text on the lines suggested by these concepts outlined in the literature review.

Racism

The novel is a powerful condemnation of racism prevalent in English society. Time and again, the author provides multiple episodes of the white racism to which the Muslim characters of Pakistani origin are subjected to. It is a recurrent theme in the novel, and Kureishi returns to it repeatedly with slight modifications to emphasize its importance and relevance. The characters belonging to the Muslim ethnicity in the novel face racist harassment at one or another stage of their lives. Indeed, being victims of racist ideology and violence is a unifying feature for them; it is one of the main reasons which brings them together and motivates them to take radical positions to protect their fellow Muslim brethren in an increasingly racist England.

The novel is replete with instances of the racist persecution of the characters of Pakistani descent and professing Islamic faith. Shahid, arguably the central figure in the novel, mentions multiple times about either being a victim of racism or showing paranoia about it. The following is a graphic description of an incident of racist violence murderously targeting a Muslim youth, "A year ago, Sadiq's fifteen-year-old brother had had his skull crushed by a dozen of youths" (*TBA*, 1995, p. 100).

Another example of racism is recounted by a man to Riaz which Shahid overhears when he goes to Riaz's room to give them mugs of tea. The man narrates that the white boys have been coming to his flat and threatening his family. He also informs him that "they have punched me in my guts" (*TBA*, pp. 36-37). This incident shows in Hat's words "something about how nice your little England is" (*TBA*, p. 36).

A significant aspect of racism in the novel is revealed through the harassment that the Muslim women who take *hijab*, suffer in British society. This deplorable fact is made clear through the recounted experience of Tahira, a Muslim immigrant student in the novel. She shares with her Muslim fellows her traumatic experience and the subsequent anxiety which she faces for no other reason than her choice to take *hijab* as is instructed by her Islamic faith. She talks about the difficulty and the humiliation wearing *hijab* brings to the Muslim women, saying "We are constantly mocked and reviled as if we were the dirty ones" (*TBA*, p. 105).

It is evident from the above-quoted words that she suffers mockery and revile due to her Muslim attire. At another place, she talks about how Muslim women are sexually objectified by white men and harassed because of their faith and modesty. She also narrates an incident in which an Englishman tries to rip her *hijab*. This speaks volumes of the little space and tolerance the Muslim immigrants especially the women who take a scarf, find in the British society presented by the novel.

More troubling is the fact that racism is not only an adult phenomenon; it is not confined to grown-up British men and women. Racist attitudes can be observed in the British children as well who show a remarkable antipathy to their schoolfellows. This can be easily traced through childhood memories of Shahid. Their aggression and violence against Shahid are evident by the fact that he returns home from the school with cuts, bruises and his bag slashed with knives" (*TBA*, p. 73). The trauma of facing his white schoolmates is conveyed by the description of his vomiting and defecating owing to the intensity of fear he experiences while going to school. His mother's response has been

insights for the reader; she behaves inexplicably by refusing to believe that racist violence was a gruesome part of her existence in England. Her behavior underlines the idea that parents find such expressions of abuse and violence against their children hard to believe, and instead of coming to their children's rescue, exhibit a state of denial. It is narrated that "more than anything she hated any talk of race or racism" (*TBA*, p. 73), and the probable reason offered is that "she had suffered some abuse and contempt" (*TBA*, p. 73). Moreover, she rips Shahid's story which narrates his experience of racism at the hands of the British kids. She terms the story "filth" stating the reason that it incites hatred against the fellow white men. The author, by making use of subtle irony, exposes her internalization of racism. On the one hand, she denounces Shahid for writing the story which unveils the evil of racism while on the other hand, she turns a blind eye to the evil of racism itself.

Racism is described as a part of national consciousness, not something having to do with individuals and limited to their aberrant behavior. It seems to be reflected and supported by the British society at large. When Shahid asks the drug-seller, Strapper, where the racists live to find out their location, the latter's answer is quite revealing. He answers Shahid's question with the words, 'Just knock on any door' (*The Black Album*, p.143). His answer testifies to the prevalence of racism in British society.

The author does not restrict himself to the depiction of the incidents of racist abuse affecting the Muslim population in general; he goes further and describes the psychological impact of these disturbing episodes on the characters' minds in the novel.

In this regard, the first story Shahid writes is of particular interest. His first attempt at story writing is entitled 'Paki Wog Fuck Off Home' (*TBA*, p.72). The story describes six white backbenchers who make the teacher leave by their rudeness and in his absence, shout abusive words at him, 'Paki, Paki, Paki, Out, Out, Out!'" (*TBA*, p. 72). The repetition of the word "Paki" thrice, shows the psychological intensity of its impact on Shahid's mind and the emotional agony he suffers as a consequence. The words that describe Shahid's emotional state are remarkable. The process of writing the story is described as banging "the scene into his machine", the words "dismal fear and fury" suggest his unsettled state of mind, and "a jagged, cunt-fuck-kill prose" sums up the style of his story (*TBA*, p.72). The use of words and phrases like "banged", "dismal fear and fury", "jagged, cunt-fuck-kill prose" are illustrative of the violence his soul goes through. He feels "like a soul singer screaming into a microphone" (*TBA*, p. 72). It can be said that his story is a cry of protest against the racist violence he suffers at the hands of the white kids. In this way, Shahid's story shows the impact of racist abuse on his subconscious mind.

Analogously, the narrator observes while Shahid passes through an area on his way to meet Deedee, he begins to jog and run as the locality is known for the racist attacks. This shows Shahid's paranoia and his attempt to escape the racist violence. In the college as well, he fears that he may be attacked by the racists when he sees a boy waiting outside Deedee's office. He imagines the racists hidden at the corners and ready to pounce upon him. This shows how severely the threat of racist violence plays with his mind. He undergoes a sense of persecution mania as he constantly feels insecure and vulnerable.

It needs to be foregrounded here that the word "Paki" is used as a term of racist abuse reserved exclusively for the people in England who are of Pakistani origin. The characters of the Pakistani diaspora are turned into inferior others because of their race, religion, and the fact that they come to England, the land of the former colonizers, from a formerly colonized country, Pakistan. This makes them subalterns and shows that their mutual relation is that of the colonizers and the colonized or the one between the dominating and the dominated.

At multiple times in the novel, the Muslim characters of the Muslim diaspora are called 'Paki' by their British countrymen. Chili, Shahid's brother, was yelled at 'get back, Pakis!' (*TBA*, p. 139) while participating in an anti-racist demonstration with his black girlfriend. Even Strapper who is shown as sympathetic to the Pakistani characters uses words like "Paki-busters" (*TBA*, p. 141) and "Paki" (*TBA*, p. 145). This shows the internalization of racism by the individuals who mean no harm. He says to Shahid that he understands him and justifies it by saying, 'You a Paki, me a delinquent' (*TBA*, p. 145). What he implies is the idea that in British society, being of Pakistani origin is considered as big a crime as a delinquent drug-seller. If you are of Pakistani origin, you are part of the problem as Strapper's words reiterate and reinforce the idea. Chili is of the view that the Pakistani Muslims have become anathema and a target of hatred of the British people. He calls them "the new

Jews" and informs them that "everyone hates them" (*TBA*, p. 201). While talking about them, he describes them as "the Pakis", calls their shops "dirty", characterizes them as "surly" and "humorless", and terms their sons "fat" and their daughters "ugly" (*TBA*, p. 201).

Racism has an overpowering and psychologically destructive impact on the sense of identity of the characters in the novel. It creates in them a sense of fear and insecurity. They feel extreme confusion and paranoia when faced with racism. This can be illustrated by Shahid's account of his anxiety owing to his harrowing experience of racism. He tells Riaz that being a non-white person, he felt "scared of going into certain places", and believed that the white people always reserved for him the cruel sentiments "of sneering and disgust and hatred" (*TBA*, p. 10).

Shahid's character shows the distorting impact of racism by responding to racist violence in a quite uncommon manner. He comes to show internalization of the racist ideology and a desire to turn into a racist himself as is obvious from the fact that he desired "to be a racist" (*TBA*, p. 10). Having been a victim of racism, he now intends to inflict it on the others around him. The fact that his mind "was invaded by killing-nigger fantasies" (*TBA*, p. 10), clearly indicates that he takes the perpetrators of violence as his model to emulate. Secondly, he shows mimicry of the Whiteman's attitude towards the African community, suggested by the phrase "killing-nigger fantasies". The expression "my mind was invaded" however, shows his consciousness of the fact that his mind has been colonized by the oppressive ideology of racism, and has been conditioned into thinking on these lines. The further proof of racism on his personality can be taken in his attempt to explain this idea when he was asked to do so by Chad. He explains his desire of "going around abusing Pakis, niggers, chinks, Irish, any foreign scum" (*TBA*, p. 11). He cannot even bear the idea of having a relationship with girls of his ethnicity. He tells Chad that even the idea of having sex with Asian girls made him nauseous.

His revulsion of the women of his ethnic stock is further made clear by these words, "I wouldn't touch brown flesh, except with branding iron" (*TBA*, p. 11). He wants to have no relationship with them except that of violence, that is, "with a branding iron". In the next sentence, he declares that he considers all nine white people, especially the ones of his ethnic stock bastards, and holds them contemptible. He goes on to argue why he was denied the privilege of being a racist and why he was expected to be good, unlike his white compatriots. He questions, "why can't I swagger around pissing on others for being inferior?" (*TBA*, p. 11). He relates that he was turning into a monster by imbibing racist tendencies. This is what he experienced and felt before he joined the group of students of Pakistani origin who are engaged in anti-racist endeavors.

Of particular importance is the lecture on the history of racism that Deedee Osgood delivers in her class. In this lecture, she gives various examples of the ways negroes suffered racism in America. She shares with the students how in Presley's time, the negroes could not watch a movie in Washington. Further, she informs them that interracial marriages were considered illegal, and how "Emmett Till was lynched in 1955 for whistling at a white woman" (*TBA*, p.27). Her lecture is significant in two ways. Firstly, it shows that Deedee knows and is sensitive to the history of racism in America that victimized the negro community. Secondly, the fact that it is addressed to students that are predominantly of Asian origin clearly shows the light in which Deedee sees her students of Asian background. She considers them vulnerable and potential victims of racism in contemporary English society. She identifies resemblance between the persecution of the black community in America and is alive to the threat of racist violence faced by her students of Asian, especially of Pakistani origin.

Kureishi also gives insight into how the British people justify their racist beliefs and their discriminatory practices against the people of the Pakistani diaspora. The rationale offered on the British people's part in the text is that the Pakistani immigrants pose a potential threat in terms of jobs and other economic opportunities and are feared to oust the British in their own country. A white woman bursts at Chad and Shahid by shouting "Paki! Paki! Paki!" (*TBA*, p. 139) at them. She violently accuses the characters of Pakistani origin of stealing their jobs, taking their housing, and everything. She demands to "give it back and go back home" (*TBA*, p. 139).

Her furious words illustrate the fact that the basis of the white man's racist behavior toward the people of the Pakistani diaspora is economic and is incited by the financial threat they perceive in the form of the Pakistani diaspora.

To conclude, Racism is an overarching theme in the novel and its heaviness pervades and poisons the novel's atmosphere. The only place in the novel beyond race and class is the mosque where people belonging to diverse "types and nationalities _ Tunisians, Indians, Algerians, Scots,

French_ gathered there..." (TBA, p. 131). The mosque is described as an all-inclusive and all-embracing sanctuary_ "Here race and class barriers had been suspended" (TBA, p. 132). All other scenes and places in the novel are haunted by the fear of racism or the endeavors to counteract the antagonism and violence it incites and inflicts.

Identity Crisis

One of the key postcolonial issues Kureishi deals with in *TBA* (1995) is an identity crisis. Many of the immigrant characters in *TBA* (1995) are victims of identity crisis which is mainly the result of their living in a secular and modern Britain while at the same time fiercely advocating and defending their fundamentalist religious ideologies. The main conflict in the novel is between religious fundamentalism represented by Riaz and his followers and liberalism espoused by the modern-spirited teacher, Deedee Osgood. And the main battlefield of this conflict is Shahid's soul. Shahid is the protagonist of the novel who goes through and is acutely conscious of an identity crisis. He as an individual has a deep desire to belong to the community of his Muslim fellows in the college and suffers from an acute fear of exclusion from their circle. On the other hand, he is attracted towards Deedee Osgood and the liberal world she represents with literature, free discussion, music, unbridled sex, and drug addiction. He finds himself at the crosscurrents of these opposing ideologies and is forcefully claimed by both. The antagonistic cultures confronted by Shahid are Islamic fundamentalism, staunchly and at times, violently, represented by his Muslim fellows belonging to the Pakistani diaspora, and western liberalism personified for him in the character of his teacher and lover, Deedee Osgood.

The novel emphasizes the sense of community and togetherness among the characters and highlights the fierce obsession of the diverse communities with their separate identities. Shahid desires to bond with his people; he wants to belong to them and fears exclusion. Concern with one's respective identity and the necessity of proclaiming it before the world seemed to be the defining feature of the age. Shahid observes that "everyone was insisting on their identity, coming out as a man, woman, gay, black, Jew-brandishing which features they could claim, as if without a tag they would not be human" (TBA, p. 92). Identity, therefore, is the prime concern not only with Shahid but also with other people and communities in the novel. Especially for the immigrant Muslim students of the Pakistani diaspora, it is the driving force that makes them take tough stances, adopt and advocate religious fundamentalism and assert themselves in face of the white oppression and racism.

The incident of book-burning in the novel staged by the Pakistani Muslim students is of paramount significance as it shows a sharp contrast between the two communities and brings the two groups in direct conflict with each other. The protesters are enraged because they think that the author has expressed blasphemous views in the book. Both the author and the book remain unnamed despite all the furor and controversy they create in the novel. It is also implied that the protesting students have not even read the book. Deedee Osgood advises the demonstrators who are on the verge of burning the book to read it first. The protesters are only demonstrating their religious frenzy without ascertaining what the book is really about. When Shahid asks Riaz "Would you kill a person for writing a book?" (TBA, p. 172), the latter's answer shows his categorical and violent stance on the issue. He replies "Stone dead. That is the least I would do to him" (TBA, p. 172). By marked contrast, Shahid looks at the matter differently and tries to humanize the author of the controversial book in the eyes of his fellow students. To Shahid, the controversial author is not the contemptible enemy and threat as he is considered by his other compatriots. He remarks that the author has not harmed them by spitting on them, refusing a job, or calling them "Paki scum" (TBA, p. 218).

The incident of book-burning is significantly associated with Shahid's identity crisis. It leads him to a point of climax where he is faced with the dilemma of making a tough yet inevitable choice between his friends who move from the position of defending their community to a more fundamentalist stance shown by their public demonstration of burning the book, and Deedee Osgood who advocates the freedom of speech and the author's right to freely voice his opinions. The destruction of the book is the ultimate act of separation between him and his friends: "the alliance terminated the moment Hat soaked the book in petrol" (*The Black Album*, p. 227). Finally, he decides to sever his ties with them and join Deedee Osgood.

The book-burning demonstration ends when Deedee informs and brings the policemen to the college. The demonstrators disperse, although they plan to wreak vengeance upon her for informing against her. Later, they invade her home intending to teach her a lesson. She suffers violence at their

hands because she opposes their hateful and violent propaganda. Shahid flees from his friends and joins Deedee at her house. He also becomes a target of their violence as he is found with Deedee in her house instead of being with them attacking the house. In the scene of confrontation in Deedee's house, he is claimed and pulled apart by both the groups. While addressing Deedee, Chad says, "He belongs to us. Let us take him, bitch, and there'll be no trouble for you!" (*TBA*, p. 266). She also grabs Shahid's "other arm" and pulls him towards herself (*TBA*, p. 266). Here, Chad and Deedee do not remain just individuals; rather, they become representatives and forces of the two competing cultures who are fighting and competing for his soul, laying claim upon it and each desperately trying to forcibly possess him as its own. Shahid, however, chooses Deedee over Chad. It can be taken as his rejection of their fundamentalist approach to religion and the increasingly violent ways they adopt to propagate it.

Shahid's identity is shaped by multiple factors that directly or indirectly affect his life. Of these, the more important ones include the racism he experiences in his childhood and youth, his deep desire to belong to the community of the Muslim students of his ethnic origin, their fundamentalism and increasingly violent stance, and the world of love and liberty offered by Deedee Osgood and the influence of her unorthodox way of teaching and liberal ideas upon his mind. Throughout the narrative, he tries to come to terms with these conflicting influences and reconcile his way out of them. In the end, he chooses to stand by and stay with Deedee Osgood. The novel ends with a two-line dialogue between Deedee and Shahid in which they decide to continue their relationship "Until it stops being fun" (*TBA*, p. 276).

The dialogue indicates that the relationship between the two is neither binding nor fixed; it is an open relationship based upon free choice and subject to change. Shahid has finally accepted the dynamic and fluid nature of identity and realized the importance of independence in relationships where one belongs with a free heart unburdened by any claims of religion, ethnicity, or nationality.

Double Consciousness

Identity crisis is inseparably linked with the postcolonial idea of double consciousness which is a state of double vision the characters experience in the novel. This concept has been partly discussed above owing to its interrelation with the idea of an identity crisis.

Riaz, the leader of the Muslim students in the college, shows double consciousness. Even he is not free from the cultural influences of the metropolitan, London, despite all his resistance against the western culture and his fundamentalist teachings. Shahid feels that Riaz is the joint product of Islam and the West, of Lahore and Leeds. He is described in the novel as "a cross between J.B. Priestley and Zia Al Haq" (*TBA*, p. 6). He is neither purely the product of the East nor totally an antithesis of the West; he sways between the two although his struggle is dedicated to advocate and uphold the cause of the former against the latter.

Equally relevant to the idea of double consciousness is Deedee Osgood's discussion with Shahid about the pop singer, Prince who is the creator of the music album, "The Black Album" which gives title to the novel. She describes Prince as simultaneously being half black and half white, half man and half woman. Furthermore, he is "half size, feminine but macho too" (*TBA*, p. 25). The words she uses for Prince show his double consciousness, hybridity, and marvelous ability to adapt to belong to both the white and the black, men and women, and manifesting both feminine and masculine sides. In other words, Prince represents the third space where all can belong without sacrificing their respective identities. The fact that Kureishi adopts the album's title for his novel reveals that he uses its creator's identity as a source of inspiration and illumination for his characters. He wants his characters to embrace hybridity and double consciousness like Prince instead of getting fixed with the insular and unchanging idea of identity. This also relates to the quote pinned in Deedee's office "All limitations are prisons" (*TBA*, p. 25) which implies that obsession with one's own culture tends to rely on either negation or exclusion of the other cultures.

Kureishi shows optimism about the Pakistani diaspora's relationship with England despite his critique of the racism inherent in the country's cultural milieu. This is clear from Uncle Asif's words who describes the relationship on the analogy of "the brides who have just crossed the threshold. We have to watch ourselves, otherwise we will wake up one day to find we have made calamitous marriage" (*TBA*, p. 54). By using the metaphor of newlywed brides, he brings home the point that the Pakistani diaspora needs time to get acclimatized to the British culture. Like the newlywed brides, they have partially left their earlier home and have just crossed the threshold of the new one while

their hearts are still engrossed in the fond memories of their parents' homes. Moreover, they also need to guard their manners before getting widespread acceptance from the British public. Otherwise, the relationship would prove a "calamitous marriage" for both parties.

Unhomeliness

Unhomeliness is another manifestation of the characters' identity crisis in the novel. The character of Chad is quite interesting and illuminating in the way it shows the complexity of identity and unhomeliness. A white couple is reported to have adopted Chad. They named him Trevor Bess. His mother turned out to be a racist who tormented him by calling his former "Pakis" and lecturing on how the Pakistani needed to adapt and adjust to the British culture. He felt excluded which, in turn, created in him mad fury, "He wanted to bomb them" (*TBA*, p. 107). He felt disconnected and uprooted. To assert his connection with Pakistan, he learned Urdu. In England, he was treated with mistrust by the white people. The Pakistanis as well mistrusted him and failed to understand his desire to belong to "the third world theocracy?" (*TBA*, p. 107). The above-described brief history of Chad's life shows that he is rejected by both cultures as he finds home in neither of them. This feeling of hopelessness and sense of abandonment by both cultures is called unhomeliness by Homi. K. Bhabha.

After being rejected by both cultures, Chad meets Riaz, who imposes on him a new identity by naming him Muhammad Shahabuddin Ali Shah. This, however, is later replaced with Chad. At this point, he adopts a religious identity by giving up his national identity. He prides on his Islamic identity and shuns his national Pakistani identity. To him, being a Muslim becomes his cherished identity in contrast to being a "Paki" or British. In this manner, Islam becomes the home he was denied both by his parent Pakistani culture and adopted British culture. Chad's character exemplifies both hybridity and unhomeliness. For him, the dominant western ideology is akin to a colonialist ideology which he rejects because of the way it subjects him to racism. By contrast, the ideology of Islam represents his pre-colonial past which he reclaims and tries to defend as its die-hard follower. Here, identity becomes fluid, vibrant, and hybrid as Chad moves across multiple identities and finally comes to settle with the Islamic view of identity.

Conclusion

The research paper concludes that Kureishi's *TBA* (1995) presents a critique of the rampant racism and the Islamic radicalism its violence creates and helps sustain in the English society and their powerful implications for society and individuals. The research foregrounds how the Muslim characters of the Pakistani diaspora are turned into subaltern others by the racist violence they suffer at the hands of their white compatriots, and secondly, as a consequence of their fundamentalist stance in opposition to the white supremacist ideology that viciously seeks them out and aggressively victimizes them. As subaltern others in white-dominated England, the Muslim characters of Pakistani diaspora are the easiest target, assailable with impunity, and the foremost to suffer the consequences of the clash between the two extremist ideologies. Some of the impacts on these characters' lives and minds outlined in the present paper include identity crisis, double consciousness, unhomeliness, and a sense of ceaseless antagonism with the native, white inhabitants of the land. Using critical insights from postcolonial theory has been central in highlighting the practice of racist oppression the Pakistani Muslim minority suffers in England as powerfully and poignantly presented in this novel. The research is significant in terms of highlighting the entrenched racism in English society, the rising Islamophobia in the west, and the growing religious fundamentalism in the British Muslim youth.

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