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Communities in a Chaotic Time: Hanif Kureishi's *The Black Album*❖

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ABSTRACT

Born during the middle part of the 20th century, Hanif Kureishi (1954-) is a novelist experiencing all the blessings and following chaos of the sea change of British society. His second novel *The Black Album*, though not highly acclaimed for its narrative forms or artistic creativeness, is ambitious in its rendering of various chaotic conditions in Britain. With the Rushdie Affair at its backdrop and revolving around the protagonist's quest for belonging among different reference groups, *The Black Album* represents the formation of (impossible) communities of various kinds, be it of Islamic fundamentalism, canonical literature, pop culture or love. This paper mainly considers *The Black Album* in the light of Jean Luc-Nancy's idea of community, and appropriates related ideas in chaos theory to illuminate that under a seemingly linear plot the novelist highlights deviations of belief systems and communal coordination. In so doing *The Black Album* goes beyond positive identity politics to attest that a community only comes into being as it is unworking.

KEY WORDS: Kureishi, community, capitalism, Islam, Communism, chaos

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渾沌時代的共同體：
庫雷西的《黑色唱片》

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摘　要

出生在二十世紀中期的英國作家庫雷西（Hanif Kureishi 1954-）經歷了二次世界大戰後英國社會興衰的巨變過程。他的第二部長篇小說《黑色唱片》並未在藝術上得到很高的評價，卻有著處理混沌狀態下各種議題的野心。庫雷西將魯希迪事件放在小說背景中，讓主角在游移於各個參考團體之時尋找自我的歸屬。於描繪這些團體之時，庫雷西再現了（不可能的）共同體的形成過程，不論它們是名之為伊斯蘭基本教義派、經點文學、流行文化還是愛情。本文試圖以儂曦（Jean Luc-Nancy）的共同體理論閱讀《黑色唱片》，並挪用渾沌理論的相關概念來說明本書看似線性的情節發展，在價值體系和共同體組成上有著種種偏移的現象。如此一來，《黑色唱片》超越了正面肯定的認同政治，呈現出共同體唯有在無法運作時才會浮現。

關鍵詞：庫雷西、共同體、資本主義、伊斯蘭、共產主義、渾沌

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The end of the Second World War brought with it the short period of the post-war boom, the long, 25-year economic upswing that forever changed the economic, social, and cultural structure of the country. Born during the middle part of the 20th century, Hanif Kureishi (1954-) experienced all the blessings and the following chaos of this sea change in British society. His first novel *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990) creatively blends clashes between class, sexualities and ethnicities and brings him into the core of the postcolonial literary landscape. His second novel *The Black Album*, though less acclaimed for its narrative forms and artistic creativity, is more ambitious in its rendering of a larger scope of the chaotic condition of Britain. With the Rushdie Affair at its backdrop and the quest of the protagonist for belonging among different reference groups, Kureishi represents the formation of (impossible) communities of various kinds, be it of Islamic fundamentalism, canonical literature, pop culture or love. This paper mainly considers *The Black Album* in the light of Jean Luc-Nancy's idea of community, and appropriates related ideas in chaos theory to illuminate that under a seemingly linear plot the novelist has come up with deviations of belief systems and communal coordination. In so doing *The Black Album* goes beyond positive identity politics to attest that the community only comes into being as it is unworking.

Chaos, Strange Attractors and the Inoperative Community

A chaotic Britain in the late 1980s emerged as the protagonist Shahid Hassan struggles between his *teacher's* postmodernist pedagogy and his beloved canonical literature, as well as between religious asceticism and radical eroticism. Values keep disintegrating, and those who struggle to keep unchangeable, non-negotiable beliefs look fragile, if not ridiculous. The disorder that the characters witnessed in their era was not just from the end of the postwar consensus, namely a welfare system maintained both by the Conservatives and Labour, but was also a result of the clash of values (moral conservatism and economic liberalism) under the hegemonic banner of Prime Minister Thatcher's new liberalism, itself creating chaotic effects both on the economy and culture. While some conservatives regard chaos as a pejorative metaphor for the waning of traditional morality, it is a descriptive term for natural scientists. In "the natural world chaos just *is*; a state of things which, if not universal, is commonplace" (McNair xi). If we regard the social as part of the nature, unrest, disorder, conflict and unpredictability among human beings

are no more than those phenomena in a nature beyond (imaginary) human control. It is always a desire of human beings to impose logic on the formless and to attribute an ultimate cause to a multiply-determined result. Chaos theory, originally developed in mathematics and physics, and later appropriated in social theories, squarely confronts the unpredictability and randomness of its research objects, which had previously been rendered as orderly and deductable in the traditional social and natural sciences. James Gleick defines chaos theory as "a science of process rather than state, of becoming rather than being" (5), echoing Deleuzean concepts such as deterritorialization and becoming. Whereas Deleuze ascribes a positive light to the transgressive unpredictability of becoming, scientists focus on the non-linear systems in nature as complexities that can no longer be clarified merely by Newtonian laws. A weather forecast might be the fittest example to show the insufficiencies of a Newtonian worldview. There are just too many variables within the weather system to allow for it to be accurately forecasted in the long term.

Following mathematics and natural scientists, scholars of the social sciences and humanities quickly picked up the idea of chaos theory, in the same way that some of their predecessors had eagerly applied positive methods to demonstrate that their research results were of the same truth value as natural scientific achievements. In fact, non-linear and complex systems shaped by multiple causes, such as the weather system, are the very objects of study of the social sciences and humanities. The causal factors in the present life-world are not only too many and too variable, but also too indiscernible, including the workings of emotion, unconsciousness, and relative perception, not to mention interactions among economic, political and social processes that are themselves non-linear. In the early 1990s, Zbigniew Brzezinski and Daniel Moynihan identified the "chaos paradigm" as "the breakdown of governmental authority, the break-up of states; the intensification of tribal, ethnic and religious conflicts; the spread of terrorism" (Huntington 35), reflecting an incessantly globalizing world where every certainty dissolves. In a chaotic world, or late/post-modernity as some scholars term it, not all that is/looks solid melts into air. In chaos theory strange attractors are "objects in phase space towards which trajectories are drawn as time approaches infinity" (Kapitaniak and Wojewoda 9), and therefore can be further explained as "what a behavior of a system settles down to, or is attracted to" (Crutchfiled et al.

50). Critics have noticed that strange attractors, despite their attracting power that gives the system a sense of stability, are unstable and even unreal. Two points getting close to the attractor at a certain time will fall apart later. Defining the strange attractor as "that simulation of a system's behavior over time," Jo Alyson Parker relates it with the subject's meaning-making activity in the study of the system. "That is to say, the attractor does not exist out there in reality, but it is a particular means for describing the behavior of the system" (Parker 23).

To say that the world is chaotic does not mean that it goes beyond our observation. Complex and unpredictable as it is, chaos is an orderly disorder that is self-organizing. If strange attractors are objects which trajectories are drawn into, explorations of the strange attractors will help to explain the order in the disorder. In human society people are attracted to various sorts of communities, which are, as has been notably pointed out by Benedict Anderson, imagined, and yet are indispensable for showing rules of human behavior based on needs of belonging, security and identity. Community, in this sense, can be compared to a strange attractor, an artificial category to explain how components/agents align and organize themselves into relations or configurations in the midst of interaction, while it is also a phenomenon that operates beyond human intentions. Community is one of the most salient concepts or ideas in *The Black Album* that *attracts* characters in a chaotic world. Shahid's struggle between different groups reminds the readers of the existence of community. As a strange attractor it seems not so much a solid substance as an artificial category applied to labeled individuals. This unreality reflects the instability of a strange attractor. That is why individuals in a community, as two points on a strange attractor, are not guaranteed immutable affinity. However, with all the senses of belonging and security that community promises in a chaotic world, people are enticed into communal practices to re-imagine national, ethnical, and religious solidarities.

Kureishi places the issue of community at the core of his early works. The identity politics revolving around ethnicity, class, gender, and sexuality are a question of community, of how and why an individual should belong to or oppose a certain kind of community. Trans-ethnic/class love, difficulties in primordial identification with a certain nation, diasporic groups' longing for an overseas motherland, and attempts to belong to a past or to unite with distant others are Kureishi's interrogative representations of community,

bringing to mind Nancy's deconstruction of this very idea in *The Inoperative Community* (*La communauté désoeuvrée*). While the ideals of communism, Islamic fundamentalism, and radical postmodernism are rendered impossible in *The Black Album*, one can discern that there is still a pattern in the (un)working of community cutting across all of the different groups. Below I will briefly introduce how the idea of community is previously discussed and later philosophically de/reconstructed by Nancy, and bring these insights to read the chaos, fear and communities in this novel.

Community as an idea is usually regarded (or misrecognized) as the very opposite of society, long existent before the emergence of society which functions in a contractual mode. German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies (1855-1936) classified society (*Gesellshaft*) and community (*Gemeinshaft*) as such: the former is a group where individuals participate in the group's activity out of self-interest, while the latter is a relatively tight and cohesive group which shares common characteristics, such as place and faith. Tönnies did not intend to make a distinction between the good and bad, but rather to appropriate the communitarianism of the Middle Age's as imagined by the romanticism of his era, so as to criticize the nostalgic reaction against alienation in modernity. Pitting community against society, this atavistic tendency is obviously slanted in favor of the natural, organic, and harmonious community of the bygone age. Raymond Williams' *The Country and the City* takes a similar direction. As early as the literary representations in the Greco-Roman world, the country is regarded as a place of nostalgia, belonging to the past, while the city is the intolerable status quo. For Nancy "[t]he lost, or broken community can be exemplified in all kinds of ways, by all kinds of paradigms: the natural family, the Athenian city, the Roman Republic, the first Christian community, corporations, communes, or brotherhoods—always it is a matter of a lost age . . ." (9).

Since community implies crystallization of human nostalgia rather than a group that really exists in the past, Nancy claims that "*Community has not taken place*" (11).

> *Gesellshcaft*—'society,' . . . has taken the place of something for which we have no name or concept, something that issued at once from a much more extensive communication (a communication with the gods, the cosmos, animals, the dead, the unknown) . . . *and* from a much more piercing and dispersed

> segmentation . . . (solitude, rejection, admonition, helplessness). (11)

Since the so-called past can never be experienced in the present, its underdevelopment or formlessness are imagined as the realization of an idealized interpersonal relationship. To communicate with the gods or anything else in the past did not guarantee a closer interpersonal bond than that in the present, while a greater sense of helplessness felt in ancient times, with a lack of modern knowledge and technology, could produce "piercing and dispersed segmentation." Considering community in the light of the future rather than the past helps disclose human anticipations of an idealized future. As Nancy mentioned, "community, far from being what society has crushed or lost, is *what happens to us*—question, waiting, event, imperative—*in the wake of society*" (11). Expectations and imperatives of a community become the "real" attributes of the community people believe:

> community is not only intimate communication between its members, but also its organic communion with its own essence. It is constituted not only by a fair distribution of tasks and goods, or by a happy equilibrium of forces and authorities: it is made up principally of the sharing, diffusion, or impregnation of an identity by a plurality wherein each member identifies himself only through the supplementary mediation of his identification with the living body of the community. In the motto of the Republic, *fraternity* designates community: the model of the family and of love. (Nancy 9)

A narrative of the lost community re-described by Nancy as such implies contradictions in itself. If individuals and the group are both independent subjects capable of communicating intimately, this communication cannot be based upon commonality, whether of tasks, goods, forces or authorities. For if it were to be so, there would be no need for communication. As the community originates from communications between *differences*, how could it result in a harmonious entity with a single identity? Attempts to try to import essence and absoluteness into subjects, objects, and communities only expose that the absolute immanence (essence with solidified boundary), whether of an individual or community, is something

external to its supposed bearer and is set to gross over diversities among its members. Without something in opposition to the absolute there will be no absoluteness. If community is a relation among its different members, this relation does not rest on the foundation of the absolute sameness of the members, but rather on the exposure of mutual differences that creates the very possibility of a relation. This deconstruction of absolute immanence is what Nancy called community.[1] The reason why a community comes up with a common goal is to mantle such difference. "[I]t is precisely the immanence of man to man [sic], or it is *man*, taken absolutely, considered as the immanent being par excellence, that constitutes the stumbling block to a thinking of community." Therefore a community of human beings "presupposes that it effect, or that it must effect, as such and integrally, its own essence, which is itself the accomplishment of the essence of humanness" (Nancy 3).

In addition to criticizing essentialized imaginations of community, Nancy discussed the conceptions of individual and community. He considers that his predecessor Georges Bataille only viewed community as an issue limited by "the theme of the sovereignty of the subject" (23). Nancy analyzes and criticizes the idea of the individual, replacing it with "singular being," which is always othered. Since every singular being is the other for another being, communicating is always limited and communing becomes impossible. However, from the very lack of fusion comes forth the embryo of community. Nancy denied the possibility that a community comes into being with a design and common goal. Rather, it is in the interstices of partition and partaking, and at the moment of abandoning the self into the ecstatic state of sharing (*le partage*) that community becomes possible. This sharing "is not a communion, nor the appropriation of an object, nor a self-recognition, nor even a communication as this is understood to exist between subjects" (25). As a result, the "'clear consciousness' of separation" of the subject and an

[1] Nancy also describes narratives of community based upon essentialism and immanentism (3) as such: "the goal of a human community . . . [is] achieving a community of beings producing in essence their own essence as their work, and furthermore producing precisely this essence as *community*. An absolute immanence of man to man [sic]—a humanism—and of community to community—a communism—obstinately subtends, whatever be their merits or strengths, all forms of oppositional communism . . ." (2). The essence of community is produced, while a community producing other communities becomes the essential way of producing itself. Without the mainstream there will be no oppositional forces, and without a relationship between the Other and the concerned community, absolute immanence of the community cannot be worked out.

inoperative community are two sides of the same coin (19):

> the exigency of 'clear consciousness' is everything but that abandonment of community that would favor, for example, a reversion to the positions of the individual . . . This consciousness—or this communication—is ecstasy: which is to say that such a consciousness is never *mine*, but to the contrary, I only have it in and through the community. (19)

Representations of different communities in *The Black Album* show that, what one identifies with (an attempt to find immanence of oneself, rather than an act of "clear consciousness") usually collides with oneself, while communities not chosen by the characters endow them with unexpected consciousness. In other words, with regard to which community or communities happened to which character, we should notice the occasion when the "subject's structure as *self*" is suspended and replaced by a "clear consciousness at the extremity of its clarity, where consciousness of self turns out to be outside the self of consciousness" (Nancy 19).

Communities in The Black Album

Despite the vast critical efforts in exploring the identity politics in *The Black Album*, the idea of community is not spotlighted, not to mention Kureishi's representation of its inoperativity and impossibility. Generally, critics read this novel in terms of Kureishi's problematization of any homogenized identity and his stress on the prevalence of capitalism. Bart Moore-Gilbert notices that Kureishi is "critical of a variety of metropolitan anti-racisms" as well as other forms of "cultural nationalism . . . organized around a singular, racialised conception of national identity" (137, 130). He is also aware of the author's "anxieties about the vulnerability of *all* forms of traditional culture to consumerism and 'mass' mediatisation" (120). Susie Thomas mentions that "there is greater recognition of capitalism's capacity to co-opt and commodify, while communal identity exerts a stronger influence on the individual" (101). Bradley Buchanan claims that in this novel there is "no possibility of establishing any meaningful class-based or racial solidarity that can protect one from the commodification, exploitation, inequality and inauthenticity of contemporary British life" (41-42). These viewpoints

certainly raise the following questions: How does the disintegration of any solid identity relate to a strong emphasis on communal identity? Does capitalism has anything to do with community? How to explain struggles among identities and the idea of community?

This being so, my approach sheds light mainly on the failures of identity politics where communities are made (im)possible. This failure is based no longer on an identifiable us-against-them or center/marginal modal. In the view of identity politics, people's political stances are shaped by their identification with race, religion, class, gender or sexual orientation. At a surface level *The Black Album* pits liberal consumerists against Islamic fundamentalists, outlining the major two communities highlighted in the Rushie Affair. This lures critics to dichotomize conflicting practices as "consumerism against fundamentalism" (Kaleta 6), or to claims that Shahid is "The Postcolonial Subject Divided between East and West" (Frederick M. Holmes), the latter as an essay title echoing Samuel P. Huntington's noted (and usually criticized) argument of a "clash of civilizations." As Huntington believed, after the bi-polar conflict between First and Second World, or the ideological contrast between capitalism and communism, the west faced its main challenge from Islamic fundamentalism on the one hand, and on the other from the economically ascendant Sinic civilization. This being so, he claimed that the primary source of conflict in the post-Cold War world comes from cultural and religious identities. I have argued that to sum up the major conflict in *The Black Album* as that between the East and the West is problematic, since a geographically eastern country may adopt capitalism and consumerism no less strongly than western ones (Liao 170). This is also the argument of McNair, who goes a step further:

> I reject [Huntington's] premise that culture and cultural identity are the driving forces of human history. This idealist position neglects the role of economics as the driver of human evolution (the materialist position), and neglects the importance of capitalism as a unifying, globalising force. (220)

Capitalism does not just resemble chaos. It is chaos itself with strange attractors such as commodity and community that never enclose themselves. This system complicates the formation of identity as people do not simply choose an identity, but are themselves points strangely attracted to different

attractors for a cause they are never consciously (if not knowingly) aware of.

Shahid's family members, with their distinct beliefs, work ethics and career choices, exemplify a sort of community not orchestrated at the discretion of the agents in the chaos of capitalism. Shahid's father as a successful business person, an immigrant, a patriarch and now deceased, is not so much an oppressive dominant *per se* as a strange attractor, a mode of becoming where family members are drawn into an unanticipated community. A child with a learning ethic yet refusing to inherit his father's business, Shahid is frequently taunted for his unmanly bookishness by Papa, a nameless universal figure haunting this novel. Shahid never identifies himself with his father's business mindset, nor can he overlook his legacies reflected by consumerist goods in his family, as well as his standard of dressing and anticipations for his sons. None of Papa's intentions "work," as Chili turns into nothing more than a drug addict and Shahid seems to leave their family business in south London forever.

However, it is just in this inoperation—failure of any intentional operation—that a community is observable. Community or strange attractors are not something created by actors in a system. They are repeat patterns that a system is attracted to. In the case of family, what attributes someone to a family is beyond the intentional control of its members, especially the will of the patriarch. Family members may repeat the consumptive or productive patterns of their leaders, though expressed in unexpected ways. Shahid's family-community, not congealed by fraternity, fails to work according to the agent's intentions, yet finds its possibility when it is "*the being-ecstatic of Being itself*" (Nancy 6), or when it manifests the relational being of this father, his relatives and sons. Shahid is drawn to his uncle Asif's books in the way that Chili is to Papa's materialism. The consumer society presupposes individuality as a necessity so as to be able to sell to a consuming subject. The consumerists in *The Black Album*, however, are rendered as Nancy's singular being, an existent that always exposes itself to others in its exteriority, therefore having others to *cut across*, to participate in itself as relational beings. As Nancy puts it,

> behind the theme of the individual, but beyond it, lurks the question of singularity. . . .What is their singular necessity in the sharing that divides and that puts in communication bodies, voices, and writings in general and in totality? . . . But

> singularity never has the nature or the structure of individuality. . . . It is linked to ecstasy: one could not properly say that the singular being is the subject of ecstasy, for ecstasy has no "subject"—but one must say that ecstasy (community) happens *to* the singular being. (6-7)

Individuality presupposes an absolute distinctiveness of the self by which one can distinguish oneself from the other. What happens to the singular beings of the afore-mentioned characters is that none of them is the sole maker of himself. In their ecstasies they are lured by commodities and cultural products as strange attractors, as community that happens to them. Shahid seems to choose a career as a journalist of his own accord, yet in producing news he shares the mechanism with his father, who runs a travel company and likewise sells stories of scenery abroad to his clients. In the same vein, Chili, a squanderer and a womanizer regarding Shahid's teacher Deedee as no more than a sexual prey for Shahid, is repentant of his deeds and becomes a guardian for Shahid and Deedee at last. This new family type formed with a looser connection than traditional ones witnesses a decrease of biological essence as the core determinant of the family, and a emergent community of bounded randomness that strange attractors—commodities, discourses and images as cultural, economic and symbolic capital circulated among these characters—keep luring agents to forge communities unimagined previously.

Deedee Osgood, Shahid's teacher in a community college may not always belong to the postmodern or multicultural community that she, as a white intellectual, strongly identifies with. Once a sex worker and still a radical feminist, Deedee has picked up pop culture and racial politics as her current topic of discussion. She has "questions about [Richard] Wright and [Ralph] Ellison, Alice Walker and Toni Morrison" for Shahid (33), and lectures on "King, Malcolm, Cleaver, Davis, and the freedom riders" against the history of oppression of African Americans (36). Deedee also takes side with other cultural figures against conventional moralities. Above her desk "were pictures of Prince, Madonna, and Oscar Wilde, with a quote beneath them, 'All limitations are prisons'" (33). The American singer Prince might be the best incarnation of such a principle, as Shahid relates, "He's half black and half white, half man, half woman, half size, feminine but macho, too" (34). Accordingly, Deedee's pedagogy is to "[encourage] . . . students to study anything that took their interest, from Madonna's hair to a history of the

leather jacket" (34). This "anything," however, is not without hierarchy. "Straight" white writers are not mentioned in her reading list, while objects of cultural study like Madonna's hair and leather jackets are encouraged for their roots in pop culture. Deedee's modeling of elite/pop, white/non-white, and straight/queer marks a subaltern community which she evaluates highly, and, which, in Nancy's critique, faces "the impossibility of the absoluteness of the absolute," or "the 'absolute' impossibility of complete immanence" (Nancy 6). Categories such as pop, non-white, and queer are not immanently themselves and will be meaningless without opposing ideas. On the other hand, conflicting sub-categories further discredit the absoluteness of the camps that Deedee takes part in, as pop includes at least the pop canon and kitsch, non-white refers to people with a wide arrange of ethnicities and nationalities, and queerness concerns heterogeneous practices of sexuality loosely related only because of a vague normality as its antonym. To incarnate her intended communities Deedee comes up with discourses and practices to demarcate borders yet ends in seeing these trials betray her initial idealization. "All limitations are prisons" is paradoxical in this sense, for this motto is a limitation that imprisons, in its logic, those who want to set limits on anything. Deedee's "liberation" of some non-white students by housing them in her home, in an attempt to include others in her imagined community, delimits them in the name of freedom. This "community" of liberalism, intended and idealized as Deedee wishes, fails to *be* precisely because it is based upon the intention of the subject, while Nancy has made it clear that "community is the ecstatic consciousness of the night of immanence, insofar as such a consciousness is the interruption of self-consciousness" (19). One of Deedee's boarding students from a diasporic family commits suicide, according to Chad, an Islamic fundamentalist student, due to her loss of identity: "That is what happens when somebody doesn't know who they are" (240). Not knowing who one really is does not necessarily entail a death wish. Yet identity/community surely fails when it is completely attributed either to Islam or to liberalism. As Chad relates, the victim "was twisted against the truth by the postmodernists. They made her flee her loving parents, who contacted brother Riaz and myself. . . . The young girl was forced to say the religion treats women as second-class citizens" (240). [2] If some

[2] Although Chad's remarks might have often been discredited in terms of his militant Islamic background, Kureishi's efforts to illuminate Deedee's blind spot can still be felt. Without familiarity

postmodernists like Deedee are meticulous in emphasizing the plural forms of their truth, in an attempt to endow their theoretical community with some identity, this identity cannot be possible without finding essentialized others as Truth holders opposite to postmodernist relative truths. Ironically, in so doing the postmodernist truths, to gain the truth value over its rivals, turn to be a capitalized Truth that Deedee imposes upon her suicidal student, whose death announces the impossibility of community via intention or essence— in this case, of Deedee's idealized liberalist humanity.

On the other side, Deedee's postmodernist credo deconstructs itself in her measures to defend the freedom of speech. When the students in the Islamic fundamentalist group accuse Rushdie's book of being blasphemous in school, obviously *The Satanic Verses*, Deedee is reminiscent of cultural figures canonized by the western elite. As a Muslim student mentions, "She putting up some course. . . . The History of Censorship: Importance of Immorality. Plato, the Puritans, Milton. . . . Anyway, just about the whole white doo-dah" (228). Deedee's turn to the center testifies that community is not something one can choose at one's will, no matter how much she keeps a distance from Eurocentric high culture. Deedee's call for the police in the book burning scene strikingly reveals how much she is attracted to the novel as a strange attractor. Her feeling to defend the freedom of speech is just as fervent as the anger of many non-white students in this novel, so much so that the legality of burning one's book without causing public danger is totally ignored by one who resolutely advocates individual freedom. In comparison to an attack on a bookstore that violates civil and criminal law mentioned at the novel's end, to burn one's own novel in the spacious area of the playground in a school is to dispose of one's own private property and to utter one's anger/opinion symbolically against certain discourses, both constitutionalized rights in the capitalist law system. When students, Islamic fundamentalist or not, resist Deedee's pedagogy in the name of democracy, either in class or at the event of the book burning, the very ideas of freedom and democracy disarrange the absoluteness upheld by the opposite parties. Both Deedee and students against her can never keep their absolute status as a cultural minority or victim, in that what they identify with, be it democracy or

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with the everyday practices of Muslims or of the Koran, some sexist practices are indiscriminately regarded as a result of disciplines in Koran, while sexism in many non-Muslim societies and religions, especially in the Bible or the Western world, is quite ignored.

freedom of speech, nullifies their imagined community. "Excluded by the logic of the absolute-subject of metaphysics (Self, Will, Life, Spirit, etc.), community comes perforce to cut into this subject by virtue of this same logic" (Nancy 4). As Islamic fundamentalists attack the so-called whites in the name of democracy, or a postmodernist teacher calls the police, a symbol of the ideological state apparatus, to keep others silent in a peaceful protest, the absolute-subject is cut through by community itself as "relation" that "undoes . . . the autarchy of absolute immanence" (Nancy 4). The impossibility of immanence and absoluteness of oneself, as shown in the inconsistency of Deedee and her students and in their mutual share of western ideas, ironically witnesses that a shared community without essential identity has "happened to" them. In cultural chaos people as singularities are drawn to different strange attractors—communities—*that* in turn defeats the self-sufficiency of individuality.

The diasporic group as one of the most salient central themes for Kureishi and other non-white British writers, is not a homogeneous community, or, to speak more exactly, the epitome of the very idea of community that is possible. Diaspora, a process of geographical dislocation and relocation, is also a mental "transport" that characterizes ecstasy.[3] Papa's travel agency is a nodal point through which people are transported all over the world, himself being an exemplar of the same globalizing process. As a first generation immigrant, Papa cannot be categorized either as a Pakistani or Briton. His aversion to Pakistan is as intense as his identification with it:

> [Papa] had considered [Pakistan] his home. . . .The place enraged him: the religion shoved down everyone's throat; the bandits, corruption, censorship, laziness, fatuity of the press; the holes in the roads, the absence of roads, the roads on fire. Nothing was ever right for Papa there. He liked to say, when he was at his most depressed, that the British shouldn't have left.

[3] In Nancy's understanding, "Ecstasy . . . implies no effusion, and even less some form of effervescent illumination. Strictly speaking, it defines the impossibility, both ontological and gnosological, of absolute immanence (or of the absolute, and therefore of immanence) and consequently the impossibility either of an individuality . . . or of a pure collective totality. The theme of the individual and that of communism are closely bound up with (and bound together in) the general problematic of immanence. They are bound together in their denial of ecstasy. And for us the question of community is henceforth inseparable from a question of ecstasy—which is to say . . . from the question of Being considered as something other than the absoluteness of the totality of beings" (Nancy 6).

> "Nineteen forty-five—a new country, a fresh start!" he'd cry "How many people have such an opportunity! Why can't we run things without torturing and murdering one another, without the corruption and exploitation? What's wrong with us?"
>
> He'd boast about England so much that his brother Asif said, "What, are you personally related to the royal family, yaar?" Yet Papa's eyes filled with tears when he left, like a boy going back to prep school. (117)

Papa's nostalgia for a British-ruled Subcontinent says much about the illusiveness of building a nation upon a utopian totality. Uneven road surfaces echo corruption in the country, and the unbearable present calls for a lost community under the rule of a supposed Other. While Pakistan is deconstructed as a motherland that a first generation immigrant in Britain is so sick for, Papa the Anglophile cannot but identify Pakistan as his home. This identification does not stem from one's free will, but befalls on him as

> [c]ommunity is given to us with being and as being, well in advance of all our projects, desire, and undertakings. At bottom, it is impossible for us to lose community. A society may be as little communitarian as possible; it could not happen that in the social desert there would not be, however slight, even inaccessible, some community. We cannot not compear. (Nancy 35)

We cannot lose community because we have exposed ourselves to each other after and even before our birth, whether in our body, given names or images imagined by our parents. It is also the same case for Britain and Pakistan with their fates and citizens exposed to each other in the colonial and postcolonial era. Both countries, considered in light of the community, are "other than the absoluteness of the totality of beings" (Nancy 6). Papa cannot lose his community because of his ecstasy, his double negation (the not-home Britain and cursed Pakistan) and recognition (Pakistan as home and Britain justified as the colonizer) that defeat the absoluteness of community. His curses and tears for an imaginary homeland interrupt any positive annunciation and political consciousness of community to render himself a relational being whose sovereignty is cut up by communities.

Because of the increasing process of globalization that threatens to homogenize the world under a westernized culture, fears of losing one's identity grow and thereupon the effort to restore the once existent totalized community gains momentum and becomes integral to the fights against chaos. We have witnessed that even a postmodernist like Deedee is unable to forsake a canonical tradition to justify her espousal of freedom of speech. Marginalized both by their ethnicity, religion and ways of life which are difficult to incorporate into the western mainstream, which Deedee's teaching materials are a part of, the Islamic fundamentalist students have every reason to embrace a lost community due to their dislocations in time and space. Chad is introduced into the Islamic group by Riaz to preach religious doctrines and fight against racism. As Shahid's counterpart, Chad is also a second generation "immigrant" born in Britain. Yet in comparison with Shahid's adaption to a westernized immigrant family, Chad is lost in translation. "He was adopted by a white couple. The mother was racist, talked about Pakis all the time and how they had to fit in" (116). Racism that he is unable to escape outside the family circle propels him to evoke a lost Pakistan. None the less, his dream of community is ironically shattered in British and Pakistani daily life. As Deedee relates:

> When he [Chad] got to be a teenager he saw he had no roots, no connections with Pakistan, couldn't even speak the language. So he went to Urdu classes. But when he tried asking for the salt in Southall [a large suburban district of West London] everyone fell about at his accent. In England white people looked at him as if he were going to steal their car or their hand-bag, particularly as he dressed like a ragamuffin. But in Pakistan they looked at him even more strangely. Why should he be able to fit into a Third World theocracy? (117)

Chad's dilemma reminds the reader that community does not happen in a past that is forever lost for someone, such as a country one has never joined—a life in Pakistan for Chad. No matter how hard Chad has tried, his Urdu accent shows a failure to *work* out a community belonged to him, while the Pakistani in reality regard him as too British to stay in a theocracy.

Unable to find a perfect identity on either side, Chad has to find a

community in a broader span than a single country.[4] As he tells Shahid, "No more Paki. Me a Muslim. *We* don't apologize for ourselves neither. *We* are people who say one important thing—that pleasure and self-absorption isn't everything" (138, my emphasis). Chad's imagining of a Muslim community is again based upon an absolute immanence that cannot be identified without the Other, here an unsaid "they" against "We." A former drug and pop addict, Chad attributes all of the evils of abandonment to the West: "[The music and fashion industries] tell us what to wear, where to go, what to listen to. Ain't we their slaves" (89). His former motto, "Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law!" from Aleister Crowley sharply contrasts with the morality of Thatcherite self-responsibility prevailing at the time (89), yet is now deemed by his group as the representative sin of the western society. For instance, Riaz relates this liberal stance to atheism. "Without religion society is impossible. And without God people think they can sin with impunity. There's no morality" (41). Riaz further ascribes vices such as "Gluttony, nihilism, hedonism—capitalism in a nutshell" to a generalized western community opposite to Islam. This us-them logic not only ignores the dark side of humanity in non-Western cultures, but imagines that in so doing the identity crisis of the diasporans can be solved once and for all. Stereotyping a culture where he is grown up, Chad claims that "They [Western, European, socialist] are existing at the lowest level! And we think we want to integrate here! But we must not assimilate, that way we lose our souls. . . . It's not we who must change, but the world" (91).

Nancy has pointed out that to summon a lost community, one has to not only draw boundaries between us and them, but also to recall an inexistent past. A universal Islamic community that goes beyond national boundary is the most abstract yet the easiest one that can be imagined by the diasporic characters in this novel, for in so doing they are not involved in regional conflicts within different Islamic nations. Riaz criticizes the Marxist scholar Brownlow for he wants "to dominate others with [his] particular morality, which has . . . gone hand-in-hand with fascist imperialism" (108). By saying so Riaz ignores the historical fact that Islam expanded into the world by Imperialism, which is usually related to European colonialism now. The past

[4] Contrarily, Shahid is more liable to *be found* by an English community which allows him the freedom of being exposed to different cultural variants, which he appropriates as materials for future production of literature and journalism in a capitalist system.

of Islamic civilization is thus elevated to that of a perfect one before the Western hegemony. Also, this Islam-against-the-West argument looks more questionable as the Islamic people are supposed to be fused into one community, with all of their enemies located in its exterior, as Riaz says "We will fight for our people who are being tortured in Palestine, Afghanistan, Kashmir! War has been declared against us. But we are armed" (92). Recent history after the publication of *The Black Album* has seen this illusion shattered since 2010. Tunisia, Egypt and Libya are just a few Islamic countries undergoing revolutions against dictators responsible for most of the oppression against their citizens.

Riaz and Chad's idealization of the East, ironically, is Orientalist in a way similar to that of some westerners. In his preface to the Chinese translation of *The Inoperative Community*, Nancy noted:

> Community . . . is originally regarded Eastern. . . . It is understood as the exterior of the West, and the East is a usual or general name for the exterior of the West . . . [that] simultaneously means: a condition possibly once existent in the land of the West, which finally vanished because of the formation of the West. (xx)[5]

Spending most of their lives in the West, Chad and Riaz do not find that they themselves, at a distance to the Eastern residents, have created an Islamic world free from any pollution. In *The Politics of Chaos in the Middle East* (2007), Oliver Roy directly points out "The vision of a Muslim world at war with the West is a fantasy. This 'Muslim world' does not exist. Most of the conflicts affecting the Middle East involve Muslims against Muslims. The current regimes mostly describe themselves as allies of the West" (73). Roy studies the conflicts and contradictory political stances among Islamic countries such as Iraq, Iran, Pakistan, Lebanon and Syrian, as well as their complicated relations with the United States. Economic, political, religious and national interests make it impossible for pan-Islamism to dominate Arab nationalism.

British citizens as they are, Riaz and Chad are drawn to strange attractors in a way they never notice, and are themselves attractors of the

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[5] I translate this quotation from the Chinese translation of the original.

chaotic system that repeats patterns of the chaotic system. Chili's Paul Smith red shirt, one of the most symbolic items in this novel, is an attractor that reflects the dominant dressing patterns of the West. Chad once gave Shahid a Salwar Kamiz to strengthen his identification with their community. However, he cannot turn away from the dress code of a culture he so much loathes. He does not feel strange when he forces Shahid to have Chili's Paul Smith as a compensation for Riaz's lost laundry:

> "Hey, where d'you get this red Paul Smith shirt?"
> "Paul Smith. He got [sic] a shop in Brighton."
> "Riaz'll be thrilled," Chad said, holding it against his chest. "He look [sic] best in plain colors." (31)

Chad's exclamation over the shirt is perhaps more powerful than his anger to refute western civilizations. To negate an other exterior to the self usually is usually accompanied by the essentialization of both, while a Paul Smith shirt, in its glamourous exposition for Chad and his own finitude, nullifies his version of an Islamic subjectivity. A similar contradiction occurs in Riaz's claim of community. Shahid notices that "Riaz loved 'his people,' but, unless offering assistance, he appeared uncomfortable with them. . . . The meaning of his life was his creed and the idea that he knew the truth about how people should live" (184). Riaz's failure to commune with real people exposes his finitude. Immersing himself frequently in doctrinal debates, Riaz is more tempted by ideas.[6] Rousing students with himself in Chili's red Paul Smith shirt at the book burning event, Riaz exposes his own identities made possible by external commodities, the burned book or a brand-name shirt, which further nullify his own sovereignty. *The Satanic Verses* as a cultural commodity that Chad and he oppose most becomes what brings them together, as power struggles and different opinions are not rarely seen in this little community. While Chad seeks for opportunities to issue orders in Riaz's

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[6] This idealized community presupposes a seamless brotherhood that sharply contrasts the reality of community, which exists in the spacing, in the partition between singularities. Nancy calls this sharing (partage), "divided and shared" (Nancy xxviii): "these singular beings are themselves constituted by sharing, they are distributed and placed, or rather spaced, by the sharing that makes them others: other for one another, and other, infinitely other for the Subject of their fusion, which is engulfed in the sharing, in the ecstasy of the sharing: 'communicating' by not 'communing'" (Nancy 25). Once we share something with others, we are found as different beings because sharing only occurs among differences. That is why Riaz is spaced from his Muslim people, and why he cannot break away from England (as a community) despite his assertion that "[England] will never be [his] home" (185).

absence, Shahid usually questions Riaz's rationale for book-burning, and Hart, a minor character in the group, denounces Chad's violence against Shahid in the end.

Nancy's *The Inoperative Community* (1986) is laden with distrust of collectivity at the dusk of communism, while *The Black Album* discusses a post-communist world where anxious characters either turn to liberal consumerism or Islamic practices. Critical discussions of communism do not occupy many paragraphs perhaps on account of the polarized opposition between postmodern liberalism and Islam fundamentalism, or because the representative of communist thought, Deedee's cuckolded husband Brownlow, is ridiculed for the deterioration in his stutter due to the collapse of the Communist world in 1989. Yet if communism is not highlighted in studying this novel, Kureishi's exertion in exploring the failure of community in various forms will be ignored or simplified. Most Kureishian critics do not focus on communism as well as its relation to other themes in *Album*, and are hence unable to recognize how Kureishi delves into an impossibility of community lurking beneath seemingly conflicting identities. Communism, "the unsurpassable horizon of our time" as Sartre said, is still a central issue for *The Black Album* and a new millennium since attempts to tackle "dissolution, the dislocation, or the conflagration of community" never cease (Nancy 1). This can be seen in the imaginary geography of certain characters here, where the Third World has replaced the Second World to be an ideal form of community against a morally degraded first world. Nancy relates communism to a paradigmatic form of utopia:

> the word "communism" stands as an emblem of the desire to discover or rediscover a place of community at once beyond social divisions and beyond subordination to technopolitical dominion, and thereby beyond such wasting away of liberty, of speech, or of simple happiness as comes about whenever these become subjugated to the exclusive order of privatization. . . (1)

This utopia that guarantees liberty and happiness beyond oppression cannot theoretically exist without supposing a freed human nature for all, which certainly entails disappearance of all social divisions. For Nancy "it was the very basis of the communist ideal that ended up appearing most problematic: namely, human beings defined as producers . . . and fundamentally as the

producers of their own essence in the form of their labor or their work" (2). Paradoxically, once one is produced totally according to his or her own will, either as an absolute individualistic or communal being, one lacks any possibility of self-change as one of the most important human characteristics. Nancy finds that an impulse to establish human nature as such is tantamount to a death wish: "The fully realized person of individualistic or communistic humanism is the dead person" (13). No wonder that communist countries cannot but step into the path of totalitarianism with its violence and death to ensure fulfillment of a presupposed humanity.

Unwilling to face the terminal paradox of the communist ideal implemented in reality, Brownlow seeks to keep his version of lost community intact in a way similar to that of Riaz. He supports the decision of Riaz to burn Rushdie's novel because that would recall his glorious past in 1960s. As he relates, "We were blowing all the doors open—blowing them off their hinges, blowing away their houses" (226). This destructive wish will finally destruct the imagined community because that for which the others are waiting to be ruined has already constituted the self. Brownlow attributes the demise of the communist movement to a British working class that "didn't want e-education, housing, the a-arts, justice, equality . . . [and] "b-b-betrayed themselves" (255), not knowing that the idea either of working class or communism has disappeared in the impossibility of absolute immanence. McNair finds that "the exploitative tendencies of capital are constrained by the very success of the [capitalist] system in developing democratic and cultural institutions, facilitated of course by a constantly advancing technological base" (28).Therefore, though the exploitation of the forces of production may be greater than that in the 19th century, workers may still enjoy automated, clean and air-conditioned factories with relatively more leisure time and high wages. Capitalism as a self-evolving economic system has made the proletariat "a home-owning, share-owning, overseas holiday-making class" (McNair 33), despite the continuation of exploitation that occurs in capitalist as well as communist societies.[7] Going on holidays abroad in the same way as the working class he takes sides with, Brownlow is

[7] Nowadays the prevalence of global capitalism seems to justify Thatcher's economic revolution, regardless of some of the side effects so much criticized by certain characters in this novel. "Despite periodic shocks such as the global depression of the 1920s, or the restructuring of British capitalism unleashed by the Thatcher government in the 1980s, both of which produced mass unemployment . . . the historical trend has been for capitalism to deliver higher levels of social wealth" (McNair 29).

attracted to Eastern Europe and Albania in a way that a tourist is to scenic spots, without noticing local corruption, exploitation and restrictions of travel in these countries. Brownlow's turn from the proletariat to non-white immigrants in Britain is not surprising for he anxiously needs a new community in a post-communist era. His belief that "the Asian working class" will not be colonized and insulted in their own country is ironical as Pakistan is regarded as the most dangerous place in the world by several mainstream media (226). His prediction that "Liberalism cannot survive these forces [of the Asian working class]" is untenable (226), since the Asian working class never solidifies as a generalized community. Twenty-one years later (2010) a young generation in Tunisia, and later in Egypt, Lybia and other countries in the Arab world rejected corrupt dictatorship and called for democracy. This, if not a triumph of liberalist ideology, indicates that young Muslims are well-informed so as to be able to make decisions other than those provided by domestic media or political parties. Their political action is disarticulated from religious belief in a way similar to that the contemporary working class or Muslims violate Brownlow's purified anticipation.

Among different ideological crashes, what Shahid directly faces is a world of chaos, rather than that of dichotomized communities clashing each other. As a British-born son of an Asian entrepreneur, he is unlikely to be identified either as a Muslim or an immigrant. In Shahid's search for a more cozy identity, communities taken for granted by their members keep being falsified. He has been victimized for his brown skin since childhood. Quite contrary to the expectation of a typical development, Shahid has wanted to join the British National Party and has proclaimed himself as a racist: "I argued . . . why can't I be a racist like everyone else? Why do I have to miss out on that privilege? Why is it only me who has to be good? Why can't I swagger around pissing on others for being inferior?" (19). Exclamation as such relates Shahid to a racist community that never imagines itself to be a Paki's dream. Shahid is not the only "Asian" that joins a community larger than their ethnicity. For Chili's wife Julma, Shahid is a hypocrite as he positions himself on the Left because he is "living off a business family." As an arch-Thatcherite she appreciates the truth when Shahid is "explaining what racists the Thatcherites were. She might imagine she was an intelligent, upper-class woman, but to them she'd always be a Paki and liable to be patronized" (97). Her understanding of this truth as "a colonial residue"

because "the new money knew no color" fittingly explains community in a capitalist chaos (97). Community is not what one can choose at one's own will. With capital/money as strange attractors and racist practices diverting their tracks, people of all colors are captivated in a capitalist society, competing as well as sharing with each other.

Shahid's experience in the mosque is sometimes regarded as the evidence of his failure to fully identify with Islam. Juxtaposing this example with other failed community practices, Kureishi actually tries to explore the unworkability of all communities. The realistically represented Islamic fundamentalist group in this novel does not stand for the major form of Islam practice in Britain. Shahid finds that in a mosque "Men of so many types and nationalities—Tunisians, Indians, Algerians, Scots, French—gathered there . . . that it would have been difficult, without prior knowledge, to tell which country the mosque was in" (142). These multicultural mosque-goers, whites or not, have annihilated Riaz or Chad's dream of their versions of community. That "race and class barriers had been suspended" in the mosque does not mean that the small community comes up with a common nature. Rather, community is possible because of its being-in-common "that the mode of existence and appropriation of a 'self' . . . is the mode of an exposition in common and to the in-common" (Nancy xxxvii). Borders of identities are suspended when the selves are being exposed in a common way to each other, yet they are still different because this being-in-common is being-*with*. Nancy explains that "'With' implies proximity and distance, precisely the distance of the impossibility to come together in a common being." Selves are "[s]haring nothing, sharing the space between."[8] Further descriptions of these people evidence their mutual distance: "There were businessmen in expensive suits, others in London Underground and Post Office uniforms; bowed old men in salwar kamiz fiddled with beads. Chic lads with ponytails, working in computers, exchanged business cards with young men in suits. . ." (142). Worshippers do not fall into a togetherness of a common thought when they are praying. No matter how much they appear as "solid, material things" in the eyes of Shahid, the later never knows exactly what is going on with these singular beings. Namely, how can we make sure people are thinking even of the same image of god or of the people around them just because they gather in the mosque or street? "[W]hat went on in the mosque with the bustling

[8] This quotation is from Nancy's remarks in a round-table discussion "Love and Community."

diversity of the city" may look like "a sharp transition" for Shahid (143), but people's sharing and division (*partage*) with each other is the same.

Thus said, Shahid's search for a community can never be successful on the basis of search for a clearly demarcated identity or self. Kureishi depicts Shahid's warring selves as *experiencing* a crisis, which can also be a reversal to a purified identity if considered in light of Nancy's idea of community. Welcomed by two polarized camps advocating spiritual purity and sensual pleasure, respectively,

> He believed everything; he believed nothing.
>
> His own self increasingly confounded him. One day he could passionately feel one thing, the next day the opposite. Other times provisional states would alternate from hour to hour; sometimes all crashed into chaos. He would wake up with this feeling: who would he turn out to be on this day? How many warring selves were there within him? Which was his real, natural self? Was there such a thing? How would he know it when he saw it? Would it have a guarantee attached to it?
>
> Lost in such a room of broken mirrors, with jagged reflections backing into eternity he felt numb. (157)

Nancy reminds us that "modern experience of community" is "neither a work to be produced, nor a lost communion, but rather as space itself, and the spacing of the experience of the outside, of the outside-of-self" (19). Nostalgia for a "real, natural self" or the anxiety toward "warring selves" sticks on one's own inside-of-self and immanence. It is not the point to identify how many selves are placed in a subject position, or to be troubled by broken mirrors that reflect the fragmentation of a self imagined to be intact in the past. The "jagged reflections backing into eternity" bespeak that identities give one the illusion supposed to conquer finitude. Community, "the ecstatic consciousness of the night of immanence," "is not the reverse side of a subject, nor its splitting. It has nothing to do with the subject's structure as *self*" (Nancy 9). Only by recognizing this point does one abandon a desire to follow a linear logic from which ideas such as broken images and split self derive.

Forsaking the idea of self does not necessarily result in nihilism. It is unfortunate that literature per se in *The Black Album* is usually understood in terms of the Rushdie Affair either related to freedom of speech or to a clash

between civilizations. Considering literature as an inoperative community helps illuminate not only the ambiguity of the political stance of literature, but also how this ambiguity helps to offer personal and communal history in its chaotic being. The Koran and Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*, the most two salient writings in this novel, respectively represent myth and its interruption in Nancy's "Myth Interrupted," the second chapter of The *Inoperative Community*. Nancy applies Schelling's idea of mythology to argue the tautology of myth, "that is, it says nothing other than itself . . . Thus, it does not need to be interpreted, since it explains itself" (49). Myth is a naturalized story, the "same story" people gathered together to listen to. "It is the story of their origin . . . of the beginning of the world" (43-44). Community in its traditional understanding derives from myth. Being taken for granted, myth serves as the essence of community for many of its members, in this novel the Islamic fundamentalists. Literature, like Nancy's understanding of community, is "the common exposure of singular beings, their compearance" (66). Literature is "not to commune" (66), but to expose "the limit "upon which communication takes place" (67). Literature interrupts myth, and "[w]hen myth stops playing, the community that resists completion and fusion, the community that propagates and exposes itself, makes itself heard in a certain way" (62). Shahid's struggle between his beloved literature and the Koran is a myth interrupted: "The problem was, when he was with his friends their story compelled him. But when he walked out, like someone leaving a cinema, he found the world to be more subtle and inexplicable." This is because Shahid, having been a bookworm since his childhood, reads the Koran as one of the "stories . . . made up by men and women; they could not be true or false" (143). In that way the Koran works as no more than a film, a narrative that exposes its limits when the author's finitude is read by the reader's, in their being-in-common or being-in-the-world. His fundamentalist friends cannot accept this for literary imagination as ecstasy would interrupt their sense of wholeness, that is to say, "would poison all, rendering their conviction human, aesthetic, fallible" (143).

The Satanic Verses is not a new myth with which Kureishi tries to replace ancient ones in a godless world. Without its name being mentioned, readers have no trouble in identifying the book not only because a book-burning plot is reminiscent of the Rushdie Affair, but also because *Midnight's Children* is mentioned as the author's earlier novel. Kureishi

purposely leaves out the title and even the content of the book to expose a formless literary community. Shahid's question "Could literature connect a generation in the same way?" (144) is nostalgia for literature "as the myth of the myth of [sic] mythless society" (Nancy 63). A literary *communion* with a certain nature is bound to shatter a literary *community*. Riaz is against Rushdie in that "The message—and all art, to speak to us truly, must have a message—is of love and compassion" (79). If it were so, the very idea of love and compassion would disappear for there would be no other way of life or narration. Rushdie did not anticipate the anger of many Muslims after *The Satanic Verses* was printed, not to mention that he would be later protected by Margaret Thatcher, the very figure responsible for racism in this burned book. Literature exposes the finitude of Rushdie in debates over the media space, ethnic groups, political arrangements and the academia. While Rushdie's class, ethnicity, gender and faith are examined in various ways, the Koran as the inter-text of this novel cannot but expose its own secularity, as "Satanic verses" is originally coined by the historian Sir William Muir to refer to pagan verses said to be uttered by the prophet Muhammad. Neither the mythic storyteller nor the novelist evades a fate of finitude. The holy prophet cannot stop exposing himself to the pagan beliefs in his own finitude, while Rushdie's upper middle-class background is both illuminated in his representations of fictional immigrant characters and in reception of *The Satanic Verses* for those with Islamic belief in reality.

Conclusion

Among all the major Kureishi critics, Ruvani Ranasinha is most critical about *The Black Album*. This novel is explored with Kureishi's *My Son the Frantic*, a short story and a screenplay of the same name, under the chapter title "Muslimphobia." For her "Kureishi defines the terms of belonging between extreme polarities of unquestioning solidarity and complete conformity, or total rejection," which is the major problem of this novel (86). Shahid's struggle is "between fundamentalism and a form of liberal individualism" (84), or "between the individual and the communal" (86). Because of "Shahid and Deedee escaping the aftermath of the book-burning and firebombing on a weekend trip to the countryside 'until its stops being fun'" (85), Ranasinha finds the "fluidity" that Shahid finally chooses can only be defined against the ecstatic rigidity of the fundamentalists (86). That said,

"the text ultimately reinforces the 'superiority of Western ideologies identified with the freedom of sexual expression and polarized against the 'irrationality' of Islam" (91).

Ranasinha's argument is understandable because we usually understand the world after the Rushdie affair (1989) and the first Gulf War (1991) as that of an antagonism between liberalism and the Islamic world. Reading *The Black Album* along with Nancy's *The Inoperative Community* helps shed more light on Kureishi's painstaking deconstruction of the very idea of community, whether it is exemplified by so-called postmodernism, Thatcherism, or Islamic fundamentalism. Ranasinha does not exemplify any Islamic practices other than those adopted by a small fundamentalist student group when she discusses Kureishi's Muslimphobia, especially Shahid's experience with the Islamic community in the mosque. This mutual exposure of the singularities of the worshippers is set against the immanence that Nancy attributes to individualism and communism. Ranasinha's argument that Shahid finally chooses individualism is untenable because his refusal to embrace any essentialized creed does not entail that he has a distinct individuality which is shared by no one else. An individual can never stop being-ecstatic, and the same logic applies to other collective practices of other mythic communities. Shahid finally chooses Deedee as a temporary partner not because of their sharing of an essence or creed, but because of a sharing of their finitude that also parts them. With "until it stops being *fun*" as their consensus (287, my emphasis) foregrounds that the "being-*with*" between the lovers is at stake. Although the relation between lovers does not form a community, it is as inoperative as the later. "[A]s lovers, they are exposed in the community. They are not the communion that is refused to or purloined from society; on the contrary, they expose the fact that communication is not communion. (Nancy 37). Shahid finally decides to "embrace uncertainty," since "[m]aybe wisdom would come from what one didn't know, rather than from confidence" (238). Forsaking the intention of a confident grasp of community, the would-be novelist Shahid opens himself to a cultural chaos where creativity flourishes more in the nothingness of sovereignty.

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