

# **MY BEAUTIFUL LAUNDRETTE: HYBRID “IDENTITY”, OR THE PARADOX OF CONFLICTING IDENTIFICATIONS IN “THIRD SPACE” ASIAN-BRITISH CINEMA OF THE 1980s<sup>1</sup>**

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The aim of this essay is to interpret Stephen Frears' *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985) as a hybrid film that explores the inescapably paradoxical quality of “third space” diaspora identifications. For that purpose, I shall first contextualise the film as an instance of mid-1980s Black British cinema discourse that somehow counteracts the homogenisation of “Black identity” imposed both by colonial discourse and by earlier Black cinema in Great Britain. Then, I shall study the way in which the film concentrates on the development of the protagonist's Asian-British “identity” and the features that position him as oscillating between two cultures.<sup>2</sup> Finally, I shall analyse how the film foregrounds the protagonist's “identity” as the fluid site for the interaction of the elements of ethnic difference and class, and the effects of their interrelation upon the power relations that are established between him and his white, lower-class, ex-fascist male lover.

Minority struggle requires cohesion. When the different immigrant communities in Britain started fighting for their rights, they adopted the generic term “Black” as a political category to define themselves in opposition to the white majority (cf. Mercer 1990: 55). Parallel with this, as some members of these groups gained access to the means of cinematic representation in the 1960s and 1970s, these new Black subjects-of-their-own-enunciations felt responsible for their respective communities and their “common interests”. One of their prime aims was to counteract the negative representations that whites had made of them by

providing a “positive image” of their ethnic groups. Film productions of this kind were labelled as “cinema of duty” by Cameron Bailey (Malik 1996: 203), and were determined in content by what Kobena Mercer has termed the “burden of representation”, i. e. “the sense that any film made by a Black film-maker has to solve all the problems of Black representation at once” (1990: 206).

Yet, cohesion frequently involves *homogenisation*. Firstly, unitarian representations of any immigrant community, of its interests and problems with an exclusive focus on the “race” issue might be seen as reinforcing the process of “racial stereotyping” of the colonised peoples carried out by colonial discourse, which “produced” those peoples “as a fixed reality which is at once an ‘other’ and yet entirely knowable and visible” (Bhabha in Young 1993: 143) so that they could be easily “appropriated and controlled” (Young 1993: 143). Black British film director Isaac Julien [*Territories* (1985), *Young Soul Rebels* (1991)] agrees that earlier films’ exclusive focus on blackness and class in fact corroborates “the whole way that white society has looked at the black subject, as being ‘other’” (1988: 57). Secondly, representations of an ethnic group as a monolithic entity inevitably bring about the *desarticulation of diversity* within the group, and silence about the existence of members within the community, like women and homosexuals, who are doubly marginalised since discrimination on account of gender and/or sexuality is added to that caused by ethnic difference. As Andrew Higson stresses, “national [and ethnic] identity is by no means a fixed phenomenon, but constantly shifting, constantly in the process of becoming. The shared, *collective identity* which is implied always *masks* a whole range of *internal differences and potential antagonisms*” (1997: 4; emphasis added).

Yet, *My Beautiful Laundrette*, released in 1985, belongs in a different context. In the 1980s, Black filmmakers started gaining wider access to production (Pines 1997: 213). This circumstance released some of them from the “burden of representation” and allowed them to counterbalance its effects by opening a space for diversity within Black representation. As Kobena Mercer puts it,

Within the British context, the hybridised accents of black British voices begin to unravel the heteroglossia, the many-voicedness and variousness of British cultural identity *as it is lived*, against the centrifugal and centralising monologism of traditional versions of national identity (1988: 12; emphasis in the original).

It is in this move to de-essentialize “Black identity” as monolithic, and in the context of Thatcherite government’s refusal “to articulate the discourse of sexuality” in its attempt to detach itself “from the sexual ‘permissiveness’ of the 1960s” (Hill 1999: 12-13), that a sector of the new wave of black independent film-making, in which *My Beautiful Laundrette* may be included, engaged in the

articulation of homosexual voices in the 1980s. Indeed, Kobena Mercer argues how it is “by foregrounding conflicts around gender and sexuality from black feminist and gay perspectives at the level of character” that “the story dismantles the *myth* of a *homogeneous* ‘black community’ and emphasises the *plurality of identities* within black society” (1988: 11; emphasis added). Indeed, the recent articulation of discordant voices from within a supposedly homogeneous community becomes a denunciation of the previous hegemonic discourses of Blackness. As Stuart Hall puts it,

This brings to the surface the unwelcome fact that a great deal of black politics, constructed, addressed and developed directly in relation to questions of race and ethnicity, has been predicated on the assumption that the categories of gender and sexuality would stay the same and remain fixed and secured (1988: 29).

In this climate of challenge to earlier monologist notions about “identity” as stable and fixed, John Hill explains how the Kureishi/Frears films usually portray characters’ identities as “constructed across different axes [...] (of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and generation)”, which are not “simply overlaid, or added on top of each other, but are themselves ‘interstitial’” and locate those characters “in ‘different’ and complicated ‘positionalities’ to others” (1999: 208).

*My Beautiful Laundrette*’s focus on the representation of Omar’s “identity” and its distinctive traces is brought to the fore from the very beginning. The first scene after the credit sequence overtly points to it, as the first image depicts Omar (Gordon Warnecke) passing in front of a mirror—with the Lacanian implication that his “identity” is in the process of constitution. The next shot is a close-up of his Pakistani father’s (Roshan Seth) hand pouring gin into a glass and raising the bottle to drink straight from it, followed by a close-up of a picture of Omar’s white, English mother. The protagonist’s family context is thus established as determining his mixed identity right from birth. Another aspect of Omar’s personality is exposed right away. His homosexuality is overtly suggested by a close-up of his usually smiling face suddenly turning serious when his father, Papa, asks Omar’s uncle Nasser (Saeed Jaffrey) to “try and fix him with a nice girl”. As the film advances, a retrospective glance may confirm the importance of sexual orientation in the constitution of “identity”, since the film begins with a scene previous to the credits presenting Johnny (Daniel Day Lewis), Omar’s lover-to-be. In addition, this initial scene introduces the third factor that will play an important role in the two main characters’ relative status and in their relationship: Johnny is a dispossessed squatter brutally expelled from an abandoned house by Omar’s cousin Salim (Derrick Branche). Significantly, each of these shots is linked to—or set off from—the next one through the insertion of a shot of moving *trains* seen from a window in Omar’s flat. Trains running in all directions might

symbolise the fluidity of Omar's hybrid "identity" as the site of conflict and struggle for predominance between his identifications as *both* a Pakistani *and* an Englishman —or as *neither* of them but as a *new* space resulting from the interaction of both. However, although trains may stand for the possibility of change and progress, their movement is always limited by the railway track; they cannot get out of the pattern that is determined before they are set in motion. To continue with the analogy, the concept of "identity" is represented as malleable only within the limits imposed by the subjects' ethnic origin, by their social and economic context and situation, and by the relations these subjects establish. The recurrent appearance of trains, indeed, calls attention to the different points of inflection in the constitution of Omar's "identity".

Kureishi and Frears' representation of Omar's "national" or "ethnic identity" as a process of negotiation of its different components may be interpreted in the light of Homi Bhabha's notion of the "third space" as a new position that emerges from the interaction of two or more "original moments" whose histories are simultaneously *displaced* and *traceable* in the subject's different "identifications" (Rutherford 1990b: 211). There is an element of individual freedom of choice implicit in this view of the (re)construction of one's hybrid "identity" that is perfectly illustrated by Iain Chambers' statement that "diverse *roots* are now displaced and transformed into particular *routes* through the present" (1990: 75; emphasis in the original). Omar's relative identifications with both his Pakistani and English heritage undergoes a process of continuous negotiation until the limits between both dissolve into his particular, individualistic *route*.

In a sense, within the context of the film, both Asian and Thatcherite ethos may be said to have much in common as regards two different issues central in Frears' film. First, the important role that the above mentioned ideological frameworks attach both to private initiative in business and economic affairs, and to the reliance on one's "own resources, avoiding as far as possible dependency on state aid" (Hand 1994: 11). And second, the centrality of "the family and its maintenance [...] not only in your personal life but in the life of any community, because this is the unit on which the whole nation is built" (Thatcher in Rutherford 1990a: 12).

Omar's identification is positioned somewhere between the two cultures — Britishness and Asianness— and varies according to his interests. He enjoys the zeal for economic enterprise and ambition typically attributed to Asian immigrants,<sup>3</sup> and his rise in social status is initially set in motion through help from his Pakistani relatives in London. Yet he departs from the behaviour usual in Pakistani communities, where individuals work for their families rather than for personal improvement (cf. Hand 1994: 11; Stopes-Roe & Cochrane 1990: 72).

The importance that Omar assigns to the individual highlights his British identification, as individualism is said to be “growing out of the complex religious, intellectual, scientific and economic changes in Europe of the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries” (Stopes-Roe & Cochrane 1990: 29) —a change that “has not yet overtaken the prevailing Asian view of the relative positions of the individual and his or her immediate community” (29).

Omar’s departure from the values of the Asian extended family in economic matters goes hand in hand with a stronger transgression against the rules of this institution: the rejection of the Pakistani tradition of the arranged marriage on account of his love for Johnny. The implicit association between the two transgressions is established in Omar’s first visit to Salim’s house. Left alone in his Mafia-type cousin’s living room, Omar unknowingly plays a video concerning some illegal business of Salim’s. What makes the connection overt is the self-conscious manner in which the scene is presented. The purpose of the sequence is not to show the viewer where Salim’s enormous economic success stems from, as the television screen only offers grey lines moving up and down. It stands as a background symbol of Omar’s intrusion in family affairs, since the TV set appears behind Omar’s head while he uses Salim’s phone in his search for Johnny —the same Johnny who, thanks to Omar, gained entry to family. Indeed, Salim will be equally enraged by both acts of defiance on his cousin’s part. Transgression of paternal rules goes hand in hand with unintentional aggression when Papa is hurt as Omar’s attention is suddenly diverted by Johnny’s phone call when he is cutting his father’s toe nails. Omar also defies his uncle Nasser, to whom he owes his entrance in the world of business, when he receives his dowry on getting engaged to Nasser’s daughter Tania (Rita Wolf) —whom he never marries. The association between Omar’s unscrupulous personal ambition, his relationship with Johnny and disrespect for his ethnic network is most conspicuous when he steals the cocaine hidden in a false beard that Salim had told him to fetch from the airport. The money they get from Johnny’s sale of the drug is invested in the improvement of the laundrette. Omar’s attitude is daring —and dangerous— as he not only steals the cocaine but also goes to Salim’s house wearing the empty beard and waits until his cousin discovers the fraud. The subsequent shots graphically show Omar’s present position with respect to his community. Salim and Omar are reflected together on a big mirror, but a line separates the two reflected figures: Salim appears *within* his room, while the line that sets them off turns out to be the reflection of the *doorframe* that shows Omar’s location behind it, *outside* his relative’s room. Omar’s in-between-ness is underlined as Salim threatens him in the corridor —a place of transition— while Omar is moving away from the room, the door of which is slammed behind him, towards the street door, under the

amazed stare of Salim's wife Cherry (Souad Faress) —who had stated earlier that she was “sick of hearing about these in-betweens, [and that people] should make up their minds where they are”. In fact, it is in a metaphorical “in-between” space that Omar accommodates the new identifications he is creating for himself. And the laundrette, where both his ambition and his relationship with Johnny acquire strength and significance, is activated as an emblem for that “new beginning” in Omar's character from the moment he decides to destroy everything inside the place in order to build it anew with Johnny's help.

An interesting aspect of Omar's relationship with Johnny is that the film renders it transgressive not because the two men are homosexual but because it leads Omar to reject the Pakistani tradition of marrying a member of his family. Perhaps his challenge is less dangerous than it might be; for someone living in London, Asian traditions seem to be looser than they would be in smaller areas, as the fact that the wedding was not arranged in an orthodox fashion suggests (cf. Stopes-Roe & Cochrane 1990: 30). Yet he is all the same defying his father and uncle's authority and thus putting in danger their “izzat” (“the family's reputation, its prestige, honour, good name” [75]),<sup>4</sup> and risking the withdrawal of community support (49) —something we never know, because Nasser finds out only at the end of the film. Omar's attitude at the level of emotional relations therefore defines him more clearly as being “English” rather than as “Asian” since, according to Felicity Hand, the deliberate choice of one's partner is “one of the sure signs of integration into English life” (1994: 10).

Despite the subversive power attached to Omar's and Johnny's mutual feelings in the film, homosexuality itself is never questioned or turned into an issue. Rather, it is “naturalised” or presented as just as natural —if problematic— an option as a Pakistani boy's attraction to a white English girl might be. The emphasis lies on the fact that the “object” of Omar's choice is *English*. The significance of his refusal of the Asian custom of marrying within his ethnic group is subtly foregrounded by the passing of trains every time he meets or talks about Johnny.<sup>5</sup>

The protagonists' homosexuality is visually enhanced and projected onto some elements of the *mise-en-scène*: they paint the *façade* of the laundrette pale blue — the “gay colour” *par excellence*. And the *pastel colours* inside and on the washing machines are conventionally associated with male homosexuals as well, as these are not considered “masculine” colours by the heterosexist ideology that tends to conflate and confuse the categories of gender and sexuality (cf. Dyer 1993: 31). Moreover, this display of mild, blended colours marks a contrast between the men's idyllic, romantic space of the laundrette and the aggressive atmosphere outside. Yet, this “gay space” is created without causing any trouble as such, since there is no homophobic tinge in any of the attacks represented in the film.

What *is* overtly foregrounded and turned into an issue is the problematic arising from ethnic difference. The xenophobic racist violence embodied in the attitude and aggressions on the part of Johnny's National Front friends toward Omar's family is a constant in the film. This foregrounding of inter-ethnic tension prepares the setting for the exploration of Omar's more profound inner conflicts. Omar's feelings towards his boyfriend are depicted as being in a state of constant development, varying and increasing in ambivalence as his economic status improves. John Hill argues that the film marks a clear contrast between "an unemployed white 'lumpenproletariat', or 'underclass' (the victims of deindustrialization) [Johnny's National Front friends], who aimlessly wander the streets, and an Asian business class who have succeeded in becoming the new 'masters'" (1999: 211; my interpolation), and that this division "invert[s] old imperial power relations" (210).

Yet, this reversal of roles is more complex as it materialises in Omar's and Johnny's ongoing relationship. When they first meet in the film, the car in which Omar and his family are travelling is being assaulted by Johnny's fascist friends. Johnny is on the dole and Omar has just become a car-cleaner. Their relative positions in the socio-economic ladder are not distant, though Johnny's whiteness places him in a position of social privilege, as his higher location in the frame suggests. Besides, the extradiegetic "romantic" music that accompanies Omar in his journey from the car towards Johnny, as well as the former's admiring expression, provide a sense of closeness and balance that is reinforced by the fact that their conversation is shown in shot/reverse-shots that include both of them in the frame.<sup>6</sup> Omar's innocent, sincere admiration and love for his (still) only friend is reasserted by a close up of his bright smile and sparkling eyes the first time Johnny phones him, and by his eagerness to meet him again.

Significantly, Omar's attitude changes as soon as he is promoted to laundrette manager. Omar's statement that "much good can come from fucking" just after he hires Johnny as his employee and before using him to sell the cocaine he steals from Salim, somehow suggests how Omar intends to profit financially from his relationship with his now subordinate lover. Only a bit later does Omar become *aware* of the paradoxical position he holds in his emotional identification with Johnny. Omar suddenly gets serious when, after kissing Johnny in the car, the latter asks him about Papa and declares that he wants to forget his fascist past and previous ill treatment of both Omar and his relatives. In-between self-consciousness is rendered explicit in Omar's reaction when he returns home: after caressing Papa's face, he drinks from his father's bottle of gin (an index of Papa's frustration, provoked by English hatred of Black immigrants) and then throws it at the passing trains. The English/Pakistani young man directs towards the

symbol of his shifting fluid identifications, his rage against his own contradictory feelings, which have made him forget about the past “race problem” and his inescapable identification as a non-white in a white xenophobic place. Yet, Omar’s positionality can never be unambiguous, and his paradoxical state of mind is emphasised by the loud extradiegetic music that accompanies the whole scene — the “romantic” tunes that heightened his emotions in the first meeting with Johnny. Omar’s new awareness thus arouses his desire to take revenge on Johnny. Having gained economic power through family help and personal ambition, Omar verbalises his pride on how the roles have been reversed. After reproaching Johnny with the way he and his friends kicked him around at school, Omar regretfully adds: “And what are you doing now? Washing my floor!”

However, despite his will to assert his power over his repentant aggressor, Omar’s character is once again portrayed as inevitably paradoxical, torn between his need to avenge the pain inflicted upon his relatives and his love for Johnny. The film’s focus on his “identity” as a site of conflicting identifications is once again brought to the fore when his image is reflected in a mirror in a particularly tense scene: Omar has just shouted at Johnny in his bedroom that he is fired unless he returns to the laundrette immediately, and then turns his back on Johnny and stares through a window. We can see both Omar’s face in close-up and his reflection in the mirror while he holds back his tears. His pain may betray regret for ill-treating the man he loves *or* anger at Johnny’s fascist attitude in the past *or* self-hatred for loving him in spite of their past... We never know —as perhaps Omar does not, either.

*My Beautiful Laundrette* thus presents Omar’s feelings as inescapably uncertain and contradictory and refuses to provide any definitive answer to any of the questions it raises. Rather, the film parallels in its formal construction the ambiguities upon which Omar’s hybrid identifications are constantly renegotiated. The film’s concern with the nature of “identity” as being always in the process of construction and transformation goes hand in hand with its self-consciousness about the constructed nature of film discourse. In keeping with this idea, John Hill defines Frears and Kureishi’s film as a “generic hybrid” (1999: 217) which “both carr[ies] on a tradition of 1960s social realism and deviate[s] from it” (205).<sup>7</sup> Hill describes this new kind of realism as characteristic of British films in the 1980s and points to its innovation in terms of both content and form. Taking on Raymond Williams’ views on this “new realism”, Hill suggests that innovation in content involves, most outstandingly, the “inclusion of hitherto ‘invisible’ social groups” (135). This, he goes on, allows for “a ‘new’ politics of difference which seeks to recognise the plurality of lines of social tension and social identities characteristic of modern societies: not just those of class but gender,



ethnicity, and sexual orientation" (135). For its part, the traditional concern of English documentary realism with the representation and criticism of social conditions extends to the film's portrayal of Thatcherite capitalism, unemployment, squatting, and inter-ethnic conflict, as well as its "chillingly real [...] recollection of the marches in the early Eighties, of the neo-Nazi National Front skinheads (who specialised in 'Paki bashing?)" (Fuller 1988: 65).

However, social realism blends in *My Beautiful Laundrette* with features characteristic of other film genres. The love story of Omar and Johnny follows the pattern of traditional romantic comedies: two people fall in love, get together after overcoming a series of obstacles, quarrel, make it up and live happily ever after. Yet, these conventions are simultaneously undermined by the facts that the couple is homosexual, and that the ending is more ambiguous than "happy". There are also some echoes of slapstick comedy, like Omar's clumsiness and tendency to fall over when Nasser first instructs him about business in Britain. And, as Hill points out, a gangster element "in the plot-line concerning the drug-dealing of Salim (and the iconography of his house)" (217).

At the formal level, Frears' film makes use of certain mechanisms of representation borrowed from European "art cinema" (cf. Hill 1999: 65). Particularly in its attempt to develop a new kind of "realism", not as the viewer is used to understanding it due to the hegemony of Hollywood conventions, but as a representation of experience *as it is perceived* by the human eye. This is achieved, for instance, through the presence or movement of obstacles —objects, walls, people— between the camera and its target, or through the use of uneasily long shots instead of "artificial" Hollywood editing techniques. Moreover, this break with the conventions of realist discourse has ideological consequences. According to Homi Bhabha, "colonial power [...] employs a system of representation, a regime of truth, that is structurally similar to realism" for stereotyping the colonised (cf. Chambers 1990: 26). Thus, the film's self-conscious formal experimentation poses a challenge to colonial power of representation, and also to the "cinema of duty" produced in previous decades for the opposite purpose but with equally flattening result (cf. Mercer 1988: 11). As Julian Henriques puts it,

A break with realism allows [...] the possibility of dealing with the issue of contradiction. [...] If reality is contradictory, if we feel different feelings at the same time (funny and serious, for example), if at any moment we can appreciate opposite forces at work, then the language of realism breaks down. [...] What the imaginative contradictory world of *Laundrette* points to is the possibility of change. *It is only when reality is taken as being full of contradictory tendencies and forces [...] that there can be any place for struggle.* Once we break with realism's notion that reality is really just one thing that can be more or less adequately represented then criticism and progress become possible (1988: 19; emphasis added).

The multiple, contradictory character of “reality” is further reflected in the opening of the laundrette. The dramatic tone of the shots that depict Tania’s argument with her father’s English mistress Rachel (Shirley Anne Field) alternates with the comic shots of Nasser telling Omar to marry Tania, and Omar’s funny grins when his uncle asks him whether his penis works or not, after he has been making love with Johnny just before the opening of the laundrette. The contrasting reactions which the sequence brings out in the viewer foregrounds the generic hybridity of the film in its blending of humour and melodrama. Likewise, the paradoxical nature both of the “integration” of the Pakistani community in England and of inter-generational conflict within the Pakistani family are reasserted as the film approaches the end. First, Nasser’s defence directed to Papa of England as their home and “a little heaven” where, unlike their homeland, religion does not interfere with business, is countered by a simultaneous sequence in which Salim is brutally attacked by members of the National Front who also smash the laundrette window. And, furthermore, Nasser’s reassurance that Omar will marry Tania is countered as Nasser and Papa unexpectedly witness the woman’s sudden disappearance and implied escape behind the moving trains.

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Similarly, the film eventually refuses to solve the conflictual relationship between Omar and Johnny after Johnny is beaten up by his former friends in his attempt to defend Salim. The end, totally open and ambivalent, just reasserts the state of hybrid and inter-ethnic identifications as inescapably unstable and paradoxical.

To sum up, *My Beautiful Laundrette* may be described as a mid-1980s British-Asian film that escapes the “burden of representation” that characterised earlier Black British cinema in two main ways. Firstly, through the representation of the British-Asian protagonist as a homosexual with a “Thatcherite” entrepreneurial drive, the film subverts the notion of the Black community as the homogeneous entity which the “cinema of duty” set out to portray in its attempt to fight for the whole group’s “common interests”. And then, the film’s generic and technical hybridity breaks with the “realism” of those earlier films and, through its representation of “reality” as fragmentary, relative and contradictory, creates a space for the questioning of received notions of “identity”. Thus, the British-Asian protagonist is represented in his individualistic struggle as reconstructing his sense of “identity” out of the traces he finds most convenient from each of the different cultures that inform his ethnic hybridity.

Finally, the film’s emphasis lies most conspicuously on its portrayal of hybrid “identity” as a site of conflict between the individual’s different national identifications. Thus, through its contrast between comic and dramatic scenes, as well as through the non-resolution of the protagonist’s ambivalent attitude towards his white ex-fascist partner, the film highlights the paradoxical nature of an “identity” inevitably slipping away between two worlds.

## Notes

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1. The research for this paper has been in part financed by the D.G.I., Ministerio de Ciencia y Tecnología, through research project BFF2001-1775.

2. Throughout the paper I shall use inverted commas to enhance my view of the notion of "identity" as a fluid site of conflicting axes always-already immersed in a process of construction and self-deconstruction.

3. The Asian-British entrepreneurial impulse may be read in the light of Chambers' idea that "black or Asian people can be acceptable to Mrs. Thatcher and much of the Conservative party if they respect a particular sense of "Britishness". [...] They are expected to become the mirror of a homogeneous, white Britain; the invisible men and women of the black diaspora and the post-colonial world who are *required to mimic* their allotted roles in the interpretative circle to which they have been assigned" (1990: 28; emphasis added). This assumption is confirmed in the film by Salim's remark that he and Nasser will get Omar out of the dole queue to enter family business, "and Mrs. Thatcher will be happy with me".

This tendency to mimic the official ideology, imposed upon the immigrant subject to allow for integration in the host society has two different implications in *My Beautiful Laundrette*. First, it represents a threat to British domination, as the Asian community seems to enjoy greater economic success than the white British represented in the film. And second, the distinction between Thatcherite and Asian business policies is blurred to such an extent that it is hard to decide which one Omar is so successfully imitating.

4. According to the research carried out by Mary Stopes-Roe and

Raymond Cochrane, "young Asians justified obedience in themselves by reference to valued parental attributes, their caring and concern, the work and effort they put into the family and its welfare" (1990: 33). So, Omar's behavior may not be so censurable even from a Pakistani perspective, as Papa is presented as an alcoholic unable even to cut his toe nails. And Nasser, a more positive father figure in every other respect, is unfaithful to his Pakistani wife —as many Pakistani men are, given their double standard of morality (cf. Hand 1994: 10).

5. When Omar and Johnny first meet on the street, Salim's car is stationary because trains are passing. Trains also appear in the background when Omar tells Papa that he has seen Johnny and then that he has been promoted from Nasser's garage to his laundrette. Both elements, Omar's economic ambition and Johnny, are linked and highlighted here. And also when the two men kiss and Omar reminds Johnny of the fascist marches he joined in in the past.

6. This framing technique is meaningfully replaced by a conventional shot/reverse-shot sequence—in which each shot shows only one of the two characters—as soon as the neo-Nazi gang approaches the two men. The separation implied by this slight formal variation very subtly introduces one of the main ingredients of the protagonist's paradoxical ethnic identifications and of his contradictory feelings as regards his relationship with his friend: Johnny's earlier racism.

7. *My Beautiful Laundrette* is hybrid even in the human component of its production, as script-writer Hanif Kureishi is a third generation British-Pakistani, and director Stephen Frears is an Englishman (cf. Henriques 1988: 17).

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