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Ethnic Identity in Hanif Kureishi's *My Beautiful Laundrette*

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Z á s a d y p r o v y p r a c o v á n í :

Studentka svou bakalářskou práci věnuje analýze díla Hanifa Kureishiho My Beautiful Laundrette ve které se specificky zaměří na různé aspekty etnické identity. Teoretická část práce se bude nejprve zabývat otázkou identity obecně, bude charakterizována základní terminologie a rovněž nastíněna teorie chápání tohoto obecného termínu. Poté bude studentka prezentovat kulturně-historickou analýzu daného období, tj. Británie 80. let 20. století. Literární analýza Kureishiho divadelní hry se pak zaměří na různé aspekty etnické identity, formy soužití s mainstreamovou kulturou, sebedefinice i definice morálních hodnot nejen u protagonistů, ale i u vedlejších (především ženských) postav.

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Annotation

This bachelor thesis deals with the analysis of ethnic identity in Hanif Kureishi's play *My Beautiful Launderette*. In the first chapter of the thesis, the term identity is generally defined. The following chapter is devoted to the analysis of aspects of ethnic identity in individual characters of the aforementioned play. The final chapter covers the living conditions of immigrants and their cohabitation with the mainstream culture depicted on the historical background of the 1980s when Margaret Thatcher presided over the government in the UK.

Key words

identity, ethnic identity, 1980s Britain, *My Beautiful Launderette*

Název

Etnická identita v díle Hanifa Kureishiho *My Beautiful Launderette*

Anotace

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá analýzou etnické identity v divadelní hře Hanifa Kureishiho *Moje krásná prádelnička*. V první kapitole práce je všeobecně definován termín identita. Následující kapitola je věnována analýze aspektů etnické identity u jednotlivých postav výše zmíněné hry. Závěrečná kapitola postihuje životní podmínky imigrantů a jejich soužití s mainstreamovou kulturou zobrazené na historickém pozadí osmdesátých let, kdy ve Velké Británii vládě předsedala Margaret Thatcherová.

Klíčová slova

identita, etnická identita, Británie osmdesátých let, *Moje krásná prádelnička*

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis is dedicated to the analysis of ethnic identity in Hanif Kureishi's play *My Beautiful Launderette*. The author of British-Pakistani origin set his play in the politico-cultural background of the 1980s Britain which was an important milestone in political and social development of the country in modern history. The author's central theme is the cohabitation of the first and second generation Pakistani immigrants with the mainstream culture, which, as argued in this thesis, had an immense influence on their quality and conditions of life.

The key aspect of analysis in this work is the theoretical approach to identity, which is defined in the first chapter. This term has received considerable attention in many fields of expertise including sociology, philosophy and economy to name a few. Despite this extensive research and interest in this topic, the clear definition still seems to be “something of enigma”. The investigation of this complicated term is thus the main concern of chapter 1.

A great number of researchers have reported that the terminology or identity vary significantly and thus it is problematic to find one concise definition, which would cover all its present meanings. Therefore, the body of this chapter presents theories by Jan E. Stets and Peter J. Burke, Stuart Hall and Anthony D. Smith, whose interpretations of the term are consistent in its major points. As such, these theories provide the background for the practical analysis of the investigated term in this thesis.

The central topic of this work covered in the second chapter is devoted to the analysis of ethnic identity, which is based primarily on the definition of professor Jean Phinney, who reads ethnic identity as person's sense of belonging to an ethnic group. This affiliation to a group is assessed here on the basis of various attributes ascribed to Pakistani ethnic group. The occurrence of these attributes signals affiliation of individual characters to the Pakistani or mainstream English group. The analyzed aspects comprise, for instance, language, culture, religion or race.

Chapter three begins by laying out the historical background of the 1980s, and looks at how it influenced the lives of heroes and heroines of *My Beautiful Launderette*. At that time, Margaret Thatcher presided over the Parliament and significantly influenced both economic and social development of the country for many years to come. Her economic policies made it

possible for one half to the Pakistani family to profit. Nevertheless, the other half suffered from poverty and the consequences of her anti-immigrant agenda. The scope of the historical background in this part of the bachelor's thesis is restricted to the events most relevant to the era, which influenced the living conditions of Kureishi's heroes and heroines to a high extent. Therefore, some of the topics of 1980s including Brain Drain, Yuppie culture or the Falkland War were not relevant to the analysis of this chapter. The theoretical findings are adopted mainly from the works of scholars such as Lenka Rovná, David McDowall or Kenneth O. Morgan.

In terms of methodology, the theoretical part of this thesis comprises findings from literature and other adequate sources, which deal with the historical, sociological and cultural topics relevant to the analysis of the play. The interpretation in the practical part is done on the basis of these findings and complemented with the extracts from the plays' text. The theoretical and practical part are interconnected and written simultaneously in order to better demonstrate the connections between the literature based facts and the lives of the main characters and their sense of identity.

1 IDENTITY

“Identity” is a question which has become a topic for research and discussions of academics across many fields of study.¹ Sociologists, anthropologists, psychologists, political scientists but also economists have taken an immense interest in the concept of identity in recent years.²

According to Daphna Oyserman, Kristen Elmore and George Smith, there exists a vast amount of sources concerning this concept. Their survey revealed that “Google Scholar yields 3 million citations, and limiting focus to professional search engines (the Web of Science, PsycINFO) still yields tens of thousands of articles in which self-concept or identity are included as key words.”⁴ Furthermore, professor James D. Fearon emphasised that according to his measurements in academic discourse, the occurrence of the word “identity” multiplied nearly three times between 1981 and 1995. Specifically, the presence of the term “identity” in the abstracts of academic papers grew from 709 to 1,911 and the approximate annual growth from 1986 to 1995 reached 12%.⁵

Despite this “discursive explosion” and the considerable interest in this topic, the notion of identity still “remains to be something of an enigma.”^{6,7} Steph Lawler argues that this term is “slippery” to a high degree and also draws attention to the fact that there exist countless theories and definitions, which vary significantly. For this reason, is not possible to achieve its universal definition or to state the way it functions accurately.⁸

¹ James D. Fearon, *WHAT IS IDENTITY (AS WE NOW USE THE WORD)?* (Stanford: Stanford University, 1999), 1, <https://web.stanford.edu/group/fearon-research/cgi-bin/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/What-is-Identity-as-we-now-use-the-word-.pdf>

² Daphna Oyserman, Kristen Elmore and George Smith, “Self, Self-Concept, and Identity”, in *Handbook of Self and Identity*, ed. Mark R. Leary and June P. Tangney (New York: The Guilford Press, 2012), 70.

³ Fearon, *WHAT IS IDENTITY*, 2.

⁴ Oyserman, Elmore and Smith, “Self, Self-Concept, and Identity”, 70.

⁵ Fearon, *WHAT IS IDENTITY*, 1.

⁶ Stuart Hall, “Who Needs Identity”, in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, ed. Stuart Hall and Paul Du Gay (London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 1996), 1.

⁷ Fearon, *WHAT IS IDENTITY*, 1.

⁸ Steph Lawler, *Identity Sociological Perspectives* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008), 1, https://books.google.cz/books?id=pHIWJQ8JvEgC&printsec=frontcover&hl=cs&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false

Many of the authors who deal with this concept, therefore, described identity as “hyphenated”, “multiple”, “overlapping”, “hybrid”, “multifaceted”, “segmented”, “multilayered” or “plural”.⁹ This list of features attributed to identity implies its variety of meanings in scientific literature.¹⁰ Nevertheless, it should be noted that despite these diverse interpretations and in-depth research, there, indeed, still does not exist an concise explanation which would cover the whole scope of the present meanings of identity. To demonstrate this absence of accurate definitions, professor James D. Fearon gathered a great number of interpretations of the term identity ranging from “suggestive glosses” to very intricate concepts and published them in his work called *“What Is Identity (As We Now Use The Word)?”*. Fearon used the examples of gathered definitions as evidence that there is an immense spectrum of theories, which differ immensely. The author further pointed out that the contrasts between these definitions “reflect the multiple lineages that ‘identity’ has within the academy.”¹¹

Fearon's findings also revealed that individual “research tradition” such as role theory, social identity theory or postmodernism have each evolved different understanding and approaches to the concept of identity¹². In sociology, new methods and terminology are often adapted to scientists' specific purposes. It means, that in order to achieve “greater specificity” and “logical or experimental maneuverability”, the researchers define new, very specific terminology.

Nevertheless, these new terms are according to Erik H. Erikson “indiscriminate” and it is therefore problematic to orient in their large range. However, Erikson further suggests that although these concepts did not contribute to the overall understanding of identity, they (at least) became valuable for researches within the field of social psychologists.¹³

Additionally, drawing on his critical approach to conceptual explanations of identity, Fearon addresses another crucial problem in defining this concept - the lack of adequate dictionary

⁹ Regis Machart, *Intersecting Identities and Interculturality : Discourse and Practice* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), 1.

<http://web.a.ebscohost.com/ehost/detail/detail?vid=6&sid=b9886c33-bcbf-4111-a9f8-180cbc03dff8%40sessionmgr4010&bdata=Jmxhbm9Y3Mmc2l0ZT1laG9zdC1saXZl#AN=860124&db=e000xww>

¹⁰ Machart, *Intersecting Identities*, 1.

¹¹ Fearon, *WHAT IS IDENTITY*, 5-6.

¹² Fearon, *WHAT IS IDENTITY*, 6.

¹³ Erik H. Erikson, *Identity Youth and Crisis* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1994), 16.

definitions. In his analysis, the author stresses that dictionaries fail to provide an accurate definition of identity, which would comprise the complexity of this term as it is understood today. In fact, the dictionary definitions seem to be obsolete and fail to provide appropriate definitions.¹⁴“At a minimum, it would be useful to have a concise statement of the meaning of the word in simple language that does justice to its present intension” Fearon says.¹⁵ He concludes that such inadequacy in dictionary terminology is a “scandal.”¹⁶

Nevertheless, criticism and many-sided development are the integral parts of the process of investigating identity in academia¹⁷. Thus, the topics indicated in the above part of this chapter were discussed mainly to give evidence for the previously mentioned claims, which suggested that identity is extremely “slippery” and extensive concept.¹⁸ However, the aim of the further analysis in this chapter will neither comprise listing and criticizing already existing methods nor their comparison, for it, as Stuart Hall points out, “reminds of competing of ‘different protagonists’, who favour various approaches to this question.”¹⁹ Rather, the focus will be given to one specific concept of identity, which will be investigated thoroughly.

This concept does not perceive identity as a “unitary subject” but as something which is composed of various “social roles” and “categories”, so-called “multiple identities”.²⁰

These identities are regarded in Oyserman's terminology as “the traits and characteristics, social relations, roles and social group memberships that define who one is.”²¹

Identity or identities of a person can be targeted at their past, present or future. Who one was and what factors influenced their personality in the past? What are one's priorities now and how they influence one's evolution? What visions, wishes or fears reflect the person one

¹⁴ Fearon, *WHAT IS IDENTITY*, 1-2.

¹⁵ Fearon, *WHAT IS IDENTITY*, 2.

¹⁶ Fearon, *WHAT IS IDENTITY*, 2.

¹⁷ Stuart Hall, “Who Needs Identity”, 1.

¹⁸ Oyserman, Elmore and Smith, “Self, Self-Concept, and Identity”, 70.

¹⁹ Stuart Hall, “Introduction : Identity in Question”, in *Modernity An Introduction To Modern Societies*, ed. Sturat Hall, David Held, Don Hubert and Kenneth Thompson (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), 596.

²⁰ Anthony D. Smith, *National Identity* (U.K.: Penguin Politics Current Affairs, 1991), 1, https://issuu.com/burakcimrenli/docs/anthony_d._smith___national_identit

²¹ Oyserman, Elmore and Smith, “Self, Self-Concept, and Identity”, 69

wants to be? The answers to these questions may serve as the point of orientation, thanks to which a person is able to determine what they should focus on or what to eliminate. Altogether, identities create a self-concept, which determines what a person thinks of himself/herself or what a person is convinced that is true of themselves. Markus and Cross describe the self-concept as “one's theory of one's personality”, which is, however, as other authors argue, sometimes “faulty”. Also, our self-concept is formed by the ways we experience our feelings, our body in motion or our voice.²² All together, these feelings and aspect create the notion of self, which consists of the aforementioned multiple identities.^{23 24}

Professor Anthony D. Smith categorizes these multiple identities or roles as “familial”, “territorial”, “class”, “religious”, “ethnic” and “gender”. He also points out that each individual identity “is based on social classifications” that can be adjusted or set aside according to a given social situation.²⁵ Jan E. Stets and Peter J. Burke continue to explain that these identities, through which the self is composed, are fixed to certain features of the social structure. This means that every “position” or “role” a person has in society is equal to one specific identity. Therefore, self as a mother is an identity, self as a judge is an identity or self as a friend is an identity. The amount of such identities is innumerable. The attributes typically ascribed to the role of mother such as patience, care for her family etc. are then regarded as the “content” of the mother identity.

What role do identities play in social interaction? In conversation, as Stets and Burke claim, a person always uses only one role corresponding to the particular situation. Thus the conversation does not happen “between whole persons, but between aspects of persons having to do with their roles and memberships in particular groups or organizations: their identities”.²⁶ They claim that as a mother we talk to our children or as a shop assistant we talk

²² Oyserman, Elmore and Smith, “Self, Self-Concept, and Identity”, 69.

²³ Smith, *National Identity*, 1.

²⁴ Oyserman, Elmore and Smith, “Self, Self-Concept, and Identity”, 69.

²⁵ Smith, *National Identity*, 1.

²⁶ “Sociological Approach to Self and Identity”, Research Gate, accessed January 17, 2017, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/252385317_A_Sociological_Approach_to_Self_and_Identity

to our customer. Again, there exist as many possibilities as there are social roles or memberships.

All identities a person may have, their content and the way one behaves under their influence are created and formed by human society.²⁷ According to Erik H. Erikson, our self and its evolution is directly interconnected with changes and development in society. He argues that the society and an individual “define each other” and are truly “relative to each other”. This means that our actions and the way we behave influences people, who live around us. Similarly, the changes in the society we live in have significant impact on our lives.²⁸

Jan E. Stets and Peter J. Burke provide an illustration of how this “interplay” between society and an individual works. According to them, a scientist, for instance, tend to behave in a rational and thoughtful manner. She gives the impression of a critically thinking person, who meets people with the similar knowledge, habits or inclinations and attends events with scientific themes. Her behaviour and the behaviour of individuals with the same (here scientific) inclinations will create one unique social group or an organization, which differentiates from others by its interests or the way of thinking.²⁹

The similar scheme can be observed in Hanif Kureishi's *My Beautiful Laundrette*, where one of the main protagonists belonged to the extremist political party. Johnny, Omar's lover, used to be politically inclined to the extreme right ideologies, met people with the same political beliefs and lifestyle. Altogether, Johnny himself, his gang and people or groups with the same political opinions and attitudes created an organisation, which strongly opposed immigration, spread hatred towards the non-white citizens, was blamed for racially motivated attacks and disregarded rights of homosexuals. This political group is known as the neo-fascist National Party, which gained the most of its popularity during the late 1970s.³⁰ The party originated as any other of the numerous significant or non-significant social structures. As implied above,

²⁷ “Sociological Approach to Self and Identity”

²⁸ Erikson, *“Identity Youth and Crisis”*, 23.

²⁹ “Sociological Approach to Self and Identity”.

³⁰ Mónica Calvo Pascual, “My Beautiful Laundrette: Hybrid Identity or The Paradox of Conflicting Identifications in Third Space Asian –British Cinema of The 1980s,” *Journal of English and American studies* 26 ,(2002): 65-66

there were firstly individuals with the fascist ideas, who then gathered in extreme right political groups. These groups then joined in one unified National Party.^{31 32}

Nevertheless, social structures as such are oftentimes regarded as rather theoretical concepts. Stets and Burke explain that “social structure is a very abstract idea. It is not something we experience directly. We are not directly tuned to these patterns as they occur across persons and over time. Nevertheless, we can become aware of them and study them.”³³ Some of the behavioural patterns as the authors mention can emerge as perfectly structured organizations well known from the everyday life. These include, for instance, “General Motors”, the “Brown family”, “Milwaukee” or the aforementioned National Front. Apart from these giants or smaller units such as Brown family, there also exist less tangible structures, which does not have any specific place, office or residence. These include concepts such as “working class” that does not possess any of the aforementioned attributes but still plays (within the context of the play) an important role in shaping the personalities and ideas of Johnny's gang members that will be dealt with later in this thesis.³⁴

As implied in the example of the National Front given above, social structures or groups stem from the behaviour, inclinations or habits of an individual. The aforementioned social structures provide feedback to individuals, who can then adjust or change their behaviour according to their own decisions or expectations of the group they belong to. The feedback which the close society provides for its members in *My Beautiful Launderette* is highly noticeable and omnipresent. It is mainly caused by the close coexistence of two diverse cultures, attitudes toward life and beliefs that instantly interact. An example of such interaction and consequent feedback can be set on Johnny's and Omar's interracial-love-working relationship. Johnny, an extreme right gang member, and Omar, half Pakistani and son of a leftist ex journalist, formed a friendship considerably inconvenient for both Omar's Pakistani family and Johnny's friends. At the beginning of Kureishi's play, Omar and his

³¹ Stan Taylor, *The National Front in English Politics* (London: The Macmillan Press, 1989), 1, https://books.google.cz/books?id=rL6wCwAAQBAJ&pg=PR8&hl=cs&source=gbs_selected_pages&cad=3#v=onepage&q&f=false

³² Nigel Fielding, *The National Front* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), 1, [https://books.google.cz/books?id=SNm9CgAAQBAJ&pg=PT5&dq=Fielding,+Nigel+\(1981\).+The+National+Front.+London:+Routledge+%26+Kegan+Paul.&hl=cs&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjMtfYorYrbAhXDXiwKHwD7B5gQ6AEIKDAA#v=onepage&q=homosexuals%20&f=false](https://books.google.cz/books?id=SNm9CgAAQBAJ&pg=PT5&dq=Fielding,+Nigel+(1981).+The+National+Front.+London:+Routledge+%26+Kegan+Paul.&hl=cs&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjMtfYorYrbAhXDXiwKHwD7B5gQ6AEIKDAA#v=onepage&q=homosexuals%20&f=false)

³³ “Sociological Approach to Self and Identity”.

³⁴ “Sociological Approach to Self and Identity”.

Pakistani family is attacked by Johnny's gang while driving through South London. The group of Lads kicks into the car, screams and fouls it. All of the sudden, Omar fearlessly gets out of the car and greets one of the Lads. It is Johnny, his former friend. The Lads are ready to fight but to their surprise, Johnny shakes Omar's hand and calls the lads off. He is embarrassed. After having a short conversation both young men return back to their friends and the Pakistanis continue to drive. Back in the car, Omar receives feedback from his family.

They continue to drive. CHERRY is screaming at OMAR.

CHERRY: What the hell were you doing?

(SALIM slaps her)

SALIM: He saved our bloody arses! (To OMAR, grabbing him round the neck and pressing his face close to his.) I'm going to see you're all right.³⁵

Cherry understood the seriousness of the situation and its possible outcomes well. According to her words, Omar “got mad” for getting out of the car. He could have provoked a fight between the Lads - a group of “anti-intellectual”, violent young men who favoured alcohol and disrespectful approach towards women and the Pakistanis.³⁶

Salim does not approve of Omar's action either. He is unwilling to concede Omar's friendship with the white, especially, when it concerns a white fascist skinhead. Salim is a strong Pakistani businessman, who is too proud to allow Omar establish a friendship with a white person, whose gang attacks his family. The reason of Cherry's fear and Salim's anger caused by the car incident lies, again, behind the two contradicting identities - the racist Lads and Pakistanis. Identities are often the cause of not only inter-group conflicts, as in case shown above, but also very serious crises. The conflict usually occurs when the convictions, beliefs or ideology of one group contradict the beliefs of the other group. Here, the racists, who despise the black, and the black, who cannot bare the racial superiority of the white.^{37 38}. In the excerpt above, not only did Omar nearly provoke a conflict and receive negative feedback from Cherry and Salim but he also disappointed his father when he told him whom he met.

³⁵ Hanif Kureishi, *My Beautiful Laundrette* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 2000), 23-24.

³⁶ Kristina Nelson, *Narcissism in High Fidelity* (Lincoln: iUniverse, 2004), 20, https://books.google.cz/books?id=M9yCzhXWvt4C&printsec=frontcover&hl=cs&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false

³⁷ “Sociological Approach to Self and Identity”.

³⁸ Smith, *National Identity*, 176.

OMAR: (Pulling up Papa's bottoms) You know who I met? Johnny. Johnny.
PAPA: The boy who came here one day dressed as a fascist with a quarter inch of hair?
OMAR: He was a friend once. For years.
PAPA: There were days when he didn't deserve your admiration so much.
OMAR: Christ, I've known him since I was five.
PAPA: He went too far. They hate us in England. And all you do is kiss their arses and think of yourself as a little Britisher!³⁹

Papa, similarly as Salim and Cherry hate Omar's positive attitude towards his white friends and suggests that Johnny, a gang member and ex-fascist, is not worthy of Omar's friendship. It would be expected that Omar will listen to his family and quit his friendship, as Pakistani culture immensely values the family unit.⁴⁰ Yet, Omar decides on his own and establishes even deeper relationship with Johnny.

Bearing Johnny's fascist identity in mind, the question then arises: how is it possible that Johnny did not attack Omar, established friendship and subsequently love relationship with him? The relationship between Pakistani (Omar) and skinhead (Johnny) seems unlikely for Omar embodies everything that Johnny's ideologic identity despises i.e. black, homosexual and immigrant. It may be surprising that the answer to the question “why they love each other” is identical with the answer to the question “why they (should) hate each other”. It is, indeed, their identity. As professor Hall explains, a person does not have only one single “unified” or “fixed” identity. Omar is not just “black” and Johnny is not just “fascist” but they have many “sometimes contradictory” and “unresolved” identities, which may be “modified” or “abolished”, as Anthony D. Smith adds.^{41 42} Thus, Johnny is not only a fascist but he also holds the role of friend or lover that enables him to love Omar. Similarly, these contradictory identities make it possible for Omar to establish relationship with Johnny.

The view that identities are not unified or everlasting matter, as described in the paragraph above, is supported by Richard Jenkins, who writes that “identity can only be understood as process, as ‘being’ or ‘becoming’”. One’s identity – one’s identities, indeed, for who we are is

³⁹ Kureishi, *My Beautiful Laundrette*, 23-24.

⁴⁰ Jan Marek, *Stručná historie států Pákistán* (Praha: Libri, 2002), 166.

⁴¹ Hall, “Introduction : Identity in Question”, 598.

⁴² Smith, *National Identity*, 1.

always singular and plural – is never a final or settled matter.”⁴³ It changes simultaneously with the situations and social structures a person deals with at a given moment.⁴⁴

In *My Beautiful Launderette*, Johnny also changed his identity of an unemployed, unmotivated member of a gangster living in a squat to an employed and caring person. After he met hardworking Omar, whose ambition was to build a successful business, Johnny changed his indifferent attitude towards work ethic and aimless roaming around streets. He started working for Omar, helped him build a modern launderette and consequently fell in love with him, leaving his Lad friends behind.

So far, it has been argued that humans have multiple identities that create their sense of self, which is formed and shaped by society. It is now necessary to ask : What are the identities or roles that create the aforementioned self? Anthony D. Smith suggests that the most determinant ones comprise the “familial, territorial, class, religious, gender and ethnic identities.”⁴⁵ However, the identities which concern the characters of *My Beautiful Launderette* the most are gender, class, ethnic and sexual. These will be shortly touched upon here in order to show their immense interconnectedness.⁴⁶

The category of gender belongs to the most underlying identities of one's life. It has a strong influence on the possibilities ,“rewards” and even liberties that a person may gain.⁴⁷ To what extent and how the gender identity and its content influences human life will be studied through this thesis on *My Beautiful Launderette*'s female characters - Tania (Nasser's daughter), Bilquis (Nasser's wife), Rachel (Nasser's mistress) and Cherri (Salim's wife). All the four women deal with quite different situations throughout their storyline but what they do have in common is the disadvantage that the gender identity imposes on them.

For instance, Tania, a daughter of Pakistani immigrants living in London, grew up in a culture which gives independence to women and where the most powerful political figure is a woman. She speaks English, attended English school and enjoys everything the English

⁴³ Richard Jenkins, *Social Identity* (London: Routledge, 2008), 17.

https://books.google.cz/books?id=03ctUhnhpGAC&pg=PA1&hl=cs&source=gbs_toc_r&cad=4#v=onepage&q=settled%20matter&f=false

⁴⁴ Hall, “Introduction : Identity in Question”, 598.

⁴⁵ Smith, *National Identity*, 1.

⁴⁶ Calvo Pascual, “My Beautiful Launderette: Hybrid Identity or The Paradox of Conflicting Identifications in Third Space Asian –British Cinema of The 1980s”, 60.

⁴⁷ Smith, *National Identity*, 1.

culture has to offer.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, she faces a conflict at home, where she is treated as Pakistani women who are, according to the European standards, treated unequally.⁴⁹

She is not allowed to make her own life decisions and expected to marry her cousin. Yet, she would like to take over her father's business and be more independent in the way the white majority English women are. Unfortunately, her father would not even think of putting Tania in charge of his business because she is 'only' a daughter.⁵⁰

Another identity which define the behaviour of the characters to a high extend is "social class". Although the definiton of "social class" is as slippery as the term "identity" itself, it can be understood as a socological concept comprising "socioeconomic status (SES), cultural capital, social networks, as well as beliefs, values, and behaviors associated with these material and social resources. SES is one major indicator of social class, typically taking into account one's family income, educational attainment, and/or occupation level."⁵¹ Interestingly, though, the way Kureishi depicted the social class status of the main characters appears to be quite paradoxical. Throughout the play, he depicts Pakistani immigrants, who surpassed the white majority, now lower class working for Pakistanis, who became rich and successful. As a result of doing so, the author implies that his characters live in a society where the hard work surpasses ethnicity. Yet he does not "glamorize" the minority experience as he shows the unfortunate situation of Omar's father Hussein - a respected journalist in his former country now self insuficient alcoholic. Assigning the upper class status to his black characters, Kureishi challenged the social norm which assumes that the immigrants should be lower class dependant on their former colonizers.⁵²

GENGHIS: Why are you working for them? For these people?

You were with us once. For England.

JOHNNY: It's work. I want to work. I'm fed up of hanging about.

GENGHIS: I'm angry. I don't like to see one of our men grovelling to Pakis. They came here to work for us. That's

⁴⁸ "Gender, sexuality and postcolonial identity in My Beautiful Laundrette", James O'Sullivan, accessed March 20, 2018, <http://josullivan.org/gender-sexuality-and-postcolonial-identity-in-my-beautiful-laundrette/>

⁴⁹ Jan Marek, *Pákistán*, 164.

⁵⁰ Jan Marek, *Pákistán*, 164-165.

⁵¹ Felecia R. Webb, "The Role of Social Class Identity: Implications for African American and White College Students' Psychological and Academic Outcomes" (Phd diss., University of Michigan, 2014), 15.

⁵² "Gender, sexuality and postcolonial identity in My Beautiful Laundrette"

why we brought them over. OK? ⁵³

The excerpt above implies the the established norm was reversed, leaving the white majority upset and causing yet another tension between the characters. Again, this dispute originated from the differences in their (here social class) identities. Also, as Monica C. Pascual explains, Omar's upper class identity sometimes causes that he makes it perfectly clear for Johnny to see that he is "something less" than Omar, keeping Johnny in subordinate and even humiliating position.⁵⁴ To conclude, the class identity in *My Beautiful Laundrette* goes hand in hand with the ethnic identity which is oftentimes the cause of racial assaults and hatred.

The last identity which influences the main characters' lives alongside with gender, class and ethnic identity (which will be deisused later in chapter 2) is their sexual identity. Although the conceptualization of this complex construct varies immensely across the wide spectrum of academic publications, here sexual identity/identities will be understood as "the label used to describe one's sexual orientation".⁵⁵ That is homosexual orientation will be treated as homosexual identity.

As explained in the lines above, gender and class identity are sources of conflicts or opportunities that the characters have in the context of the play , the role of sexual identity is, however , presented in much different, non-conflicting way. Even though the nature of Johnny's and Omar's relationship may sometimes seem as uneasy, their homosexual identity never causes any tension or difficulties. Instead, it is displayed as something "naturalized" and non-problematic in a way the relationship of a boy and a girl would be.⁵⁶

Nevertheless, the fact that this relationship is so undisturbed by the socio-cultural, religious and political circumstances which should oppose it is quite unprecedented. The Lad gang which hold some of the facist believes should exclude Johnny for his sexual identity that does not correspond with the masculine type of personality that the society impose on men. Also, the

⁵³ Kureishi, *My Beautiful Laundrette*,17.

⁵⁴ Mónica Calvo Pascual, "My Beautiful Laundrette: Hybrid Identity or The Paradox of Conflicting Identifications in Third Space Asian –British Cinema of The 1980s," *Journal of English and American studies* 26 ,(2002): 66

⁵⁵ Sabra L. Katz-Wise, " Sexual fluidity in young adult women and men: associations with sexual orientation and sexual identity development", *Psychology & Sexuality* 6, no. 2 (2015): 190.

⁵⁶ Calvo Pascual, "My Beautiful Laundrette: Hybrid Identity or The Paradox of Conflicting Identifications in Third Space Asian –British Cinema of The 1980s",64.

traditions and religious beliefs of his Pakistani family would never consider such a relationship as acceptable.⁵⁷ Yet, the reader gets only the slightest hints of the non-acceptance coming from Salim's allusions that something is going on between the two and the only Papa's remark : “Try and fix him (Omar) with a nice girl”, suggesting that there is something wrong with his son.⁵⁸ Moreover, there is not a single negative instance of feedback from their social environment which was strongly influenced by Thatcher's ideas that didn't support anything that would not “fit in” - the rights of homosexual minorities included.⁵⁹ Having described Johnny's and Omar's relationship the way he did, Kureishi managed to “normalize”, at least in *My Beautiful Laundrette*, what has been considered taboo or even abnormality.⁶⁰

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The results in this chapter indicate that a person has multiple identities that often change or overlap. They are depend on and shaped by the society an individual lives in. These properties of identities were analyzed on the basis of interaction between characters and their social environment.

At the end of this investigation, the basic identities that shaped the experience and the living conditions of the characters most significantly were given. These specific identities comprised gender, sexual, class and ethnic identity, which will be the subject of analysis in the following chapter.

⁵⁷ “Gender, sexuality and postcolonial identity in *My Beautiful Laundrette*”

⁵⁸ Kureishi, *My Beautiful Laundrette*, 12.

⁵⁹ Andreas Athanasiades, “Re-imagining Desire and Sexuality in the Work of Hanif Kureishi” (Phd diss., University of Cyprus, 2013), 14-15.

⁶⁰ “Gender, sexuality and postcolonial identity in *My Beautiful Laundrette*”

⁶¹ Adam J. Tebble, “Homosexuality and Publicness: Towards a Political Theory of the Taboo”, *Political Studies* 59 (2011): 921-23.

2 ETHNIC IDENTITY

Ethnic identity is one of the multiple identities that create an overall self. Like all the other identities, it is constantly changing and unstable construct, which stems from the character of society a person inhabits .⁶² ⁶³Yet, its meaning is not difficult to grasp if explained on the basis of its “etymological origins”. The word “ethnic” comes from Latin and Greek words “*ethnicus* and *ethnikas*” which signifies “nation”. Throughout the history, this term was used to label people known as “heathens”.⁶⁴ Joseph E. Trimble and Ryan Dickson further explain that “*Ethos*, in Greek, means custom, disposition or trait. *Ethnikas* and *ethos* taken together therefore can mean a band of people (nation) living together who share and acknowledge common customs.”⁶⁵ However, in order to fully comprehend identity of an ethnic group or a nation, it is essential to “map their territorial distribution”, “trace their origins and movements in time” and “list their fundamental characteristics”, Richard Tapper adds.⁶⁶

Although an extensive research concerning ethnic identity was carried out - similarly as in the case of the term identity itself - the precise meaning of it still seems to be ambiguous and highly dependent on the purpose of authors' research.⁶⁷ Richard Tapper explains why the definitions of ethnic identity are so diverse. He points out that each ethnic group differ enormously and thus require specific methodology and research approach that would best express its “uniqueness”. Therefore, scientists dealing with this subject became significant “creators” and “manipulators” ,who have the potential to indicate the future development of the issue and its terminology.⁶⁸

⁶²Hall, “Introduction : Identity in Question”, 597-8.

⁶³ Smith, *National Identity*, 1.

⁶⁴ Joseph E. Trimble and Ryan Dickson, “Ethnic Identity”, in *Encyclopedia of Applied Developmental Science*, ed. Celia B. Fisher and Richard M. Lerner (California: Sage Publications, 2005),415 .
<http://web.a.ebscohost.com/ehost/ebookviewer/ebook/ZTAwMHh3d19fNDc0MjU5X19BTg2?sid=1bae2c65-cd14-4217-b1bd-1ce10af1237f@sessionmgr4006&vid=3&format=EB&rid=1>

⁶⁵ Trimble and Dickson, “Ethnic Identity”, 415.

⁶⁶ Richard Tapper, “Ethnic Identities and Social Categories in Iran and Afghanistan”, in *History and Ethnicity*, ed. Elizabeth Tonkin, Maryon McDonald and Malcolm Chapman (London: Routledge,1989),232.

⁶⁷ Trimble and Dickson, “Ethnic Identity”, 417.

⁶⁸ Richard Tapper, “Ethnic Identities and Social Categories in Iran and Afghanistan”, 233.

Nevertheless, it is not an uncommon practice that they sometimes miss-interpret their own definitions, Chandra criticizes⁶⁹. She maintains that “Many comparative political scientists do not define the term before using it. And those that do often classify identities as ethnic even when they do not correspond to their own definitions.”⁷⁰ Despite Chandra's findings and the data implying that the perfect definition of ethnic identity is nearly unattainable, it is still possible to generally summarize its main meaning.⁷¹ Typically, the ethnic group identity is understood as “so many people occupying such a territory, practising such a way of life ”.⁷² This definition elegantly grasps the essence of ethnic identity at a general level but it needs to be enhanced with the more specific findings from other authors too.

For instance, professor Jean Phinney provides a definition, which is according to Joseph E. Trimble and Ryan Dickson ranked among the most acknowledged ones.⁷³ She argues that “ethnic identity is a dynamic, multidimensional construct that refers to one’s identity, or sense of self as a member of an ethnic group”.⁷⁴ Phinney also recognizes common attributes that are shared among the group members that comprise: “ancestry”, “similar culture”, “race”, “religion”, “language”, “kinship”, and “place of origin”. Taken together, the aforementioned aspects of ethnic identity enable its members to set the “boundaries”, thanks to which a group differentiates itself from other ethnicities, Fredrik Barth explains.⁷⁵ The aspect regarded as the most relevant for this work include language, culture, religion and also race, which will be discussed in the following chapter that deals with the political and race based problems of the 1980s era. The former three aspect will be analyzed on the examples of My Beautiful Laundrette's characters in the following lines, starting with an investigation of their language.

Language is seemingly just another aspect of ethnic identity quite like culture or religion. Nevertheless, Alexander Von Humboldt states that language also plays an important role in the formation of ethnic identity as such. He claims that “Language is the outer appearance of the mentalities of peoples; their language is their mentality and their mentality their language”

⁶⁹ Kanchan Chandra, “What Is Ethnic Identity and Does It Matter?” *Annual Review of Political Science* 9 (2006): 398.

⁷⁰ Chandra, “What Is Ethnic Identity and Does It Matter?”, 398.

⁷¹ Richard Tapper, “Ethnic Identities and Social Categories in Iran and Afghanistan”, 233.

⁷² Richard Tapper, “Ethnic Identities and Social Categories in Iran and Afghanistan”, 233.

⁷³ Trimble and Dickson, “Ethnic Identity”, 417.

⁷⁴ Trimble and Dickson, “Ethnic Identity”, 417.

⁷⁵ Trimble and Dickson, “Ethnic Identity”, 417.

which means that people who speak the same language hold the same “world view” and their language serves as its mirror.⁷⁶ Nevertheless, the aspect of common language among the Pakistani characters in *My Beautiful Launderette* occurs rather sporadically. Although they all speak Urdu ,an Indo-Iranian language officially spoken in Pakistan and closely related to Hindi, the family uses it mainly in tense situations, rather than in everyday discourse^{77 78}. Bilquis sometimes greets Omar (he replies in basic Urdu) or gives instructions to Tania, who understands the language but does not speak it. Nasser uses Urdu to verbally abuse Bilquis or to argue with Salim about financial matters. Also, Nasser and Salim speak their original language when they do not wish to be understood or heard, especially when insulting the white (here represented by Johnny).

NASSER: (In Urdu) Don't worry, I'm just putting this bastard to work.

SALIM: (In Urdu) The bastard, it's a job in itself.

NASSER: (In Urdu) I'll have my foot up his arse at all times.

SALIM: (In Urdu) That's exactly how they like it. And he'll steal your boot too. (JOHNNY looks amusedly at them both.)⁷⁹

Drawing on the findings discussed above, it would be exaggeration to suggest that the departure from the language aspect of ethnic identity in the play is clearly observable. This claim is supported by the fact that characters usually use English as their working language every day. Moreover, the Pakistanis also speak English during their family gatherings because otherwise Omar would not understand.

Another aspect that forms ethnic identity besides the common language is the culture of a given ethnic group .⁸⁰ Culture is a complicated term which is read here as “ shared set of symbols, values, codes and norms” capturing the Pakistani way of life.⁸¹ These attributes of

⁷⁶ Trimble and Dickson, “Ethnic Identity”, 415.

⁷⁷Christine Everaert , “*Tracing the Boundaries Between Hindi and Urdu : Lost and Added in Translation Between 20th Century Short Stories*” (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 13-14.

<http://web.b.ebscohost.com/ehost/ebookviewer/ebook/ZTAWMHh3d19fMzM4NjcwX19BTg2?sid=b707ac37-d071-48a6-9391-661a9d346935@pdc-v-sessmgr04&vid=3&format=EB&rid=1>

⁷⁸ Marek, *Pakistan*, 168-9.

⁷⁹ Kureishi, *My Beautiful Launderette*, 40.

⁸⁰ The aforementioned aspect of language is commonly considered to be a part of culture. Nevertheless, in the context of this paper, it was presented as a separate component of ethnic identity .

⁸¹ Chandra, “What Is Ethnic Identity and Does It Matter?”, 409.

culture are (within the context of the play) represented by religion, attitude to marriage, and family unit.

As far as professor Jan Marek is concerned, one of the most significant features of Pakistani culture is their religion. Pakistanis are strongly devoted to their faith, which is an inevitable part of their everyday life. Religion and state are not separate entities in Pakistan. According to the Constitution, the country's official name is the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, where Allah is the one and only god. Each Muslim has duties that comprise a prayer five times a day, faith in Allah, a fast and pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in a lifetime.

However, it is not possible to accurately assess if the characters abide by these rules set by Islam for the author has never described or mentioned any of them. What can be assessed, though, is the clear departure from other (not less important) values that each Muslim should hold. The rules of Islam laid down that Muslims are forbidden to steal, drink alcohol, take drugs, commit adultery or practice usury.⁸² The main male characters, however, break all of these. Omar steals Salim's cocaine of great value, Nasser has long-term relationship outside his marriage, Salim engages in illegal drug trade and Papa (Omar's father) drinks heavily. Also, it is not an exception, that the family enjoys drinking on numerous events or when meetings their friends. It is thus apparent from the behaviour of the family that they do not behave in accordance with the faith of their former country. Rather, they enjoy all the possibilities English culture has to offer. Again, the similar case of departure from traditional ethnic identity aspects is observable here.

The following aspect of Pakistani cultural identity is wedding and marriage, which are closely related to religion and traditions. Unlike the European customs, where marriage is considered a sacred bond, Pakistani marriage rather symbolizes a contract. Husband-to-be must suggest the amount of money he offers his bride as a wedding gift and pay it in two instalments in advance - the first before the wedding and the second (much higher) in case the contract is broken. Both groom and bride are carefully selected and marriage is planned long before the wedding. Also, a union between family members like cousins is no exception in Pakistani tradition. This practice makes it possible to keep the common property in the family and increase it even more.⁸³ The above mentioned aspects of the traditional conception of

⁸² Marek, *Pakistan*, 158.

⁸³ Marek, *Pakistan*, 165.

Pakistani marriage are clearly recognizable in the context of the play. Nasser, the father of the family, has no male heir and three daughters, who must be married according to the tradition.⁸⁴ He feels the responsibility to choose suitable husband for his daughter and thus cunningly plans to marry Tania to her cousin Omar. Once Nasser came to his nephew and told him : “Start being nice to Tania. Take the pressure off my fucking head.”⁸⁵ He is well aware that Omar is an ambitious and promising young entrepreneur, who could one day take over his successful business. Therefore, Nasser decides that he will make Omar marry his daughter. “If I say marry her then you damn well do it!”⁸⁶. He said with dedication.

Omar consequently obeys his uncle and asks Tania to marry him just when standing drunk at the door. Tania reluctantly answers : “If you can get me some money...”.⁸⁷ She wants to leave her family and Omar is her only way to do so. Nevertheless, when Nasser intends to check whether the couple is going to get married soon, he receives a reply from Tania : “I’d rather drink my own urine.”⁸⁸ He is furious over his daughters behaviour. Such a refusal of the traditional values like a marriage he arranged himself is scandalous. Although, the Pakistani traditions can be more looser for the Muslims living outside their country, Tania's decision could have still endangered her father's “izzat” (“Izzat is based upon control, the ability to control key social and economic groups and persons in society. Almost all the things that directly affect izzat are instances of success or failure to control these social elements. The most fundamental level of control is control of women”).⁸⁹ ⁹⁰ However, not only Tania decided not to obey the traditional rules ,as she struggled for more independence. Her cousin Omar also gave preference to his secret relationship with Johnny and thus they both receded from the obligations their ethnic origins put on them.

⁸⁴ Marek, *Pakistan*, 165.

⁸⁵ Kureishi, *My Beautiful Laundrette*, 46.

⁸⁶ Kureishi, *My Beautiful Laundrette*, 46.

⁸⁷ Kureishi, *My Beautiful Laundrette*, 47.

⁸⁸ Kureishi, *My Beautiful Laundrette*, 59.

⁸⁹ Calvo Pascual, “My Beautiful Laundrette: Hybrid Identity or The Paradox of Conflicting Identifications in Third Space Asian –British Cinema of The 1980s”, 64 .

⁹⁰ Michael D. Fischer, “The Concept of Izzat”, in *Economy and Culture in Pakistan: Migrants and Cities in a Muslim Society*, ed. Hastings Donnan and Pnina Werbner (New York: Palgrave Macmillan 1991), 108.
<https://books.google.cz/books?id=sPqvCwAAQBAJ&pg=PA108&dq=izzat&hl=cs&sa=X&ved=0ahUKewjiop73qPbcAhUMC8AKHdbCBvIQ6wEIODAC#v=onepage&q=izzat&f=false>

The last aspect typical for Pakistani culture discussed here is family unit, which is for Pakistanis the “centre” of their life. It is basis where the members find support, love and protection. The mutual help among family members is an absolutely natural thing. Even The remote relatives would not hesitate to ask for help if needed and they would always find it.⁹¹ The plot of *My beautiful Launderette* is interwoven with family relations and cooperation. At the very beginning of the play, Omar's father Hussein intends to secure a job for his son before he sends him to the university. Hussein thus calls his wealthy brother Nasser, who could provide an employment for Omar. However, Nasser thinks that employing his seemingly incompetent cousin would be his personal punishment. Yet, he helps Hussein and gives Omar a car cleaning job. The fact that Hussein helps his brother indicates that the strong family bonds among Pakistani relatives and willingness to help precedes the disadvantages that the employing of lazy Omar could cause.

Later, Omar proves his uncle's earlier assumptions wrong and gains both promotion and his family's respect . Young Omar quickly becomes skilled and successful in managing his new enterprise, which he gained through his uncle's help. Despite all this success and his family's recognition, Omar does something that is considered unacceptable among Pakistani family members. He steals Salim's drugs that he later sells and makes considerable amount of money. At the moment when Salim recognizes Omar's deception, he seriously threatens him. Being in this unfortunate situation, Omar and Johnny start to steal electronic devices in order to pay off their dept. Once the instalment is ready, Omar gives it to Salim who - to Omars's surprise- rejects it.

SALIM: Don't ever offer me money. It was an educational test I put on you. To make you see you did a wrong thing. Don't in future bite the family hand when you can eat out of it. If you need money just ask me. Years ago your uncles lifted me up. And I will do the same for you.⁹²

What Salim did was not an act of vengeance as it might have seemed at the beginning. Rather, he wanted to express the true value he puts in family and pass it to Omar. Perhaps, Salim also intended to teach Omar that family is the base of mutual help and the family bound as well as that forgiveness is stronger than vengeance and desire for money.

⁹¹ Marek, *Pákistán*, 166.

⁹² Kureishi, *My Beautiful Launderette*,59.

The strong family bond typical for Pakistani identity is represented also on the relationship between two brothers Nasser (Omar's uncle) and Hussein (Omar's father). Unlike for Omar, the traditional family values are everything but strange for his uncle and father. The two brothers stick together and face the challenges that living in Britain brings about. The reader can perceive the profoundness of this relationship especially when Nasser sits by Hussein's sickbed and the two discuss the past, the future and Nasser's sorrow over his lost mistress.

Not only can the reader feel the brotherly love, but they can also notice the selfless way Omar takes care of his bedridden father. He provides him with food, cuts his nails and helps him with anything his father needs. Yet, Nasser criticizes that Hussein did not teach his son the traditional Pakistani approach to family care, he said: "Haven't you trained him up to look after you, like I have with my girls?"⁹³. Nasser indicates that Omar should take care of his family more in a way any Pakistani man, who is the authority and provides for the family, should.

The conventional Pakistani family lives in a multigenerational household with many children, where the father occupies the leading position and his wife is subordinated.⁹⁴ This traditional family scheme precisely corresponds with Nasser's family. He secures all the material needs of his close relatives and runs his household by himself, whereas Bilquis, his wife, stays at home and takes care of their three daughters. The mutual help and a strong cohesiveness within the family unit is extremely important for Pakistanis.⁹⁵ However, it seems that life in Britain does not have a positive impact on this way of their traditional family life. Cherry, Salim's wife, expresses her deep regret about missing her old way of life back in Pakistan, where her family gathered often. She says: "Every day in Karachi, every day your other uncles and cousins are at our house for bridge, booze and VCR."⁹⁶ Pakistanis, precisely like Cherry remembers it, are companionable and considered to be warm-hearted and hospitable people, who enjoy spending time together. For these reasons, perhaps, it is problematic for them to grasp the "European individualism" that prioritizes privacy and impersonal approach towards people. This "cold" attitude (and Pakistanis' hatred towards it) is aptly portrayed on

⁹³ Kureishi, *My Beautiful Laundrette*, 12.

⁹⁴ Marek, *Pakistan*, 166.

⁹⁵ Marek, *Pakistan*, 166.

⁹⁶ Kureishi, *My Beautiful Laundrette*, 19.

the following excerpt from Kureishi's play, where Johnny just expelled young Pakistani student with his family from an apartment.⁹⁷

The PAKISTANI STUDENT yells out of the window at JOHNNY.

PAKISTANI STUDENT: You are not human! You are cold people, you English, the big icebergs of Europe!

(OMAR stands at the next window along, looking out. This room is lighted.

JOHNNY chuckles to himself as he walks jauntily away.)⁹⁸

Johnny's behaviour and indifference proves the aforementioned claim that English people are, at least according to Pakistanis, cold individualists. Nevertheless, there is a hidden paradox between the lines of the above excerpt. The person behind the student's misfortune was not Johnny himself but it was Nasser, his boss. When Johnny subsequently asked Nasser why he left his own compatriot homeless, he only said: "But we're professional businessmen. Not professional Pakistanis. There's no race question in the new enterprise culture."⁹⁹ Nasser showed that he behaves (according to the Pakistani student's opinion) in a similar way like the English and that, at least in this situation, he forgot about the values Pakistanis hold dear. The excerpt also implies, that Nasser's greed prevailed over his moral values and the aforementioned Pakistani cordiality.

So far this chapter has focussed on various aspect of ethnic identity, which included language, religion and culture. It has been argued that each of the analyzed aspects of ethnic identity showed clear signs of departure from the pure Pakistani tradition to a greater or lesser extent. As a reader may notice, Kureishi's characters violated the rules that their ethnic identity put on them. All the actions and decision the characters made so far imply, that their identity cannot be simply categorized as purely Pakistani or purely British. According to theoretical concept of identities by Homi Bhaba, the characters live in the "space in between" these two instantly interacting cultures. Such "space in between" is a notional passage between two different opposites- the British and Pakistani culture. It is the space

⁹⁷ Marek, *Pakistan*, 168.

⁹⁸ Kureishi, *My Beautiful Laundrette*, 52.

⁹⁹ Kureishi, *My Beautiful Laundrette*, 41.

where the two ethnic identities clash and create a new “hybrid” identity.^{100 101} Some of Kureishi's *My Beautiful Launderette* characters, especially Omar and Tania, may be understood as a representation of such “hybrid” space, which manifests itself differently in individual heroes and heroines. Some of them incline more to one culture whereas the others tend to choose the other. Also, the possibility of choosing both applies here as it will be argued in the following analysis.

In one of the play's parts, Cherry says : “Oh God, I'm so sick of hearing about these in-betweens. People should make up their minds where they are.”¹⁰² She expresses her annoyance at Omar's inability to decide to which culture he belongs to. Nevertheless, Omar himself has never seem to occupy himself the with question Am I British? or Am I Pakistani? ,nor does he search for his true self. Simply, he does not worry at who he is and rather uses his “mixed origins” to his advantage. His behaviour is characterized by its immediate adaptability to a given situation.¹⁰³ When at home, Omar takes care of his bedridden father, showing care and an interest for his family as it is typical for Pakistanis. Also, he would be willing to obey his uncle's wish and marry his cousin Tania in order to financially secure future for both her and himself . Another sign typical for affiliation to the Pakistani identity in Omar's case is the fact that he seeks information about his relatives' former home and wants to know about their history and “ethnic heritage”. Maria P.P. Root explains that such an interest is a sign that a “multi-ethnic person” like Omar is more likely to choose one particular ethnic group over the other (here Pakistani over English). Root also maintains that parents and their upbringing greatly influence the multi-ethnic child's choice of ethnic group affiliation.¹⁰⁴ Nevertheless, in *My Beautiful Launderette*, Hussein (the father)

¹⁰⁰ Bernhard Giesen, “Inbetweenness and Ambivalence”, in *The Oxford Handbook of Cultural Sociology* ,ed. Jeffrey C. Alexander, Ronald N. Jacobs and Philip Smith (Oxford University Press,2017),1-2.

<http://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195377767.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780195377767-e-30>

¹⁰¹ Calvo Pascual, “My Beautiful Launderette: Hybrid Identity or The Paradox of Conflicting Identifications in Third Space Asian –British Cinema of The 1980s”,62 .

¹⁰² Kureishi, *My Beautiful Launderette*,19-20.

¹⁰³ Calvo Pascual, “My Beautiful Launderette: Hybrid Identity or The Paradox of Conflicting Identifications in Third Space Asian –British Cinema of The 1980s”,62 .

¹⁰⁴ Joseph E. Trimble and Ryan Dickson, “Ethnic Identity”, in *Encyclopedia of Applied Developmental Science*, ed. Celia B. Fisher and Richard M. Lerner (California: Sage Publications, 2005),418-19.

<http://web.a.ebscohost.com/ehost/ebookviewer/ebook/ZTAwMHh3d19fNDc0MjU5X19BTg2?sid=1bae2c65-cd14-4217-b1bd-1ce10af1237f@sessionmgr4006&vid=3&format=EB&rid=1>

strictly disapproves of his son's behaviour and explains to him : “They hate us in England. And all you do is kiss their arses and think of yourself as a little Britisher!” Perhaps, Hussein is right and Omar is a real “Britisher” because his actions are not oftentimes in accordance with the Pakistani ones. One of many examples of Omar's behaviour that Pakistani consider “English like” is his refusal to help his Pakistani relative Zaki with his unsuccessful business. Instead of lending a helping hand to a relative he only thinks about his own enrichment and individual success. This is not the only case. As it has been discussed earlier in this chapter, Omar also stole money from his family, which a “true Pakistani” should hold dear and help them. As a consequence, even his family started to question his belonging to their ethnic group.

NASSER: But this is the point. He's (Omar) hired someone else to do the work!

ZAKI: Typically English, if I can say that.¹⁰⁵

Zaki and Nasser bitterly comment on Omar's “typically English” manners. Their impression of Omar's behaviour can be supported by Trimble's and Saharso's hypothesis, which define person's affiliation to a specific ethnic group. Trimble claims that a person's belonging to a group should be, besides other aspects, based on their shared language. Saharso adds that ethnic group membership also depends on “one's choice of friends and selection of a future partner”.¹⁰⁶ In Omar's case, a reader can observe that the main hero does not speak Urdu - the language of his family- which sometimes sets him aside from family conversations. What is more, Omar chose a white English boyfriend which signals, according to Saharso's theory, that he inclines more to English mainstream group. Although the facts that he does not speak Urdu and chose white boyfriend suggest that Omar is rather English than Pakistani, it cannot be ignored that (as mentioned above) he also shows the behaviour typical for Pakistani people. Thus, based on the above claims, the main hero can be perceived as English-Pakistani, who inclines more to his English half and his behaviour is strongly dependent on the immediate context. The main hero's position is aptly expressed by Peter Weinreich, who

¹⁰⁵ Kureishi, *My Beautiful Laundrette*, 35.

¹⁰⁶ Trimble and Dickson, “Ethnic Identity”, 417-18.

¹⁰⁷ Calvo Pascual, “My Beautiful Laundrette: Hybrid Identity or The Paradox of Conflicting Identifications in Third Space Asian –British Cinema of The 1980s”, 64 .

claims that “ethnic self-identity is not a static process but one that changes and varies according to particular social contexts.”¹⁰⁸

In comparison with Omar, who uses his mixed origins to his own advantage, Tania struggles to embrace the values which her parents' culture expects her to hold. She is a free spirited young woman, who was raised in a country that gives much more independence to woman than does her parent's culture. As a consequence of English cultural influence, Tania hasn't fostered the traditional values of her parents' and thus struggles to live up to their expectations. She would wish to take over her father's business and live independently.¹⁰⁹

Sociologist Sawiti Saharso explains that the way a person perceives their live opportunities is a lead to their ethnic group membership. The fact that Tania decided not to marry her cousin and went her own way therefore suggests that she prefers English way of life over Pakistani. More specifically, the heroine chose to be employed as a majority of English women rather than stay at home and be dependent on her husband's income.

There are other clues that make the reader believe Tania strongly inclines to the English mainstream group. When she assisted her Pakistani mother with preparing the magical potion for her father's mistress, it was obvious that she considers practising of such a ritual to be silly. She didn't seem to understand the deep meaning this ritual has for her mother. The expression on Tania's face indicated that she is annoyed and feels a little ashamed for what her mother does. This indicates that the heroine does not attach any considerable value to the traditional practices of her mother's culture. Another factor that indicates Tania's tendencies is her choice of “white” friends. As it was mentioned earlier, the choice of one's friends indicates the affiliation to an ethnic group. Therefore, the fact that Tania established close relationship with Johnny and perhaps other non-Pakistani people signals that she has strong tendencies to chose English over Pakistani culture. Nevertheless, the most fundamental act indicating her decision to live in accordance with the mainstream culture is her departure from her family. Marek claims that family is the first priority that Pakistani people have, and leaving it or staying alone is a torture for them.¹¹⁰ Yet, Tania decided to leave them and their traditional customs for good.

¹⁰⁸ Trimble and Dickson, “Ethnic Identity”, 417.

¹⁰⁹ “Gender, sexuality and postcolonial identity in My Beautiful Laundrette”

¹¹⁰ Marek, *Pákistán*, 168.

Her departure meant that she “withdrew” from her ethnic group and chose to affiliate with English group. Tajfel explains, that it is possible to leave a group and choose another but he also warns that such a decision may cause “psychological complications” - which a reader cannot assess as her story ends up with her departure.¹¹¹ Tania's decision was based on the cultural influence of the English society she grew up in. Cheung states that one's choice of ethnic group is strongly influenced by cultural factors, which were in the case of the heroine the main reason for her “withdrawal”.¹¹²

The investigation of the two main characters has shown that Tania inclines more to the English group, whereas Omar chooses according to the context, occasion and his personal intentions in a way that it benefits him the most. Nevertheless, in the case of Nasser, it can be argued that he lives a double life. When at home, Nasser behaves like a perfect Pakistani father, who provides for his family, helps his cousin and has a wife who takes care of his three daughters. He enjoys telling stories spending time with his friends and relatives.¹¹³ On the other hand, however, he has a mistress whom he meets in public and provides her with money which is an unthinkable practice in the context of his religious belief. Also, his ambition and hard work he puts in his business is in contrast to Marek's description of Pakistani tendencies towards “laziness” and “carelessness”. Professor Marek claims that Pakistanis believe in life that was predestined for them. As a consequence, they sometimes leave the important matters “for tomorrow” which most of the goal-directed Europeans do not understand.¹¹⁴ Nasser's active participation in business matters defies these stereotypes of traditional Pakistani behaviour. Nasser himself claims that “We're professional businessmen. Not professional Pakistanis.”¹¹⁵ This claim of his suggests that he is very much able to put his ethnic identity aside and adapt to the culture of his English counterparts.¹¹⁶ To conclude, when at home, Nasser feels to be a part of Pakistani group whereas at work he affiliates to English society.

Nevertheless, Nasser is different from other characters born and raised in Pakistan in a number of respects. He employs an English person and even has English mistress. It seems that he manages to live along the English society in a peaceful way, which is mutually

¹¹¹ Trimble and Dickson, “Ethnic Identity”, 18.

¹¹² Trimble and Dickson, “Ethnic Identity”, 18.

¹¹³ Marek, *Pakistan*, 166.

¹¹⁴ Marek, *Pakistan*, 170.

¹¹⁵ Kureishi, *My Beautiful Laundrette*, 41.

¹¹⁶ “Gender, sexuality and postcolonial identity in *My Beautiful Laundrette*”

beneficial for him and his English counterparts. The other characters (mainly first generation Pakistanis), however, do not share Nasser's attitude. It is mainly Salim, a self-confident man not afraid to strictly enforce his own intentions, who struggles to find a peaceful way of living along the English majority. He is a proud Pakistani, who despises the English and is deeply suspicious about them. He is convinced that they are racist, who discriminate others and that is why he does not feel to be a part of their society at all. Thus, his only intention is to get as much money as possible out of England and not to really think about any moral principles, especially when selling dangerous drugs.

JOHNNY: (*Eventually, and tough*) Salim, we know what you sell, man. Know the kids you sell it to. It's shit, man. Shit.

SALIM: Haven't you noticed? People are shit. I give them what they want. I don't criticize. I supply. The laws of business apply.¹¹⁷

Drawing on the excerpt above, it can be argued that Salim exploits and harms others without really thinking about its consequences. His behaviour often serves as evidence for those My Beautiful Laundrette characters, who claimed that the immigrants came to England to live off its people and wealth. As a consequence, Salim had to face numerous conflicts with Johnny's gang members, whose intention was to protect England from such people and practices.

The tense relationships, numerous conflicts and superior behaviour of the English made it difficult for My Beautiful Laundrette heroes and heroines to assimilate into English society. Instead of finding new home and expected securities, the Pakistanis experienced the feelings of loss, homesickness and rootlessness that Kureishi explores through Cherry's, Bilquis' and Hussein's characters.¹¹⁸ ¹¹⁹ Their relationship to the new home is aptly described by Cherry's reproach addressed to Omar: Could anyone in their right mind call this silly little island off Europe their home?¹²⁰ Cherry's remark reminds a reader that the first generation characters do not feel to be part of it they do not feel that England is their home. These

¹¹⁷ Kureishi, *My Beautiful Laundrette*, 60.

¹¹⁸ David McDowall, *Britain in Close-Up* (Essex: Longman, 1993), 98-99.

¹¹⁹ "Gender, sexuality and postcolonial identity in *My Beautiful Laundrette*"

¹²⁰ Kureishi, *My Beautiful Laundrette*, 19.

characters experience the loss of something they hold dear- their home and have to constantly search for who they are and where they belong .¹²¹

The last female heroine is Nasser's wife Bilquis, who is bound to the Pakistani ethnic group most of all the characters. She still holds the traditional values and practices the old rituals that the rest of the family have abandoned. Perhaps, this is because she spends most of her time at home taking care of the kids and does not interact with the English as often as other members of her family and thus the culture does not impact her as much as other family members. As a consequence of Bilquis' separation, there forms a gap between her traditional Pakistani way of life and her family's lifestyle considerably influenced by the English culture.

Thus, Bilquis sometimes has to deal with condemnation coming from her relatives, who do not approve of some traditional practices she uses. For instance, in one of the scenes Bilquis makes a magic potion that should help her family to get rid of Nasser's mistress. Nevertheless, nobody seems to understand her actions and intentions. On the contrary, her husband Nasser is furious and considers her behaviour absurd or even "stupid". Moreover, Omar is absolutely amused by his aunt's feats and secretly laughs at her with Johnny. Perhaps, Bilquis feels to be discarded from her closest group, which should be her spiritual home and support. Many times she finds herself in an opposition to her community and wishes to move back to her homeland, where she could find her true place and people who share her values and traditions. Her unhappiness is intensified by the fact that Bilquis is illiterate and cannot connect to her family in Pakistan. Her only way to contact her relatives is ask her daughter Tania for help. It appears that she is trapped in a culture which exists far away but not at home within her family.

Also, her brother-in-law Hussein has to face the similar obstacles. He gives an impression of an embittered, desperate and cynical man, who did not find a place in society that he lives in. Hussein's soul and meaning of life were left behind in Pakistan, where he feels his home is. He once said in an interview with his brother : "This damn country has done us in. That's why I am like this. We should be there. Home".¹²² Grief for his homeland, rejection from society and the bitter hatred for English society resulted in addiction to alcohol that helps him deal with his unfortunate situation.

¹²¹ Andreas Athanasiades, "Re-imagining Desire and Sexuality in the Work of Hanif Kureishi" (Phd diss., University of Cyprus, 2013),18.

¹²² Kureishi, *My Beautiful Laundrette*,66.

Each hero and heroine represent an individual way of coping with their social environment and the group they affiliate with. Some of the characters, especially the first generation, struggle because their former identity had been challenged by the English culture that surrounds them. Nevertheless, each individual member of Pakistani origin solve their problems regarding their belonging to a social group in a different way. Bilquis and Hussein experience grief and separation from home that results in Hussein's alcoholism and Bilquis' magic rituals. Nasser, on the other hand, learned to live together with the English majority group and established new successful life. Yet, he kept many traditional aspect traditionally attributed to Pakistani identity. Similarly, Salim is proud Pakistani, who belongs to his original ethnic group but also, in many aspects, he found a way of assimilating to the English society with all benefits it offers.

As the analysis of this chapter suggests, many aspect of the characters' Pakistani ethnic identity were rewritten by the influence of the English society. Nasser and Salim's characters are the most explicit examples of everyday departure from the original Pakistani values, indicating the fact that identity can be changed in time and by both outer and inner circumstances. Hussein and Bilquis, who have never accustomed to the English majority, are the reminder that the sense of belonging to a group is individual and dependant on the decision of each person. Tania and Omar, who both could not fully relate to the culture where their parents grew up, made such a decision. Tania's and Omar's Pakistani roots were so distant for them that they naturally felt that they belong to the English majority rather than to Pakistani minority.

In this investigation, the aim was to outline the terminology of the term ethnic identity, define its aspects and analyze them on the basis of *My Beautiful Laundrette* characters. This complicated term is read here as person's "sense of self as a member of an ethnic group", which has numerous specific aspects common to its members. The results of this investigation in this chapter show that all Kureishi's characters, except for Hussein and Bilquis, have shown significant departure in the aspects typical for Pakistani identity, which include their specific language, traditions, religion and culture to name a few. This departure symbolizes that the characters begin to leave their former ethnic identity and slowly start to be a part of their new country's culture. Nevertheless, the sense of belonging to an ethnic group and its manifestations differs for each individual hero or heroine. Omar, for instance, changes his identity according to what brings him profit or what lies in his interests at the given moment. Nevertheless, he most often behaves in accordance with English mainstream

group. On the other hand, his uncle Nasser leads a double life. When at home with his family, Nasser cherishes the traditional Pakistani way of life. However, in business and his personal life he becomes (as one of the characters puts it) typical Englishman. Also Salim found many profits that living in England brings but he would never truly feel to be the part of the British culture and society, which treats his own people as subordinate ethnic group.

The remaining characters Bilquis and Hussein, contrary to the three aforementioned male heroes, will never find their place among the English. Their isolation and feeling that they do not belong to the English society causes them problems, which Hussein solves with drinking alcohol and Bilquis with attempting to run away back to Pakistan. The last heroine faces an opposite problem. even though she tries hard, Bilquis' daughter Tania will never feel to be a part of her parents ethnic group and its traditions. As a consequence, she runs away from her family to live a life according to the lifestyle of the society where she grew up and feels home.

The results of this chapter also indicate that ethnic identity of *My Beautiful Laundrette* characters is fluid, always changing and dependant on the given situation but most importantly stemming from the individual feeling of belonging to a group. Nevertheless, the context and atmosphere of the society the heroes and heroines live in also influences their identity to a high degree. What aspect of living in socio-cultural background of 1980s Thatcherite Britain affected the characters' identities the most will be the subject of analysis in the following chapter.

3 1980s BRITAIN

As it was argued in the chapters 1 and 2, human identity is strongly connected to the social environment, which one inhabits. Thus, the decade of the 1980s and the impulses it brought about undoubtedly shaped the identities of My Beautiful heroes and heroines. Their coexistence with the mainstream culture was complicated, especially if the reader considers the negative attitude of the British society to the minorities, which was supported by the Prime Minister's anti-immigrant agenda.¹²³ How did the two different cultures live together and what it cost them? The answers to these questions will be the subject of investigation in this chapter written on the background of the historical and cultural context of the era.

The economic, socio-cultural, and political conditions of the 1980s significantly depended on the events of the 1970s. Kenneth O. Morgan called the latter era as the time of “social tension”, “economic pressure” and “payment crises” which was not solved by devaluation of pound as originally planned. During the 1970s, Britain had to face a rise in inflation that was followed by the long period of unemployment. Unfortunately though, these problems continued to rise and their consequences influenced the wide spectrum of British citizens and industries on a general level. “The nation's capacity to generate wealth, along with its share of world trade and production, were in serious, perhaps terminal decline”, Morgan explains¹²⁴. He goes on to add that Britain became ingloriously known as the “sick man of Europe”.¹²⁵ As a consequence of economic decline, the British experienced a considerable fall in their standard of living. This gave rise to the growing numbers of the trade unions members that had reached 13 million by the year 1979. The two miner's strikes followed in 1972 and 1974, making the Heath government fulfil unionists' demands and understand miners' power to impact the country's supplies.¹²⁶

Nonetheless, it still seemed that the economic suffering of the country would not come to an end. Soon after the strikes, Britain experienced an immense increase in the prices of oil, leading to the rising inflation that has not occurred since 1919. In relation to this situation, the trade unions again demanded a significant rise of wages at the minimum of 30%.

¹²³ Andreas Athanasiades, “Re-imagining Desire and Sexuality in the Work of Hanif Kureishi” (Phd diss., University of Cyprus, 2013), 14-15.

¹²⁴ Kenneth O'Morgan, *The Oxford History of Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 648.

¹²⁵ O'Morgan, *The Oxford History of Britain*, 648.

¹²⁶ O'Morgan, *The Oxford History of Britain*, 648.

Although the high inflation began to fall during the 1982 and 1983, it reinforced the unemployment rate that exceeded 3 million by the beginning of the year 1983. Such “rot” in national economy caused that a huge number of people (many of them in very young age) was “doomed perhaps to years of national assistance” Morgan states.¹²⁷ Furthermore, the number of new born children rapidly fell at this time and the majority of the population consisted of people in advanced age. While the elderly and the young were unemployed and dependent on social services, the rest of the population capable of work was supposed to ensure their well being ¹²⁸. The dissatisfaction among the British citizens caused by the aforementioned situation consequently led to numerous strikes in 1978-1979 known as the “Winter of Discontent”. These strikes organized by the public service employees were among the factors that supported the victory of Margaret Thatcher and her Conservative Party in the forthcoming elections.¹²⁹

Thatcher was elected for she represented the vision of new, better times for Britain. Her personality and perspective of the nation's future sparked the interest of many of her voters. David McDowall wrote about her : “Her style and her views appealed to many British people who had lost confidence in the welfare state and in the direction the nation had taken. In some ways she was the first genuine leader the nation had had since Churchill”¹³⁰. Yet, there was a strong base of voters comprising 50% of Brits, who did not vote or concede her. They were concerned that her priorities concerning “material wealth” and individualism would surpass the idea of welfare state and close-knit community.¹³¹ Other critics objected that a woman cannot deal with the “sick man of Europe” - a nickname of Britain her male political predecessors left their nation with.

Despite the opinion of all her opponents, the Prime Minister managed to win three successive elections and her politics brought about profound changes in both economy and society that had consequences reaching beyond British borders.¹³² The main pillars of her vision to build a prosperous nation consisted of “hard work, patriotism and self help”¹³³. Nevertheless, her ambition went far behind that. She intended to combat inflation and keep the unionists'

¹²⁷ O'Morgan, *The Oxford History of Britain*, 650.

¹²⁸ O'Morgan, *The Oxford History of Britain*, 650.

¹²⁹ O'Morgan, *The Oxford History of Britain*, 651.

¹³⁰ David McDowall, *An Illustrated history of Britain (Essex: Longman, 1989)*, 179.

¹³¹ David McDowall, *An Illustrated history of Britain*, 181-82.

¹³² Lenka Rovná, *Premiérka jejího veličenstva* (Praha: Evropský kulturní klub, 1991), 14.

¹³³ David McDowall, *An Illustrated history of Britain*, 180.

strikes under control. Also, Thatcher planned to establish equal ratio between the rights and duties of the aforementioned trade unions. Other - not less important - aspects of Thatcher's policy can be summarized as follows: to create new job opportunities, support the parliament along with law and order, bolster the defence system and secure sufficient social care for those in need.¹³⁴

Nevertheless, McDowall claims that despite these visions and plans to restore economy and social life, the Prime Minister was not able to fully meet her liabilities. Drawing from his findings, the nation's production coming from the industries decreased by 10 per cent and also manufacturers recorded 17 per cent production cutbacks.¹³⁵ Yet, Margaret Thatcher made a significant contribution to British economy, which resided mainly in the transition from corporatism to the property-owning democracy, Lenka Rovná states. According to the prime minister's intentions, every citizen should have a chance to be the part of the "economic miracle". House ownership and selling off the state owned property, so called privatization, were supposed to provide a solid base for picking up the nation's economy.

This strategy seemed to have worked out successfully. At the time when the government started selling the state-owned houses, the number of owners increased by 6 per cent and this trend continued to grow rapidly.¹³⁶ Similarly, the transfer of nationalized companies and industries proved to have had an immense commercial success. David McDowall states that "By 1987 telecommunications, gas, British Airways, British Aerospace and British Shipbuilders had all been put into private ownership".¹³⁷ The numbers of privatized companies grew rapidly and the amount of share holders increased by more than 7 per cent. The well known names including Jaguar and Rolls-Royce were sold to private sector too. Therefore, many of the former employees became share owners, who fuelled the development of "private capitalism". This rapid growth of privatized property meant that the implementation of Thatcher's strategy came up to her expectations. Moreover, the production of goods and its efficiency advanced rapidly in the hands of private sector. This was according to the Prime Minister's words the key to prosperous and successful economy.

¹³⁴ John Blundell, *Margaret Thatcher : A Portrait of the Iron Lady* (New York: Algora Publishing, 2008) 90-91.
<http://web.b.ebscohost.com/ehost/ebookviewer/ebook/ZTAwMHh3d19fMjQ1NDMyX19BTg2?sid=821430db-f956-4b8c-8428-7f34770c728a@sessionmgr120&vid=3&format=EB&rid=1>

¹³⁵ *David McDowall, An Illustrated history of Britain, 180.*

¹³⁶ Lenka Rovná, *Premiérka jejího veličenstva, 138.*

¹³⁷ *David McDowall, An Illustrated history of Britain, 180.*

Nevertheless, her strategy of privatizing nation's property has not escaped criticism from the Labour Party and voters. The prices that the privatized companies charged grew immensely. The British Telecom, for instance, increased its prices by 60 per cent. The quality of their services, however, often showed significant decrease as MORI's survey indicates. The regular user, therefore, could not benefit from the new system which was the cause of Labour Party's criticism.¹³⁸ The party's members accused Thatcher of causing even more imbalances in nation's economy and dividing the country into "two nations". On one hand, there was a "wealthy" half of Brits who profited from the decrease in income tax. On the other hand, the "poor" half suffered, as they were only provided with little financial assistance from the government.¹³⁹

Both sides of the divided social spectrum are represented in Kureishi's play. The Pakistani family impersonates the upper-class society, whereas the majority of English characters live in conditions of poverty. Contrary to the belief of the "white" (usually fascist) characters, who think immigrants should be subordinate, the Pakistanis prospered financially. James O'Sullivan argues that such a division of roles means that the heroes and heroines "reside in a society where work ethic supersedes ethnicity"¹⁴⁰. Indeed, the Pakistani characters were capable managers who got the best of the system the Prime Minister established. They were the moving force of capable individuals, who contributed to the development of economy. Their work ethic is aptly captured by Salim's remark addressed to his hardworking uncle: "You're too busy keeping this damn country in the black".¹⁴¹ Saying this, he expressed the fact that his uncle supports the nation's economy in a way that Margaret Thatcher has imagined.

Thanks to his work and abilities, Nasser and his family had a chance to get rich and financially exceed the white majority. This fact is clearly stated in an interview between Salim and an Englishman: "Look at you, Salim, five times richer and more powerful than me". Salim replied in surprise: "Five times? Ten, at least". An Englishman just added: "In my country!"¹⁴² The Pakistanis in Nasser's family had every reason to celebrate Thatcher's

¹³⁸ Lenka Rovná, *Premiérka jejího veličenstva*, 140-141.

¹³⁹ David McDowall, *An Illustrated history of Britain*, 180.

¹⁴⁰ "Gender, sexuality and postcolonial identity in My Beautiful Laundrette"

¹⁴¹ Kureishi, *My Beautiful Laundrette*, 14.

¹⁴² Kureishi, *My Beautiful Laundrette*, 21.

economic policies indeed. It encouraged their ambitions in business and the only thing they had to know was “how to squeeze the tits of the system” as Nasser puts it.¹⁴³

What is more, the success of Omar's uncle generated favourable conditions for Omar himself, who could start a business on his own. Although he was initially forced to take a low paid job, he had managed to extricate himself from the poverty and slowly became self-reliant. As Omar began to reach financial gain, his uncle Nasser, who provided him with his first job, was happy for he felt that he contributed not only to his nephew's prosperous life but also to the England's economy. “Mrs Thatcher will be pleased with me”, Nasser noted.¹⁴⁴

Drawing from the findings above, it is clear, that the Pakistani characters fulfilled the intentions of the Prime Minister's policies to much higher extent than their white counterparts. Yet, their success and ability to contribute to the nation's economy did not pay off in many respects of their personal lives. Instead of being accepted to the society, the Pakistani characters had to overcome strong aversion and discrimination coming from the English characters. The Pakistani family gets hints from their environment indicating that they do not belong to England on everyday basis. At the beginning of the play, Kureishi depicted a Pakistani couple approaching the old house they purchased. Its windows are covered with these words: “*Your greed will be the death of us all*”, “*We will defeat the running wogs of capitalism*” and “*Opium is the opium of the unemployed*”.¹⁴⁵

However short, these sentences have deep meaning for each of them represents the consequences Thatcher's agenda imposed on the heroes and heroines of the play. The first one implies that acquisitiveness of individuals harms the prosperities the social cohesion can bring. Other possible interpretation may lie in fear that the black will steal “what is ours”, i.e. work places, homes or other opportunities. The following line captures the antipathy to both Asian immigrants and capitalist ideas of modern society that especially Skinhead subculture refused to accept. David McDowall explains that Skinheads (Johnny's gang members) preferred the lifestyle of “traditional working-class culture” that did not correspond with popular values of the contemporary society in the 1980s. He continues to add that typical aspect of the Skinheads' behaviour was fighting and aggression which declares the word

¹⁴³ Kureishi, *My Beautiful Laundrette*,17.

¹⁴⁴ Kureishi, *My Beautiful Laundrette*,15.

¹⁴⁵ Kureishi, *My Beautiful Laundrette*,59.

“defeat” that the author of the used in his second sentence.¹⁴⁶ Finally, the third sentence seems to be the bitter reminder of the fact that an immense number of young unemployed people has no better future than joining the dole queue or smoking opium.

Taken together, these sentences remind the reader of other severe problems that the 1980s Britain had to face in terms of racial inequality, discrimination and immigration. At the time when the immigrants from Pakistan started arriving in waves during the 1960s and 1970s in order to compensate the lack of British workers, it was believed that they will leave one day or assimilate without any problems.¹⁴⁷ ¹⁴⁸ Nevertheless, these expectations proved to be wrong soon. The immigrants and the white British found it extremely difficult, if impossible, to find a way of peaceful cohabitation. Immigrants became targets of racially motivated assaults and discriminations in many spheres of their lives including finding suitable housing, getting a loan or job, McDowall explains. In order to take control of this situation, Race Discrimination Act and other anti-discrimination laws were implemented.¹⁴⁹ Despite all the measurements taken, the immigrants were often forced to take low-paid jobs and had to endure living in the poorest areas of big cities. They were also in many cases employed in the positions that were not sought after. Yet, the minorities were accused of stealing the job opportunities from the non-black citizens.¹⁵⁰ Paradoxically, the unemployment rate among the blacks was two times higher than among the white majority.¹⁵¹ Thus, Nasser's wealthy half of Pakistani family can be considered as an exception from the conditions the immigrants usually experienced.

In order to depict the harsh side of immigrant experience, Kureishi set the lives of the other half of the family to the precise social conditions that were introduced above. Similarly as many immigrants at that time, Omar and his father Hussein live in a small and dirty apartment above a noisy train station. They live on the government benefits and cannot afford decent clothes or food. Yet, none of them seem to be willing to fight for better life conditions, nor they try to find a job. Perhaps, they felt that their chances to succeed in the society full of discrimination are so low that it would be pointless to try. It is also likely, that if Omar's did not get a chance to work at his uncle's garage, he would probably stay unemployed and

¹⁴⁶ David McDowall, *Britain in Close-Up* (Essex: Longman, 1993),111.

¹⁴⁷ McDowall, *Britain in Close-Up*, 97-98.

¹⁴⁸ David McDowall, *An Illustrated history of Britain*,177.

¹⁴⁹ McDowall, *Britain in Close-Up*,98.

¹⁵⁰ David McDowall, *An Illustrated history of Britain*,177.

¹⁵¹ David McDowall, *An Illustrated history of Britain*,181.

without any ambitions as many young immigrant men living in London did. It is also possible that he would end up working in a factory or in other “unpopular” workplace, McDowall explains McDowall.¹⁵² Fortunately, Omar managed to recover from his difficult financial situation, overcame the limitations of the society that discriminates people of colour and became successful entrepreneur.

Hussein, however, was not as lucky as his son. Not only did he suffer from the loss of his beloved country and isolation from his community but he also lived in a system which did not support values Hussein holds dear. He used to be a journalist, who puts emphasis on education.¹⁵³ Nevertheless, Lenka Rovná points out that Thatcher's agenda did not support people like Hussein, i.e. those who worked in science, at schools or in any other intellectual jobs. Rovná maintains that although Thatcher promised to rise investment in education, the expenditure on this sector grew only by 1 per cent between years 1979 - 1985.¹⁵⁴ Hussein is thus convinced that Thatcher's policies along with the English society has ruined him and left him jobless. “This damn country has done us in. That’s why I am like this”,he told his brother Nasser, who saw the terrible condition Hussein is in.¹⁵⁵ The unkempt appearance, a bottle of vodka in hands, cinicism and depression. This is what expresses Hussein now. Once successful journalist is now an unemployed alcoholic, who seems to have buried his desire for life in the past. He will probably never get accustomed to the English society and the society will never accept him.

Moreover, it would be no exaggeration to suggest that the relationships among two cultural groups were a huge problem. The abyss between the English and immigrants was deepened even more as numerous riots provoked by the minority deluged larger cities. This situation was complicated by the fact that the unrest was broadcasted on TV and contributed to the spread of fear and intolerance among white citizens.¹⁵⁶ What is more, the anti-immigrant rhetorics of the prime minister and implementation of laws restricting immigration did not calm down this severe situation. Consequently, there were two dissatisfied groups claiming their rights. The immigrants, who defended their right to be British citizens and wanted equal treatment as they were promised and the Brits, who feared that their country will be

¹⁵² David McDowall, *An Illustrated history of Britain*,177.

¹⁵³ “Gender, sexuality and postcolonial identity in *My Beautiful Laundrette*”

¹⁵⁴ Lenka Rovná, *Premiérka jejího veličenstva*,144.

¹⁵⁵ Kureishi, *My Beautiful Laundrette*,66.

¹⁵⁶ O'Morgan, *The Oxford History of Britain*, 653.

“swamped” if the numbers of immigrants continue to grow, Athanasiades explains. He maintains that these severe interracial tensions fuelled the extremist ideas especially among working-class young men, who were ready to protect their country from the “black wogs” without fear to use violence.¹⁵⁷ The characters like Ghenghis, Moose and their friends accurately capture the above-mentioned model of young people affected by the extremist thinking. They were responsible not only for verbal assaults and destroying the property of Pakistani characters but also for nearly killing one member of their family. The final scene of *My Beautiful Launderette* depicts Salim covered in blood, who would not have survived their attack without the help of Johnny. Perhaps, Kureishi used this final scene to remind the reader of the problems the minority group members had to endure at that time. Or, it is also possible that the author used an ex-fascist Johnny, who saved a Pakistani person from death to show that the blacks and whites can live in a peaceful way if they overcome their conviction that the colour of one's skin or political ideology matters more than a person's life.

To summarize, the 1980s in Britain brought about the profound changes in both economic and social life. The new government of Margaret Thatcher symbolized new hope for many Brits. Nevertheless, her policies, as her critics point out, divided the country into two nations. Privatization and decrease in taxes brought favourable conditions for the rich, whereas the poor citizens suffered. Kureishi's main characters represent both sides of the divided spectrum. Nasser and his family found a way to profit from Thatcher's policies. Nevertheless, his brother Hussein had to face the unfavourable conditions many immigrants experienced at that time. They were usually unemployed, lived in poor conditions and were often blamed for the nation's misfortunes. Thus, the coexistence of Brits and immigrants caused severe problems, which nearly resulted in Salim's death. Nevertheless, the way each individual character coped with the social and economic situation highly depended on their skills and abilities. Some of them managed to climb to the top of the social ladder, whereas the rest will probably live in poor conditions for the rest of their lives.

¹⁵⁷ Athanasiades, “Re-imagining Desire and Sexuality in the Work of Hanif Kureishi”, 15-16.

CONCLUSION

In this investigation, the aim was to analyze aspect of ethnic identity in Hanif Kureishi's play *My Beautiful Launderette*. The findings of the first chapter suggested that in general, identity is extremely “slippery” term, which has become key topic for researchers in many fields of study. Yet, any attempt to precisely define this term seems to be problematic task. Many authors agree, that numerous definitions of identity differ and are dependent on author's study intentions. Thus, the conceptual framework of identity in the first chapter was based on definitions by Anthony D. Smith, Stuart Hall and Stets and Burke, whose interpretations of the term are consistent in its major points. The authors agree that humans have multiple identities that are dependent on various factors such as social or cultural environment to name a few. They also claim that identity is, in simple terms, a sense of belonging to a group or to a social role a person occupies. Smith, Hall and Stets and Burke point out that identity is unstable and can be changed or “abolished”. These properties of identity were demonstrated on Johnny's character, who left his fascist identity and fell in love with Omar - a person who embodied everything that fascists ideology despises. Also, the investigation in this thesis shown how two opposing identities may clash. The contrasting identities of the “black” and “white” characters were often the cause of numerous conflicts discussed throughout the work. Further in chapter 1, the investigation shown how identity manifests itself in everyday lives of the play's characters and how it direct their actions. Finally, gender, class and sexual identities were briefly defined and analyzed for they (similarly like ethnic identity) immensely influence the behaviour of the heroes and heroines of the pay as the argument of the last part of chapter 1 suggests.

The second major topic, which creates the core of this bachelor's thesis, is the analysis of ethnic identity in *My Beautiful Launderette*. The term ethnic identity is here presented as person's sense of belonging to an ethnic group. Nevertheless, it has been pointed out that the definitions of this term differ (similarly as in the case of the term identity itself) according to the specific focus of authors' research. For the specific purposes of this thesis, the model of professor Phinney's was implemented. She recognizes many aspects that members of any ethnic group have common. These include ancestry, similar culture, race, religion language, kinship, and place of origin. The aforementioned aspect served as indicators of characters' affiliation (or non-affiliation) to English or Pakistani group. However, the findings of this analysis did not reveal any uniform answers. Rather, it was implied that the sense of ethnic

identity is different for each individual hero or heroine. In simple terms, the main Hero Omar chooses his ethnic group affiliation in accordance with his momentary needs. His cousin Tania tried to be a part of Pakistani community as her parents wished. Nevertheless deep in her heart she felt more like English and thus left her family. Her mother Bilquis and her uncle Hussein, who grew up in Pakistan, suffered because their traditions and beliefs bound to their Pakistani identity are in conflict with the culture they currently live in. Nasser and Salim, also first generation Pakistanis, do not share Bilquis' and Hussein's unfortunate destiny. Both men found a way to live along with the mainstream culture, and yet managed to keep (at least partially) some of the aspects of their former identities. Every character in *My Beautiful Launderette* symbolizes individual “way of belonging”. Keeping the stories of Kureishi's characters in mind, it is possible to say that their identities are, as argued in chapter 1, highly individual, always changing and stemming from the society, that surrounds them.

The final chapter of the thesis is concerned with the impacts of Margaret Thatcher's policies on the living conditions of Pakistani family and their relationships with the mainstream culture (but especially with the extremist members of Johnny's gang). The era of Thatcher's government is presented as time of great economic changes that had far reaching consequences. Three main factors that were presented as having the most significant influence on the characters included the division of the country into the “nation of two”, the Prime Minister's anti-immigrant agenda and rhetoric and finally terrible conditions many immigrants had to live in. The investigation in this chapter has shown that some of the characters were able to use the system for making successful life and financially exceed English characters. Also, it was suggested that even the hero like Omar, who came from poor conditions managed to climb the social ladder and became rich entrepreneur. Nevertheless, not all the characters had such opportunities. The high unemployment rate, poor living condition and discrimination. Those were the conditions the author depicted through Hussein. What is more, the Pakistanis had to endure oral and physical assaults from the Johnny's gang members, who nearly killed Salim at the end of the play. Nevertheless, the fact that ex-fascist Johnny helped bleeding Salim, who cannot defeat himself leaves the reader with the feeling that the relations between the two conflicting groups may get better one day.

RESUMÉ

Tato bakalářská práce se věnuje analýze etnické identity v divadelní hře Hanifa Kureishiho *Moje krásná prádelnička*. Autor britsko-pákistánského původu zasadil své dílo do období osmdesátých let ve Velké Británii. Ústředním tématem jeho hry je život rodiny první a druhé generace pákistánských přistěhovalců v Londýně a jejich soužití s mainstreamovou kulturou, jež je zde zastoupena zejména členy gengu, kteří jsou silně ovlivněni fašistickou ideologií.

Klíčovým aspektem k analýze v této práci je vysvětlení termínu identita, jež je detailně představena v první kapitole. Definice identity je zde uvedena jako otázka, která se stala ústředním tématem pro výzkum a debaty akademiků napříč mnoha studijními obory. Sociologové, antropologové, psychologové ale také ekonomové se v posledních letech intenzivně zabývají konceptualizací identity jako takové. I přes tuto “diskurzní explozi” a značný zájem o toto téma se zdá, že identita neustále zůstává být jakousi “enigmou”, vysvětluje profesor Jmaes Feron. Mezi dalšími autory jež považují tento termín za nesmírně “záhadný” je Steph Lawler, která upozorňuje na fakt, že zde existuje nespočetně mnoho teorií a definic jež se významně liší. Z tohoto důvodu podle Lawlerové není možné určit univerzální definici, jež by postihla veškeré aspekty identity a určila, jak přesně funguje.

Koncept identity, který byl zvolen pro analýzu v této bakalářské práci vychází z teorií autorů jako například Anthony D. Smith, kteří tvrdí, že každý jedinec nemá pouze jednu ucelenou identitu, ale mnohočetné identity, které utvářejí lidské já. Výše zmínění autoři se shodují, že lidská identita není sálá, ale mění se s konkrétními okolnostmi a je utvářena, stejně tak jako ovlivňována, lidskou společností. Tyto vlastnosti identit byly subjektem analýzy Kureishiho díla v první kapitole.

Primárním účelem druhé a nejrozsáhlejší kapitoly této práce byla analýza etnické identity u konkrétních hrdinů a hrdinek *Mojí krásné prádelničky*. Teoretický základ pro pojetí etnické identity zde poskytla definice profesorky Jean Phinneyové, která tento koncept chápe jako pocit sounáležitosti jedince s etnickou skupinou. Phinneyová rozeznává atributy, které jsou typické pro každou etnickou skupinu a odlišují jí od ostatních. Na základě těchto atributů jež zahrnují společnou kulturu, rasu náboženství a jazyk je v druhé kapitole vyhodnocována příslušnost konkrétního hrdiny nebo hrdinky buď k anglické nebo pákistánské etnické skupině.

Prvním hodnoceným atributem je jazyk, který je prezentován jako jeden z ústředních aspektů formujících etnickou identitu. Alexander Von Humboldt vysvětluje, že jazyk je “odrazem

mentalit národů; jejich jazyk je jejich mentalita a jejich mentalita je jejich jazykem”. To znamená, že pokud lidé hovoří stejným jazykem, mají podobný “pohled na svět”. Nicméně postavy v Kureishiho hře svůj rodný jazyk Urdštinu používají už jen velmi zřídka, což jen indikuje odklon od prvního typického znaku etnické identity, kterým se tato kapitola zabývá.

Následujícím aspektem spjatým s etnickou identitou pákistánských postav je jejich původní kultura, která je analyzována na základě teoretických poznatků zejména z knihy “Pákistán” od českého autora Jana Marka. Konkrétní kulturní prvky, které jsou diskutovány v této analýze zahrnují náboženství, sňatek, rodinu, pracovní etiku a postavení žen. Nicméně, u všech výše zmíněných prvků byl stejně jako v případě jazyka zjištěn odklon od původních projevů a hodnot spjatých s původní identitou postav. Vliv na tento odklon má soužití s Britskou kulturou, která svým působením mnohdy zcela změnila kulturní chování u konkrétních postav. Je ale nutno dodat, že chápání sebe sama jako člena či členky etnické skupiny se u jednotlivých postav diametrálně odlišuje. Některé inklinují více k anglické kulturní skupině, jiné jí naprosto odmítají a další žijí na pomezí obou. Například hlavní hrdina Omar si svou etnickou příslušnost vybírá tak, aby z ní v dané situaci nejvíce profitoval. Pokud potřebuje pomoci, spoléhá se na soudržnost a pomoc rodiny, jež je typickým znakem pákistánské kultury. Omar je také ochoten starat se o svého nemohoucího otce a poslechnout příkazy svého strýce tak, jak by se slušelo u mladého pákistánského muže. V jiných ohledech je ale hlavní hrdina “typickým Britem” (jak ho jeho otec nazval). Soustředí se na svůj vlastní zisk a dokonce i podvede svou rodinu, což je pro etnickou skupinu jeho rodiny nepřijatelné. Dále si vybírá partnera bílé pleti a tím se podle Pinneyové přiklání k anglické skupině. Jinými slovy, Omar žije na pomezí dvou kultur a tedy i identit, které hrdina využívá ve svůj prospěch. Další hrdinkou Mojí krásné prádelničky je Tania, která zosobňuje utrpení dětí imigrantů, kteří se neztotožňují s kulturou svých rodičů. Tania, ač se snaží, nedokáže žít v souladu s pákistánskými tradicemi a utíká od své rodiny. Tímto gestem hrdinka projevuje svou příslušnost k anglické skupině a její kultuře. Ostatní postavy se od Tanií a Omara odlišují tím, že vyrostli v zemi, která se nejen svou kulturou nesmírně liší od té anglické, ve které nyní žijí. Nicméně každá postava druhé generace se dokázala vypořádat s novou kulturou a svým místem v ní značně odlišným způsobem. Salim a Nasser našli své místo ve společnosti, vylákali z ní (hlavně finančně) to nejlepší a přitom si ponechali mnohé tradice a hodnoty své původní kultury. Bilquis a Hussein toto nedokázali. Jejich etnická identita, tradice a hodnoty s ní spojené těmito dvěma hrdinům nedovolila sžít se s anglickou společností a to je odsoudilo k životu separaci a psychickému utrpení.

Poslední kapitola se zabývá dopady, které měla politika Margaret Thatcherové na životní podmínky pákistánské rodiny a na jejich vztah s mainstreamovou kulturou (zvláště s Johnnyho gangem). Období vlády Thatcherové je popisováno jako období velkých ekonomických změn, které měly dalekosáhlé důsledky. Tři hlavní faktory postavy ovlivnily ze všech nejvíce – jednalo se o protipřistěhovaleckou agendu a rétoriku premiérky, rozdělení národa do dvou skupin a nakonec obtížné podmínky, ve kterých museli přistěhovalci žít. Výzkum v této kapitole ukázal, že některé postavy byly schopné využít systému a finančně předčily i některé Brity. Také se ukázalo, že i hrdinové jako Omar, kteří pocházeli ze špatných sociálních podmínek, se dokázali posouvat po pomyslném společenském žebříku stále výše.

Je nutné dodat, že ne všechny postavy měly stejné příležitosti. Autor skrze Husseina poukázal na vysokou nezaměstnanost a špatné podmínky pro život, které byly v té době pro imigranty typické. Pákistánci také museli snášet slovní i fyzická napadení od členů Johnnyho gangu, kteří na konci hry téměř zabili Salima. Nicméně čtenář je ponechán s nadějí, že se vztahy mezi těmito skupinami jednoho dnelepší.

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