Disidentification, Intimacy and the Cinematic Figuration of the Postcolonial in Europe

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Résumés

Français English

Les discours sur l'identité européenne sont structurés autour d'un postulat : ceux qui en font partie et ceux qui sont en dehors. L'analyse de *My Son the Fanatic* (Stephen Frears, 1997) entend démontrer ici que le film transforme la postcolonialité la faisant passer d'une identité statique à une forme dynamique de subjectivité relationnelle qui est cruciale si l'on entend repenser ce que signifie l'Europe. Plutôt que de reconfigurer une forme hybride du sujet postcolonial marqué par la migration, le film produit une construction filmique de l'identité européenne telle un réseau de relations en mouvement entre les sujets postcoloniaux. La constitution de l'Europe à travers cette construction filmique prend l'histoire postcoloniale des immigrants en Europe comme ressource pour deux choses : refuser une compréhension sclérosée et stéréotypée de l'immigrant et démontrer la capacité de relations contre-intuitives à devenir le fondement d'une transformation de la façon dont on comprend l'identité européenne.

Discourses of European identity remain structured according to assumptions of those who belong and those who do not. *My Son the Fanatic* (Stephen Frears, 1997) will be analyzed to argue that the film transforms postcoloniality from a static identity into a dynamic form of relational subjectivity crucial for rethinking the meaning of Europe. Rather than reconfirming a hybrid form of postcolonial subject marked by migration, the film produces a cinematic construction of European identity as a network of transforming relations between postcolonial subjects. The constitution of Europe through this cinematic construction takes the postcolonial history of immigrants in Europe as a resource for two things: refusing ossified and stereotypical understanding of the immigrant; and demonstrating the capacity for counter-intuitive relationalities as the basis for a transformed understanding of European identity.

Texte intégral

Introduction

1   What could the term "Postcolonial" mean in the context of thinking contemporary Europe? And how can cinema contribute to the meaning of the terms "Postcolonial" and "Europe"? Étienne Balibar argues, "European citizenship should be reworked as citizenship *in* Europe"[1]. If one rewrites this suggestion in terms of film, how could "cinema in Europe" rather than "European cinema" further an understanding of Postcolonial Europe? One way of answering this question is to ask *what* postcolonial subjectivities *in* Europe could mean and where they can be located. Could a postcolonial cinematic figuration *in* Europe provide another way of understanding the term "European" by problematizing the ways in which social space and identity are related to each other? The term "postcolonial" is not deployed in this essay as a sub-category of European identity/cinema. Rather, cinematic figurations of postcolonial subjectivity will be analyzed as aesthetic constructions which operate to reframe the meaning of European identity. At issue then is less an "addition" to the corpus of European cinema by postcolonial writers and filmmakers than a reframing of a common European identity constituted by the transformational dynamic of postcolonial subjectivities.

2   *My Son the Fanatic* (Udayan Prasad, 1997) based on the short story of the same name by the British writer Hanif Kureishi (New Yorker, 1994) emerged in the context of a growing recognition of the complex realities of postcolonial identities within Britain. Kureishi, as we shall see below, explicitly problematized the categorization of immigrant cultural contributions by emphatically stating their *British* provenance. Further, *My Son the Fanatic* presciently confronted what was to become a pressing political and social issue– the rise of religion extremism by *Europeans* . Unlike the 2001 attacks in the U.S. which were perpetrated by non-American citizens, the July 2005 bombings in London put "home-grown" terrorism on the political agenda. Speaking more than ten years after the film's 1997 release, *New York Times* critic A. O. Scott notes that while the story of a young man's turn to fundamentalism might have sounded "strange" in 1997, today the film is "topical, prophetic and urgent"[2]. The simple distinction between citizen and foreigner proved fatally inadequate in foreseeing both the possibilities of and the reasons why European citizens of immigrant background were being converted to forms of religious extremism. *My Son the Fanatic* provides a nuanced perspective from which to counter simplistic and exclusionary understanding of "home" while sketching the social, global and national contexts within which fanaticism of all sorts arise.

3   The essay will argue that the European subject needs to be thought as the effect of a transformational dynamic of postcolonial subjectivities through the terms "disidentification" and "relationality". The cinematic construction of postcolonial subjectivities in *My Son the Fanatic* produces two specific forms of productive interventions in thinking Europe. Firstly, the film undermines a static and essentialist discourse of alterity which often constructs postcolonial identities as absolutely other to some fictive notion of the "European". Postcoloniality emerges less as a condition of separation, exclusion and tradition set against a dynamic notion of European modernity. Instead, postcolonial identities emerge as part of a *common* understanding of what it means to be *in* Europe as legitimate members of a constructed community. The process of both refusing an ascribed status of the "other" and precisely asserting a commonality with a community can be named "Disidentification". Further, disidentification is political precisely because "[P]olitics is a matter of subjects, or, rather, modes of subjectification […] the production through a series of actions of a body and a capacity […] not previously identifiable within a given field of experience"[3]. Rather than acting as subjects imprisoned in static forms of identity alien to Europe and Europeans, postcolonials close the distance from those deemed separate from them through *processes* of subjectivation by enacting actions they are deemed incapable of.

4   Secondly, the process of disidentification is produced by the capacities of postcolonial subjects to establish forms of *relationality* which is subtly and powerfully portrayed in the film. Relationality is this "capacity not previously identifiable within a *given* field of experience" because a "given" field, such as Europe and those who legitimately belong in it, often relegates postcolonial subjectivities by describing them as being incapable of change. The relationality portrayed in the film is based on complex notions of intimacy which interrogate hypostasized notions of culture, religion, class, language and gender. One of the signal interventions of the film is its consistent emphasis on the forms of conviviality, intimacy and exchange between characters from very different social locations By continually exposing the capacities of very differently located social subjects (men and women, white and non-white, working class and privileged) to forms of intimacy, the fraudulent political discourse which places individuals in separate categories is exposed as ideology. Europe emerges from a postcolonial perspective as a *common* space "where anyone can be counted" as belonging to a community[4]. The film thus provides a cinematic experience where "the scale upon which sameness and difference are calculated [...] are altered productively so that the strangeness of strangers goes out of focus and other dimensions of a basic sameness can be acknowledged and made significant"[5]. The film portrays a common capacity for overcoming distinctions by both acknowledging and undermining categories of class, gender, sexuality and religion. A postcolonial critique of Europe is fleshed out by exposing "the sheer contingency of any social order" which such distinctions seek to stabilize[6]. Postcolonial Europe emerges as "the setting-up of a contentious commonality" based on a broader critique of identity[7].

5   Postcolonial studies has redrawn both the cultural history and political present of Europe by insisting on colonialism beyond Europe as a founding condition for understanding it. This relational understanding of Europe's constitution emerging from beyond its geographical and political borders resulted in a now-canonical theorization of *hybrid identity* as the specific form in which postcolonial subjectivity in Europe took form[8]. Ania Loomba succinctly summarizes the problems with invoking hybridity as the dominant form for understanding postcolonial subjectivity[9]. While not disavowing their specific histories, the characters in the film, Parvez (Om Puri) in particular, exemplify the capacity for *anyone* to enter into relations with anyone else despite the bounded categories of race, class and gender which seek to define groups and place them in specific and unmoving locations *within* a culture. Hybridity emerges through evolving intimacies between postcolonial subjects *and* those Europeans who have no ostensible postcolonial history.

6   Cinema *in* Europe from this postcolonial perspective displaces the location of postcolonial culture from a separately marked and specific cultural location within Europe. This displacing effect produced by disidentification and relationality changes the contours and constitution of Europe by moving beyond fixed notions and locations of postcolonial identity. The double dynamic of disidentification and relationality makes visible the capacity of individuals and groups to exercise a capacity to produce new forms of being-together *irrespective* of the identities conferred on them.

7   In particular, I will argue that a politics of "the anonym" figured through the film enables an understanding of Europe where *anyone* can claim a legitimate place in European space[10]. The transformation from a given identity to the category of the "anonym" is the effect of a refusal and denudation of properties ascribed to an identity. In other words, the "anyone" in a politics of the anonym does not mean a vacant category with no substance, but a form of subjectivation based on the capacity to establish relations by refusing already-ascribed identities. The politics of resistance moves from the affirmation of difference to *difference as the affirmation of relationality*. Foucault exemplifies this logic of troping, of the self's potential for turning away from the social regulation of subjectivity. Speaking about homosexuality, he perceives political possibilities through the subject's dislocation of ascribed identity and the resulting derangement of social space by redrawing the psychic and social relation between intimacy and enmity, proximity and distance. He suggests "friendship

as a *way* of life" to counter the social construction of a separate homosexual identity[11]. "Homosexuality" he argues "is an historic occasion to re-open affective and relational virtualities, not so much through the intrinsic qualities of the homosexual, but due to the biases against the position he [sic] occupies; in a certain sense, diagonal lines he [sic] can trace in the social fabric permit him [sic] to make these virtualities visible"[12].

8   Relational virtualities, he implies, exist but cannot be acknowledged when intrinsic qualities are ascribed to an identity. The positings and positionings which map a social fabric and place the subject in it are the very conditions of possibility from which the self-separating subject can first acknowledge the power of these positionings *through disengagement* in order to then re-open virtualities, capacities for counter-intuitive relationalities. If one replaces "homosexuality" with "postcolonial identity", one can understand the dynamic of disidentification and relationality as a process through which postcolonial presences in Europe redraw the social fabric of Europe by making virtual, not yet discernible affinities, visible. Instead of emphasizing separatist notions of religious fundamentalists, traditional cultures, and backward communities, the film sets "Europe in motion" as an expansive and dynamic space in which contentitious commonalities emerge[13].

Disidentification: Strange names, Common worlds

9   "I'm not a Pakistani or an Indian writer, I'm a British writer"[14]. Hanif Kureishi describes here both his social location and specific profession through a series of negations and an affirmation. Not Pakistani, not Indian – these negations necessary in order to affirm he writes as a British writer suggest that there must be some relation between Pakistani, Indian and British which needs to be specified. Kureishi seems to be *dis*identifying from a discourse that might be emerging from the outside that frames him as some sort of outsider to Britain. Why this need for disidentification, and what does it produce as a consequence? The negations in this description do a number of things: firstly, at a surface level they seem to be simple clarifications – "I am not X, I am Y"; secondly, though, the question must arise *why* these negations are necessary in the first place?

10   Kureishi explicitly constructs a *distance* from the national origin of his father (Pakistan), refusing to be tied down to a cultural discourse of alterity based on far-off places (outside Europe) and filiations. But the consequence of this distancing move is *not* an erasure of his specific history. Instead, it inserts a non-European history *into* his construction of British identity. In other words, both his partly non-European self and his present British self are brought into a relation with each other. The effect of this relationality is to change both the meaning of the terms he negates (Pakistani, Indian) and the term he affirms (British). How? Elsewhere, he describes his situation thus: "English literature has changed enormously in the last ten years, because of writers from my background [...] You know there are many, many of us, all with these strange names and some kind of colonial background. But we are part of English literature"[15].

11   It is precisely because he has a "strange name" that Kureishi feels he must distance himself from the *consequence* of not sounding particularly British or European. His negations were necessary in order to counter the temptation of constructing him as strange, different, other. But colonial history itself is what produces this conjunction between writers with "strange names" becoming part of "English literature". English literature then becomes the *common space* where people with "strange names" rightfully see themselves, like Kureishi, as "British" writers in the postcolonial present. Now, the negations and the affirmations can be understood for what they are doing in Kureishi's self-description. They acknowledge a non-European component to European selves without making the "postcolonial" past the *basis* for a separatist understanding of identity. Further, the negation/affirmation dynamic also deranges the meaning of

English/British/European by claiming a legitimate space within Europe for strange-sounding people whose origins cannot be an alibi for constraining them into places and times which they do not identify with.

12   Kureishi's strategic mode of self-description pithily describes forms of postcolonial relationality which produce *common* spaces (Europe, Britain, English literature) by both acknowledging complex histories and geographies while refusing to *reduce* identities to these other spaces, times and cultures. It is precisely this dynamic of postcolonial relationality *in* Europe that *My Son the Fanatic* produces through the forms of conviviality between characters in the film, and figurations of cultural co-presence within and between characters. Indian-born British filmmaker Udayan Prasad, a graduate of the National Film and Television School in London, had already won awards for his television work for the BBC. *My Son the Fanatic* was co-funded by the Arts Council of England and the BBC, and this nationally- supported film was nominated for the best European feature film at the Brussels International Film Festival (1998) at which Om Puri won the Best Actor award. The film's production details exemplify national (British) recognition of the importance of diasporic writing and cinema. The nominations and awards at the European level acknowledged the writing, cinematic and acting talent, as well as the importance of the themes of diasporic identity in a postcolonial European context.

13   The film departs substantially from Kureishi's original short story, adding new characters and fleshing out the lives it portrays in much greater detail. A first viewing of the film produces a somewhat startling realization that it is not the son, Farid (Akbar Kurtha), but the father Parvez around whom the story revolves. Parvez, his wife Minoo (Gopi Desai) and Farid live in an unnamed northern post-industrial English town where Parvez works as a cab driver. The title of the film suggests the transformation of Farid from a music-loving, secular young man into a Muslim religious fanatic as the main plot driving the story. However, this assumption is deceptive for as the film progresses it is the establishment and transformation of relationships involving the father, Parvez, that become the focal point of the story. Early in the film, Parvez picks up a German client, Mr. Schitz (Stellan Skårsgaard) at the airport, who is visiting the town to scout out investment opportunities. Their relationship forms of one of the central nodes in a larger network of social relations that the film will portray. Parvez will also "provide" Schitz with a local prostitute, Bettina (Rachel Griffiths), whom Parvez has formed a friendship with through his cab-driving work. The evolving relationship between Bettina and Parvez forms a second node in this social network.

14   The film begins with a visual rendition of a typical English situation - a large house in the country, in front of which the Union Jack is flying, and where Parvez, Minoo, and Farid will meet the parents of Farid's fiancée, Madeline (Sarah-Jane Potts) a white Englishwoman whose father is Chief Inspector Fingerhut (Geoffrey Bateman). At the end of the film, Parvez has lost Farid to a group of young fundamentalist Muslim men, his wife has left for Pakistan, and he remains with Bettina in a town torn apart by violence as the house Bettina and her fellow sex-workers live in is set ablaze by a crowd of angry young men from the local mosque. The analysis of the film will focus on the relationships forged *between* these two situations. The trajectory of Farid's life in the film is set into motion by the evident distaste and distance which marks the reception Madeline's parents give Parvez and his wife. The warmth, eagerness and friendliness with which Parvez engages with Madeleine's parents is met with stony silence and disdain, which Farid picks up on. Later Farid will reference this humiliating meeting as the trigger for his disillusionment, his sense of exclusion from English society. For the viewer, it is the only event which will clearly mark *why* the son turns from a guitar-playing young man with a girlfriend into a sombre Muslim youth.

15   The opening incident counters the temptation to cast immigrants as mired in a past culture of tradition (fundamentalist Islam). Neither Farid nor his parents display any already existing devotion to religion or tradition. The turn to fanaticism in Farid is a *response* to a humiliating experience of social exclusion, an experience which frames not just him, but also his parents, as outsiders. At the very outset then, cultural identity

is not a given, but marked first as a process of separation (Farid's alienation from Madeline and her family) and then of *reinvention*. Islam emerges not as Farid's already existing foundation for self-definition but a cultural response, a reaction to the exclusion he is made to undergo. Farid's transformation exemplifies "'the radical negotiability of the concept of identity' and could be read as a working through of a *philosophical* description of a Muslim whose Islamisation is arguably negotiated as a result of an unhappy, dissatisfying time in Britain"[16]. The "culture" he finds in the community of alienated young men at the mosque is a fabrication created by them as a reaction to their experience of social exclusion.

16   This trajectory of improvised cultural self-definition through Islam in the context of racism in Europe and the "war on terror" has now been made familiar by social scientific writings, media coverage and political discourse. Prevalent xenophobic discourses in contemporary Europe however, consistently refuse to acknowledge the *relational* transformation of postcolonial identities which actively engage with cultural different others, establishing forms of intimacy and conviviality rather than antagonism. It is these relational forms of cultural transformation in European identity that the film gives voice to from the perspective of postcolonial subjectivity.

17   When Parvez picks Mr Schitz up at the airport and drives him around the city, the camera follows his gaze while the words which accompany it flesh out and construct both an image of what home (in Europe) can be, and begin to establish an interesting relationship of host and guest. While Parvez is clearly a sort of host in this situation, he does not embody a stereotype of Britishness or Europeanness. He emphatically marks his location as an immigrant from Pakistan who moved to England as a young man to work in a factory, now a ruin, which he takes Schitz around. The immigrant is the host here, showing England (and a very particular part of it) to another European visiting from elsewhere[17]. Reading the film from a European perspective, this first encounter between Parvez and Schitz deranges a normative framework from which "Europe" as an imaginary construct can be seen. The displaced immigrant welcomes the visiting European to a nation in Europe which has *become* his home. Europe is less the place of autochtonous belonging based on place of birth, than the space which is produced by two sets of journeys – one of permanent migration (Parvez) and the other of a temporary visit (Schitz). Europe is being sketched from the perspective of displacement rather than historical belonging.

18   Parvez's recounting of the history of this former industrial town whose mills are now ruins weaves together a national history of the Thatcherite evisceration of the working-class with his own personal story of migration. This story produces a beginning sketch of Parvez's sense of self which echoes Kureishi's own complex understanding of being both in and out. Parvez proudly reminisces about his time working in the cotton mill, thus embedding his own history with the history of this English town. But his time here as a worker is marked precisely by the co-mingling of different cultural influences which do *not* neatly mix into a happy, non-conflictual hybridity. He reminisces about his fondness for cricket, one of the British colonial exports which took root so strongly in British India and that many in the sub-continent see as essential to their own (sporting) culture. Cricket, like Kureishi's English (literature), is not a marker of distance between two cultures, but a coagulant which binds these cultures to each other.

19   Yet Parvez will remark that neither he nor his friend Fizzy, another immigrant from Lahore, Pakistan, were allowed to be part of the cricket team of the mill. Paralleling Kureishi's self-description, Parvez's love for cricket constructs a commonality that spans nations and cultures, but his exclusion (like Kureishi's "strange name") must be thought together with this common passion for a sport (cricket) or for a profession (literature). In other words, postcoloniality here is figured as both the emphatic assertion of a commonality (cricket, English literature) *and* an acknowledgement of a social specificity (exclusion based on racism). This is one example of the transformational dynamic of postcolonial Europe where relationalities establish a

commonality without at the same time denying specific histories (including that of racism).

20   This dynamic of commonality/ specificity through which relationality works is given a more global and contentious figuration when Parvez ironically comments that the Ayatollah Khomeini (of Iran) wore cotton robes made by this mill in England. When framed through the knowing words of the immigrant ex-millworker, England's industrial history as a manufacturing hub of textiles in the 1970s is linked to Islam and the Ayatollah. Khomeini's fatwa in 1999 in response to Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* had led to violent protests across England[18]. Postcolonial Europe emerges not just as the presence of formerly colonized peoples *in* Europe, but as a continent and culture whose very material prosperity is intimately linked with nations, cultures and a religion that xenophobic Europe today and in the past will set itself against.

21   Relationality in this second example moves from Parvez's personal story of exclusion and commonality to the dynamic perspective of geopolitics and cultural conflict from which Europe needs to be seen as intrinsically imbricated with far-off places and seemingly "alien" cultures and religions. Thus, early in the film already, the viewer encounters three forms of relationality which reframe Europe from the perspective of a dynamic and relational process of shared histories and accompanying exclusions. Firstly, Parvez as host to Schitz deranges what a "European" home might mean by undermining stereotypes of who is best situated to receive whom *qua* host and guest. Secondly, "home" emerges as a place produced through common practices (cricket) *and* experiences of exclusion (racism). Lastly, at the scale of cultural exchange and geopolitics, Europe emerges from a postcolonial perspective as a *network of relations* whose histories and geographies counter a simple cartography of inside and outside.

22   While a pure notion of European identity constructs the immigrant always as the cultural outsider, particularly when from a postcolonial nation, Parvez's relationship with Schitz troubles such a notion by combining commonalities with differences rather than erasing the former for the latter. Through his love for cricket and "hosting" a foreigner to England even though an immigrant himself, Parvez's manifests a sense of self through a process of complex *dis*identification. Instead of the cultural outsider framed by a discourse of European purity, the politics of Pavez's filmic construction is based on the appearance of *equality* – that is, the capacity of anyone to be like anyone else. Parvez's words enact what Rancière calls

> the verification of the equality of any speaking being with any other speaking being…enacted in the name of a category denied either the principle or the consequences of that equality: workers, women, people of color, or others. But *the enactment of equality is not* [...] *the enactment of the self*, of the attributes or properties of the community in question. The name of a community that invokes its rights is always *the name of the anonym*, the name of anyone[19].

23   Disidentification here is the enactment of the self, but this self (Parvez) is *not* the bearer of "attributes or properties" of an already established "community". Parvez fails to fit a stereotype of the Muslim immigrant from a postcolonial country. Recounting a childhood encounter with a religious teacher in Pakistan to Bettina, Parvez demands of his teacher why his Hindu best friend would be consigned to "*kafir* hell". Parvez's opposition to his Islamic teacher clearly demonstrates that Parvez's identity is not based on an exclusionary understanding of his religious background. Even more crucially, the recounting of this story also emphasizes that Parvez's open and relational understanding of himself already emerged in his childhood *outside* Europe. In other words, Europe is not the continent or culture where Parvez's identity is first transformed. What being a "Muslim" means is already interrogated by Parvez when in Pakistan. Disidentification is a process that began long before his encounter with cultural others *in* Europe. His ironic remark about the Ayatollah, his passion for cricket, his love of jazz and whiskey, and his distaste for oppressive forms of religious tradition, do not fit the othering discourse which would cast him out as an outsider to Europe. In Rancière's terms, while he clearly "belongs" to the category of a person of colour, and is

a worker, the categories of West and East, modernity and tradition, secularism and religious obscurantism, cannot accurately grasp his particular mode of living.

24   As we will see, in his growing intimacy with Bettina, Parvez exhibits precisely his capacity to be like anyone at all. What does this "anyone" mean in relation to the "politics of the anonym"? The fact that Parvez forms bonds of intimacy with people whose social situations are very far indeed from his own demonstrates the illegitimacy of conferring certain forms of capacities on some and not others. As Rancière argues "A *political* people is not an already existing given, it is a result"[20]. The discursive fabulation of "a people" is not the accurate representation of an already existing reality. It is the performative construction of the common by a "people" who emerge through their capacities to establish counter-intuitive forms of relationality. Parvez becomes part of a community precisely by the way his life crosses borders drawn by culturalist discourses that distinguish a (European) self from an (immigrant) other.

25   Parvez clearly embodies a class difference from the wealthy businessman Schitz, but his work as a cab driver does not prevent him from forming an ongoing bond of friendship with Schitz. Similarly, Parvez's playing of the "host" to Schitz, the German, does not make him simply an Englishman like any other. Instead, he is the Englishman whose ethnicity includes him in a community *marked* by its racist attitude to him. Parvez thus does not distance himself from England, he places himself *in* it while explicitly acknowledging his (ethnic) difference from a white notion of Englishness. In the words of Rancière "[T]he point is not to move from individualism to community but to move from one form of community to another"[21]. By basing itself on the presumption of equality, the politics of the anonym gives another *form* to the meaning of community through a polemical being-together.

Relationality: Sharing Exclusions, Forming Community

26   How does the film construct polemical forms of being-together? And how might such relations formed by "unlikely" kinds of people further an understanding of postcolonial Europe from the perspective of social exclusions based on gender and class? It is in the evolving relationship between Parvez and Bettina, and the effects it has on his family, that multiple forms of exclusions become the *basis* for forming a community. The film portrays different forms of exclusion in a politically powerful way precisely by showing how such exclusions do not divide but precisely bring together people from quite different social situations. Wendy Brown had powerfully argued against the dangers of "installing injury as identity" precisely as a way of moving out of unexamined, liberal forms of identity politics[22]. Firstly, if one perceives one's injury as based *solely* on the basis of one facet of one's identity, one might fail to see that unquestioningly deploying this very identity strengthens the very power one opposes. More importantly in the context of the film analysis, when injury becomes the basis for constructing a separate and *individual* identity, the possibility for forming relations with those who suffer *other forms of injury* can be foreclosed. The film powerfully portrays a process where injuries suffered through different social exclusions of class, gender, religion and ethnicity do not install separate, inter- combative identities but become the basis for forging relations of intimacy and care[23].

27   The very different social situations of exclusion experienced by Bettina and Parvez unite rather than separate them. Their injuries do not produce *separate* identities but transform them through the relations they establish with each other. Their relationality breaks the bounds of sexist notions of gender (Bettina) and racist notions of ethnic identity (Parvez) as well as clichés of what "Muslim" men or what (white) European women think and are capable of. This is precisely where the politics of the anonym, the capacity of anyone to become anyone else, coincides with a *polemical* form of being-together. Early in the film, Parvez arranges for Bettina to keep Mr. Schitz entertained

on his visit to England. This triangular relationship is not portrayed *only* as a three-way financial transaction (which it also is). Care, affection and friendship rather than a clichéd discourse of sexual immorality or sexism will frame Parvez's interactions with Bettina. It is clear from the way Parvez and Bettina talk that they are fond of each other, and Parvez later on will protectively let Bettina know that he will wait for her and bring her home once she is finished with a client. When Schitz, Bettina and Parvez are spending an evening in a club, the stand-up comedian singles Parvez out to attack him with derisive remarks and comparing him to Salman Rushdie. As the public jeers at him, Bettina angrily defends him and confronts the hostile public. Bettina and Parvez form a mutually supportive relationship, protecting each other from very different sorts of injuries. These injuries are clearly based on different forms of racist and sexist violence. But these different forms of violence do not form them as bearers of separate identities. Rather, their identities are continually constructed through the relationality they keep forging as the plot develops. Parvez will notice with concern the bruises on her body, the effect of the often violent situations she finds herself in sexwork. Bettina will patiently listen to Parvez's growing concern about Farid and offer helpful advice to both. Their very separate vulnerabilities become the ground for an intimacy which spans perceived differences.

28   The embattled and marginalized position of Bettina and Parvez in terms of class, gender and ethnicity reframes the perspective from which Europe can be perceived. An immigrant British Pakistani cabdriver and his family, a down-at-heels English sexworker, a visiting German businessman – these characters do not occupy privileged national, gender or ethnic positions. Rather, it is from their *positional relationalities* that Europe is sketched as a possible community open to all. European subjectivity is filmically constructed not through clichéd encounters between benevolent white characters and their "entertaining" coloured migrant underlings, such as in the French film *Intouchables*[24].

29   Parvez's increasing intimacy with Bettina will estrange him from Fizzy who will angrily criticize him for consorting with her. But Parvez will refuse to give up the friendship and love that has grown between him and Bettina. This growing intimacy is marked clearly when Bettina requests him to call her by her real name, Sandra. Their relationship crosses the bounds of marital fidelity, national origin, gender difference and social acceptability. The film suggests a strongly anti-identitarian politics of co-belonging precisely *because* these categories are not stumbling blocks but the conditions of possibility for establishing intimate relationships. Injury does not install a separate identity nor produce anatgonism between differentially-located people. Towards the end of the film, Minoo will express her pain at Parvez's growing intimacy with Bettina/Sandra. Parvez responds by saying "Friendship can be good Minoo. I think it can be found in the funniest of places".

Friendship, Disidentification and Europe

30   Floya Antias and Nira Yuval- Davis describe the constricting discourse of alterity conferred on immigrant groups in Britain thus: the "assumption that all members of a specific cultural collectivity are equally committed to that culture [...] tends to construct the members of minority collectivities as basically homogeneous, speaking with a unified cultural voice. These cultural voices have to be as distinguishable as possible from the majority culture in order to be seen as 'different'; thus, the more traditional and distanced from the majority culture the voice of the 'community representatives' is the more 'authentic' it would be perceived to be[25]. *My Son the Fanatic* refuses this discourse of alterity, authenticity and communal homogeneity precisely by emphasizing the transformations produced by disidentification and relationality. Relations through disidentification, the transformations of personal identity and a displacing vision of postcolonial Europe combine in the travelling gaze of Parvez as he drives his cab

towards the end of the film. The cab is a space where Parvez's immigrant Englishness and Schitz's visiting German presence are conjoined. Their double vision through the moving windows of the cab apprehend a scene in which is staged a conflictual relationality between rioting British Muslim youth who attack and set ablaze the rundown building which houses the sexworkers of the town, including Bettina. The striking thing about this second form of relationality is the *ex*centric position from which a European space can be imagined. Neither the young Muslim youth, excluded from mainstream white English society, nor the impoverished young women escaping their shabby and dilapidated house represent a privileged class or ethnic group. The rage of the one group against the other is not based on a pre-given essential form of identity. The film has clearly tracked why and how immigrant youth from impoverished towns left in post-industrial decline *turn* to religion as an invented source of self-definition. Bettina's own story of material decline earlier in the film explains her work as a sexworker but the film does not *reduce* her to her job. The scene is a troubling and tragic portrait of how different forms of exclusion rather than different identities turn people against each other. Put another way, it is social exclusion that brings two groups together even if in antagonism.

31   This antagonism is powerfully broken in the film when Parvez rushes out of his car to defend and protect Bettina from attack by Farid. In that image between a belligerent son, an injured woman and a protective man, a network of relations is portrayed which captures how different forms of exclusion produce forms of relationality through disidentification. Particularly in Parvez and Bettina, the viewer is exposed to a form of being-together *despite* differences of class, gender and ethnicity, while the film has subtly framed Farid's rage against them less as the effect of his religion than the situation of social disempowerment he finds himself in.

32   In his modestly put statement "Friendship can be good", Parvez articulates the politics of the film's productive construction of a possible Europe. Friendship as a form of relationality undoes the narrow identitarian logic of Us/Them that structures claims to identity, including European identity. Through the portrayal of multiple forms of friendship, the relationalities in *My Son the Fanatic* suggest the capacity of those *in* Europe to produce a form of European community that does many things at once. Firstly, the film resists the temptation of constructing a normative gendered, raced and classed subject, usually a propertied white man, as the backdrop for forms of happy multiculturalist engagements with others. There is no normative centre from which Europe can be perceived in this array of characters from different margins. Secondly, the network of relations formed in the film transform identities often constructed to imprison groups through stereotypical definitions of class, gender, religion and culture. These relations *move* the characters out of the subject-space that discourses of culture consign them to, and open up other maps for figuring a Europe of shifting identities through forms of counter-intuitive intimacies that anyone can partake in. Disidentification describes this transformational dynamic produced by counter-intuitive intimacies which produce *relations rather than identities* as the basis for thinking what being European could be.

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Notes

1 Étienne Balibar, *We the People of Europe? Reflections on Transnational Citizenship*, Princeton and Oxford, Princeton University Press, 2004, p. 177. Emphasis added.

2 A.O.Scott, "'My Son the Fanatic'/ Critics' Picks/ New York Times", *New York Times*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qq45uHvNvD0. Accessed 7 September 2019..

3 Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*, trans. Julie Rose,Minneapolis and London, University of Minnesota Press, 1999, p. 35.

4 Ibid., p. 36.

5 Paul Gilroy, *After Empire: Melancholia or Convivial Culture?*, London and New York, Routledge, 2014, p. 3.

6 Rancière (1999), p. 15.

7 Ibid., p. 9.

8 See Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, London, Chatto and Windus, 1993 and Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, Abingdon, Oxon and New York, Routledge, 1994.

9 Ania Loombia, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* ,London and New York, Routledge, 1998.

10 Jacques Rancière, "Politics, Identification, and Subjectivization", *October* 61, Summer 1992, p. 60.

11 Michel Foucault, "Friendship as a Way of Life", Ed. Sylvère Lotringer, *Foucault Live: Collected Interviews, 1961-1984*, New York, Semiotext(e), 1996, p. 308.

12 Ibid., p. 311.

13 Sandra Ponzanesi, "Europe in motion: migrant cinema and the politics of Encounter", *Social Identities*, 17:1, 2011: 73-92.

14 Ruvani Ranasinha, *Hanif Kureishi*. Tavistock, Northcote House, 2002, p. 6.

15 Kenneth C Kaleta, *Hanif Kureishi: Postcolonial Storyteller,* Austin, University of Texas Press, 1998, p. 3.

16 Nahem Yousef, "Hanif Kureishi and 'the brown man's burden'", *Critical Survey* no. 8, vol. 1, 1996, p. 17-18. Emphasis in original.

17 See Mireille Rosello, *On Postcolonial Hospitality: The Immigrant as Guest*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2002 for a revealing engagement with multiple forms of complex host/guest relationalities portrayed in cinema.

18 Salman Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, London, Vintage, 1988.

19 Rancière (1992), p. 59-60.

20 "Un peuple politique, ce n'est pas un donné préexistant, c'est un résultat." My thanks to Jacques Rancière for the translation. Jacques Rancière, *En quel temps vivons-nous ? Conversation avec Eric Hazan*, La Fabrique, Paris, 2017, p. 16. Emphasis added.

21 "Le problème n'est pas de passer de l'individualisme à la communauté mais de passer d'une forme de communauté à une autre." My thanks to Jacques Rancière for the translation, ibid., p. 28.

22 Wendy Brown, *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity*, Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1995, p. xi.

23 See Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender*, London and New York, Routledge, 2004, especially pp: 1-16 for an elaboration of what she calls "acting in concert" (1). She suggests that identity politics based on antagonism and separatism prevents a more complex understanding of how specific forms of injury (based on gender, sexuality, race) can be the conditions of possibility for establishing relations of support without denying specificity. For a powerful contemporary cinematic portrayal of just such forms of solidarity *across* sexual, gender and racial difference in the context of the AIDS crisis, see David Weissman, *We Were Here* (2010).

24 Olivier Nakache & Éric Toledano, Dir., *Intouchables*. Gaumont – TF1, 2011.

25 Floya Anthias and Nira Yuval-Davis, *Racialised boundaries: Race, Nation, Gender, Colour and Class and the anti-racist struggle*, London, Routledge, 1992, p. 38.

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