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## **The Exploration of Community in Hanif Kureishi's Short Fiction**

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<1>The first widely acclaimed British-born writer of New Commonwealth descent, the Londoner Hanif Kureishi is considered one of the most eminent representatives of contemporary black British literature. His particular, even 'historic' importance is commonly attributed to both his pioneering role in the development of a specifically British Asian culture (see Moore-Gilbert 190-192; Ranasinha 122), and his function as a 'herald of hybridity' who contests monocultural notions of Britishness and champions an inclusive and pluralistic understanding of national identity (see Schoene 117; Thomas 2). However, Kureishi's first collection of short stories *Love in a Blue Time* (1997) has been regarded as a crucial turning point in his *œuvre*, marking a shift in focus from inherently political themes such as British Asian ethnicity to the private difficulties, worries and fears of predominantly white, middle-aged male individuals.

<2>In discussing Kureishi's short fiction, this essay will challenge the assumption that his middle works are characterised by a complete thematic reorientation. [1] It will argue that ethnicity does not only continue to be an explicit concern of various short stories, but that it is also implicitly addressed in all those 'postethnic' stories that chiefly explore new forms of masculinity in the post-feminist era. Based on a combination of postcolonial conceptualisations of community and deconstructivist philosophical concepts, the ensuing analysis intends to show that Kureishi's short stories may, in fact, be read as explorations of community. As such, they deconstruct exclusionary monocultural notions of national identity.

<3>After a brief outline of Kureishi's short fiction and its critical reception, I shall illustrate that ethnicity continues to be an explicit concern of Kureishi's middle works by analysing the short story 'We're not Jews'. After discussing the salient features of Kureishi's postethnic stories, I shall then delineate how, on a deep-structural level, the short stories deconstruct exclusionary notions of community. This paper will conclude by pointing to the unique capability of literature, and the short story in particular, to explore alternative kinds of community formation.

## I. An Introduction to Hanif Kureishi's Short Fiction

<4>To date, Kureishi's short fiction *œuvre* comprises the collections *Love in a Blue Time*, *Midnight All Day* (1999) and *The Body and Seven Stories* (2002), as well as a group of 'New Stories' recently published in the almost complete edition of *Collected Stories* (2010). Additionally, there is one story, 'Esther', that was published in *The Atlantic Monthly* in May 1989, but has never been included in any of the story collections. Whereas the vast majority of the stories belong to the short story genre, the collections also include novellas, such as 'Lately' (in *Love in a Blue Time*) or 'The Body'.

<5>Although the publication dates of the story collections suggest otherwise, Kureishi has been working in the short story form intermittently since the mid-1980s. Not only did he conceive of *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985) and *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990) as short stories, but his first published story, 'With Your Tongue down My Throat', was printed in *Granta* as early as in 1987 (see Kaleta 148; Moore-Gilbert 150). Moore-Gilbert stresses that '*Love in a Blue Time* and *Midnight All Day* thus represent a decision to concentrate on a genre which had long fascinated Kureishi', and he argues that 'Kureishi's short stories seem a logical development from the often highly episodic novels' (150-151).

<6>At first sight, Kureishi's short fiction appears to be significantly less concerned with issues of race or ethnicity than his early works, in particular his first novel and contemporary classic, *The Buddha of Suburbia*, and its successor, *The Black Album* (1995). Since his stories thus render the postcolonial approach preferably adopted in analyses of his writings less suitable, comparatively little research has been conducted on his short fiction. While *Love in a Blue Time* and, to a lesser extent, *Midnight All Day* have been critically reviewed and at least received some academic attention, the short stories contained in *The Body and Seven Stories* as well as his 'New Stories' have largely been ignored. Moreover, insofar as the predominant portrayal of white, middle-class, male characters in Kureishi's middle works has been interpreted as a refusal of the black artist's 'burden of representation' (Kobena Mercer), reviewers have become increasingly severe and openly hostile (see Buchanan 147 and 157-159). Note, for example, Sandhu's deprecating discussion of Kureishi's *Midnight All Day* in the *London Review of Books*: 'The book represents – along with *Love in a Blue Time* (1997) and *Intimacy* (1998) – the third instalment in the ongoing decline of a once vital writer' (35).

## II. Kureishi's 'Ethnic' Short Stories

<7>Turning my attention to Kureishi's 'ethnic' short stories first, I propose to classify all those stories as 'ethnic' that explicitly address ethnicity as a major subject matter. Accordingly, 'We're Not Jews', 'With Your Tongue Down My Throat', 'My Son the Fanatic', as well as 'The Tale of the Turd' in *Love in a Blue Time*, 'Girl' in *Midnight all Day*, and 'Straight' and 'Touched' in *The Body and Seven Stories* are short stories that focus on ethnicity. It becomes immediately obvious that such stories are in a clear minority: whereas almost half of the stories – four out of ten – in the first collection may be classified as 'ethnic', only one out of ten stories in *Midnight All Day*, two out of eight in the third collection and none of the 'New Stories' belong to this category. However, irrespective of their small quantity, the fact that explicit portrayals of ethnicity are interspersed throughout the short fiction *œuvre* indicates that Kureishi continues to be interested in the potential of the 'ethnic' short story. Additionally, the rarity of 'ethnic'

stories appears to put special emphasis on their existence and foreground their concerns powerfully.

<8>To illustrate this type of stories, I will briefly discuss the less widely known short story 'We're Not Jews'. First published in the *London Review of Books* in 1995, the story is set in an English city in the 1960s and relates how the young Anglo-Pakistani school boy Azhar and his white English mother Yvonne are racially abused during their bus journey home. Their tormentors are the very same Little Billy and his father Big Billy about whose bullying Yvonne has just complained to the headmistress of her son's school. The story reaches its climax when Azhar's mother is unable to stand the Billys' verbal abuse any longer and attempts to stop their insults by muttering: 'We're Not Jews' (*Collected Stories* 45), to which Big Billy indifferently replies: 'Nah [...]. You no Yid, Yvonne. You us. But worse. Goin' with the Paki' (45). [2]

<9>In this extradiegetic and heterodiegetic narrative mainly focalised through Azhar, ethnicity is addressed in complex ways and on various levels. While Azhar's parents enter an interethnic marriage, both characters continue to define themselves as members of markedly different ethnicities. Thus, Azhar's mother gets uneasy whenever her husband announces that their family is going 'home' to Pakistan soon, for '[h]ow could she go 'home' when she was at home already? Hot weather made her swelter; spicy food upset her stomach; being surrounded by people who didn't speak English made her feel lonely' (45- 46). Moreover, Azhar's parents clearly differentiate between ethnic self and other, conceptualising their respective ethnic communities as exclusionary entities. Even though she is married to an Indian Muslim, Mother does actually share white Britain's stereotypical view of the immigrant other: Not only did '[s]he refus[e] to allow the word 'immigrant' to be used about Father, since in her eyes it applied only to illiterate tiny men with downcast eyes and mismatched clothes' (44), but she also denies that they are like the supposedly typical Pakistani family that lives in an overcrowded flat and eats curry and rice. Furthermore, her attempt to stop the Billys' insults by arguing that '[w]e're not Jews' (45) indicates that Mother does not merely distinguish between self and other, but also classifies Britain's religious, cultural and ethnic minorities hierarchically, apparently believing that Jewish people are 'below' Pakistani immigrants or an Anglo-Pakistani family. Azhar's father, on the other hand, attempts to cherish his ethnic self by maintaining as many features of an Indian life as possible. While he thus excludes himself from white British society to a certain extent, the factory worker and aspiring writer is convinced that the English 'were barring him' (47). His experiences of racism have even resulted in an overly generalised view of the West, claiming that the British took part in the atrocities committed by Nazi Germany: 'Azhar had heard his father say that there had been 'gassing' not long ago. Neighbour had slaughtered neighbour, and such evil hadn't died. Father would poke his finger at his wife, son and baby daughter, and state, "We're in the front line!"' (45). To save his family from becoming the next target of white cruelties, the Muslim Indian intends to move to Pakistan, although the idea of returning to a home he himself has never seen troubles him. The extent to which both Azhar's mother and his father are beset by the daily realities of an interethnic marriage, indicates how difficult it is to overcome an exclusionary, monocultural notion of identity and make concessions to the ethnic other.

<10>Growing up with one white and one black parent, Azhar has never had reason to reflect on his own skin colour or attach a particular importance onto it until he entered school, where he suddenly becomes the victim of racial abuse. Therefore, 'he couldn't

make out what it was with him that made people say such things, or why, after so many contented hours at home with his mother, such violence had entered his world' (43). His shock and surprise at his classmates' name-calling and physical cruelties towards him underpin, on the one hand, that he has grown up protected from the harsh realities of racial discrimination in 1960s' Britain. On the other hand, they indicate that he firmly believes in the equality of white and black people. Not only is Azhar's best friend white, but he also suffers from a terrible vertigo when his mother tells him about the incomprehensible system of apartheid in South Africa: 'This peculiar fact of living history, vertiginously irrational and not taught in his school, struck his head like a hammer and echoed through his dreams night after night. How could such a thing be possible? What did it mean? How then should he act?' (45). Importantly, the protagonist is similarly unable to understand his mother's line of defence when she argues that they are not Jews. He therefore transcends his mother's prejudices against immigrants as well as her anti-Semitic tendencies, on the one hand, and his father's belief in the evilness of white England and the West in general, on the other. Whereas Kaleta has read Azhar as an unthinking child who simply accommodates himself to the values, traditions and prejudices of the adult world (see 163-164), I would argue that in a third space that is neither his mother's nor his father's ethnic community Azhar develops an inclusionary notion of humanity. As such, the protagonist epitomises the hope that future generations will transcend the presently existing exclusionary notions of race, ethnicity as well as culture.

<11>The story's white British characters render the representation of ethnicity even more complex. Clinging to a white, anglocentric notion of national identity that excludes any other, Big Billy behaves obnoxiously towards Azhar's white English mother since her interethnic marriage threatens to blur the dividing line between self and other, challenging his monocultural conceptualisation of Britishness. Yet, the working-class man's hatred for Yvonne and her family is also personally motivated by the fact that he used to go out with the woman who married a Bombay intellectual. Little Billy does not only imitate his father's racial abuse and discrimination of others, but he also outdoes his role model by violently throwing a marble at the window between Azhar and his mother's heads, cracking the glass. In contrast to Azhar, he signifies how children may inherit their parents' hatred and prejudices along with their exclusionary notion of national identity, and act even more cruelly than they do. However, Azhar's family's neighbour represents yet another aspect of British society, namely the educated, open-minded and polite gentleman. Not only does the retired teacher help Azhar's father with his writing, but he is also more than ready to accompany Azhar and his mother home when he notices that Yvonne is terribly upset. Although the middle-class teacher appears to betray a certain imperial sense of mission when he calls Azhar's father affectionately but patronisingly 'a good little chap' (48), his tolerance and helpfulness towards any other have Azhar consider him one of the few 'normal' people 'in a deranged world' (48). The neighbour's stereotypically British appearance in a three-piece suit and trilby hat, his equally stereotypical love for his garden and his walking a Scottish terrier, strongly emphasise that his tolerance towards others is as typical of white Britain as is a tendency towards exclusionary insularity.

<12>Hence, 'We're Not Jews' is remarkable for its complex portrayal of ethnicity and the interrelation between ethnic identity, racist attitudes and class. The story's intricacy is further increased by a multitude of allusions, spanning from references to the migration patterns of Muslims within Southeast Asia to comments on the Holocaust, references to

the Second World War, remarks about South African apartheid and mentions of the Vietnam War (see King: 191). On the one hand, these allusions serve to 'firmly generaliz[e] Azhar's experience' (Malcolm 324). On the other hand, they situate the short story in a very specific historical and socio-cultural context. While the story's artful composition has led King to describe it as 'a small classic' (190), Malcolm classifies it as a 'key work' in the history of the British and Irish short story (322-324).

### III. Kureishi's 'Postethnic' Short Stories

<13>Apart from the few short stories that primarily deal with ethnicity, the majority of Kureishi's stories are instances of what Mark Stein has called 'postethnic' literature. Borrowing the concept of postethnicity from the Berkeley historian David Hollinger, in *Black British Literature: Novels of Transformation*, Stein adapts it to denote 'a contestatory perspective which is characterized by the play between external ascriptions and active affiliations, if not by the absence of ethnic markers, and which treats ethnicity as partly chosen' (137). Significantly, Kureishi has experimented with postethnicity from his earliest works in the short story genre, such as 'Esther' (1989), 'In a Blue Time' (1991-1995) or 'D'accord, Baby' (1993-1995), to his most recent stories like 'Long Ago Yesterday' (2004), 'Maggie' (2010) or 'The Decline of the West' (2010). Indeed, it may be argued that the short story form has been instrumental in the development of the 'postethnic' stance typical of Kureishi's middle works. While the film *London Kills Me* (1993) stands out from the early output as 'his first consciously post-ethnic work' (Upstone 39), Kureishi's first 'postethnic' novel *Intimacy* (1998) and his recent 'postethnic' plays and screenplays have only appeared after he had extensively explored the 'postethnic' mode of representation in his short fiction.

<14>Following Stein's definition, short stories such as 'Hullabaloo in the Tree' are 'postethnic' insofar as they expose ethnicity as a sociocultural construct that 'is characterized by the play between external ascriptions and active affiliations' (Stein, *Black British Literature* 137). When the story's unnamed middle-aged protagonist is reprimanded by an Indian friend: 'I know we live here now, but you have let [your children] become Western, in the worst way!' (485), the usage of the first person plural 'we' indicates that his friend considers him Indian. However, the narrative focalised through the father reveals that the protagonist regards himself as a member of British society. While he cherishes the memories of his Indian father who immigrated to Britain, he has an English fiancée and many English friends. He describes his three sons as 'pale' (492) and his own skin colour must be of a lighter shade than that of his Indian friend, whom one of his sons calls 'a brown face' (485). Thus, the protagonist's bodily appearance enables him to pass into white Britain rather easily. The father calls London his 'home' and does, therefore, not share his friend's fear of a potential westernisation of his children. On the contrary, it infuriates him that his friend dares to utter such a thing that '[n]o English friend would have presumed to say' (485). Consequently, the protagonist actively chooses the community to which he belongs in accordance with his personal values, feelings and beliefs, and does not cling to an essentialist notion of a community of common descent.

<15>However, the vast majority of the 'postethnic' short stories is characterised by a general vagueness about the precise ethnic background of the portrayed characters. Either it is not referred to at all, and first names such as Baxter, John or Harry, the setting of the stories mostly in England and the fact that the protagonists do not face

discrimination, or racial harassment suggest to the reader that the characters are white. Or ethnic markers can only be discerned as a result of both a very close reading of the stories and logical deduction. In 'Long Ago Yesterday' (2004), for example, a number of textual signs suggest that the autodiegetic narrator Billy is the son of an Anglo-Indian marriage, i.e. black British. The protagonist remembers a friend from his youth as 'another white friend' (601), indicating that he himself is not white. Moreover, his father is a literature- and art-loving accountant who daily commutes from the suburbs to London and is, therefore, an intertextual reference to other Kureishi characters – most famously Haroon in *The Buddha of Suburbia* – who immigrated to Britain from India, live in a London suburb and earn their livings as clerks in the city. The supposition that Billy's father is a Muslim Indian immigrant is supported by the fact that his use of English occasionally deviates from what is regarded as Standard British English. Furthermore, the protagonist's mother is a soap enthusiast, who does not want to be disturbed by her family as she knits, crochets and eats chocolates while watching TV. As such, she appears to be intertextually linked with the figure of the English mother in Kureishi's works. The assumption that she is English is underpinned by her marked difference from the Pakistani women graphically portrayed in the story 'With Your Tongue down My Throat'. Not only does she work in a supermarket rather than being a housewife, but she also considers herself equal to her husband and 'doesn't like to do anything for [him]' (606). Additionally, Billy recalls that his mother 'could sigh for England' (608). On the level of the discourse of the 'postethnic' short story, the relative absence of ethnic markers is connected with a preference for a fixed focalisation of the narrated events through the protagonist of the respective story. This narratological device entails a lack of precise information about a given such as the protagonist's ethnicity, especially in an autodiegetic narration.

<16>In leaving the ethnicity of most characters vague, Kureishi's 'postethnic' short stories emphasise that ethnicity is one, but not necessarily the most important, feature of an individual's identity. To the 50-year-old Billy in 'Long Ago Yesterday', confronting the haunting memories of his dead parents, fully accepting and living out his homosexuality and eventually realising his dream of becoming an artist are far more pressing issues. Moreover, the deliberate concealment of a character's ethnic background establishes greater equality between white and non-white characters, for as Kureishi observed in an interview with Nahem Yousaf: 'You expect to recognise ethnicity but no- one says that a white character is white' (10). Additionally, the conspicuous lack of ethnic markers functions to tease readers and prompt them to reconsider their notion of ethnicity, 'provoking questions such as: Why does the ethnicity of the character matter? Or: Why does it not matter?', as Stein writes in 'Posed Ethnicity and the Postethnic' (139).

<17>Both kinds of 'postethnic' stories, those in which ethnicity is depicted as partly chosen and those in which ethnic markers are largely absent, foreground themes that have a wide, transethnic appeal. In fact, it may be argued that a large proportion of Kureishi's postethnic short fiction is either implicitly or explicitly concerned with the depiction of masculinities in crisis, or more precisely, the reasons for, ways of dealing with and effects of male characters' mid-life crises. While early stories 'are riddled with instances of male depression, isolation and anxiety which are the consequence of failed negotiations of the demand for new forms of masculinity' (Moore- Gilbert 157), later stories tend to emphasise the constructedness of gender and offer examples of new forms of masculinity. These new forms span from men eager to adapt to the demands of

a relationship of equal power with their female partners to self-declared 'feminist house-husbands' ('Maggie' (2010)). [3] Moreover, the following related, potentially 'transethnic' issues figure prominently in Kureishi's 'postethnic' stories: the conflict between individualism and social or familial commitment, love relationships, marriage, fatherhood, friendship or homosexuality. In so doing, these short stories emphasise that people are being united by their shared, human concerns, thus challenging ethnicity as an exclusionary, essentialist category.

#### **IV. Kureishi's Short Stories as Explorations of Community**

<18>While it has become customary to analyse contemporary black British literature with the help of the tools provided by postcolonial theory, it proves fruitful to read Kureishi's short stories also in the context of deconstructivist philosophical conceptualisations of community. On the one hand, postcolonial conceptions of personal and collective identity are inextricably connected with deconstructivist theories of subjectivity and community. On the other, a sole postcolonial approach would not produce any concrete results concerning Kureishi's postethnic short stories and, therefore, fail to reveal that they are as much explorations of community as his ethnic stories. Let me briefly outline the major tenets of such a theoretical framework before I apply it to Kureishi's short fiction.

<19>In the context of a general renaissance of the concept of community in public, political and academic discourses (see Rosa *et al* 58), the 1980s gave rise to a particularly French debate about the deconstruction of community, in which philosophers such as Jean-Luc Nancy, Maurice Blanchot and Jacques Derrida have partaken. Heavily influenced by Martin Heidegger's argument in *Sein und Zeit (Being and Time)* (1927) that *Dasein*, or the human being-there, is essentially being-with (161), and as such first and foremost indeterminate potentiality (57), and indebted to George Bataille's conceptualisation of *communautés électives* ('communities of choice') (see Rosa *et al* 156), these philosophers have striven to free the thinking of community from its traditional implications of homogeneity and essentialist substance in order to open it towards a recognition of its constitutive internal difference. Jean-Luc Nancy's writings on community are amongst the most important contributions to this philosophical deconstruction of community. On the basis of the 'co-ontology' developed in *Being Singular Plural* (1996), Nancy has conceptualised a differential, non-essentialist, dynamic and continuously interrupted 'inoperative community' of singular plural beings in works such as *The Inoperative Community* (1986) and 'The Confronted Community' (2001).

<20>The French attempts at a deconstruction of community were internationalised when the Italian philosophers Roberto Esposito and, most powerfully, Giorgio Agamben published their philosophies of community in the early 1990s. Employing a terminology that is reminiscent of both Nancy's and Derrida's works on community, Agamben proposes a transnational and entirely inclusionary 'coming community' that is not based on any shared properties or presuppositions. Instead, it signifies a differential, unfixable and infinite community of 'whatever being[s]', i.e. singular 'being[s] *such as [they are]*' (Agamben 1). A further instance of the growing internationalisation of the discourse may be seen in Wolfgang Iser's conceptualisation of 'transculturality'. The German philosopher developed this notion of a differential, inclusive and open community in the 1990s.

<21>In the light of these deconstructivist philosophies of community, Stuart Hall's and Homi K. Bhabha's influential theories of identity may be regarded as a rethinking of community within a specific postcolonial context. Indeed, both draw heavily on Derrida's notion of *différence* in order to develop their concepts of identity. In his essays of the late 1980s and 1990s, Hall calls for 'new forms of ethnicity' ('The Meaning of New Times' 236) in the sense of contingent, 'culturally and historically constructed *positions* rather than fixed, or natural essences' that are characterised by difference rather than homogeneity and the local and global rather than the national (Procter 113). In 'Minimal Selves', he therefore proposes to think of communities as "'unities"-in-difference' (45). In a similar vein, Bhabha argues, in *The Location of Culture* that the postcolonial condition of global migrants and national minorities in a 'third space' in-between self and other gives rise to 'vernacular cosmopolitanism', a transnational and translational community that is characterised by the 'right to difference-in-equality' and based on political practices as well as ethical choices rather than 'an original [or essentialist] cultural or group identity' (xvii).

<22>From a postcolonial perspective, Azhar in 'We're Not Jews' inhabits a third space in-between the languages, territories, communities and cultural traditions of his white English mother and his Pakistani father. He is neither at home in white Britain whose racial prejudices and assaults puzzle and shock him, nor does he entirely belong to his Pakistani relatives, whose conversations have him whirl 'in incomprehension' (50). Azhar's position in-between self and other enables him to transcend his parents' exclusionary, essentialist and homogeneous notions of ethnic identity and 'reveal[] *hybrid* forms of life [...] that do not have a prior existence within the discrete world of any single culture or language' (Bhabha, 'The Vernacular Cosmopolitan' 141). Thus, his unconditional belief in the equality of everyone regardless of their differences from each other in terms of bodily appearance, ethnicity, culture or religion, marks him out as a proponent of Hall's 'unity-in-difference' or Bhabha's 'difference-in-equality'. Importantly, however, the narrative explicitly illustrates that Azhar's notion of an absolutely inclusionary community does not only apply to his own black British experience but also to the people living in South Africa or the Jewish. Hence, he appears to imagine a *transnational community* of singular and equal human beings that may be read as an instance of the Nancean singular plural 'inoperative community' or the Agamben 'coming community' of beings-such-as-they-are. Additionally, Azhar's elderly white British neighbour seems to share the child protagonist's deconstructivist view of community, illustrating that the belief in a transnational, inclusionary community is not simply the result of inexperience and childish naïveté.

<23>In focusing on themes that have a wide, transethnic appeal, Kureishi's postethnic short stories similarly challenge the narrow confines of an essentialist, monocultural and exclusionary notion of community. Furthermore, the frequent absence of ethnic markers that would define the characters' respective backgrounds indicates that these general and in fact *human* concerns have become more important to them than the particulars of their ethnic identity, which, in turn, suggests that they regard themselves as part of a larger, transethnic community. Seemingly unconcerned with the thematics of ethnic identity, Kureishi's postethnic short stories thus deconstruct traditional notions of community in order to propose an *inclusionary, transnational community* of singular plural beings (Nancy) or beings-such-as-they-are (Agamben) united by their human concerns and worries. In other words, below the surface level of the texts, these stories explore a non-essentialist, polyethnic and inclusionary understanding of community.

They illustrate that such a deconstructivist community is characterised by the equality of every- and anyone, for each character is treated regardless of their specific ethnic background on both the level of the story and the level of the discourse. Moreover, in focalising the narrated events through the respective protagonist, the postethnic short stories powerfully portray the singularity of the members of such an inclusionary community. The resultant multiplicity of narrative voices and perspectives is indicative of a 'polyphonic, "collective" writing' that distinguishes Kureishi's short fiction from his novels' 'single dominant perspective which orders their respective characters' competing discourses hierarchically' (Moore-Gilbert 163).

## V. Conclusion

<24>In analysing Hanif Kureishi's short fiction on the basis of a combination of postcolonial conceptualisations of community and deconstructivist philosophical concepts, it has become apparent that both his ethnic as well as his postethnic short stories are *explorations of community*. In varying degrees, all stories deconstruct traditional exclusionary and monocultural notions of communal identity, and instead imagine a highly differential, transethnic and potentially transnational dynamic community of singular beings. In so doing, they provide concrete, tangible examples of abstract philosophical conceptualisations such as Derrida's 'community without community' (42), Nancy's 'inoperative community' or Agamben's 'coming community' of beings-such-as-they-are.

<25>In contradistinction to the general reception of Kureishi's short fiction, it may therefore be argued that all of his short stories are political. They seem to underpin Paul March-Russell's observation that the postcolonial short story is characterised by '[t]he desire for a new social contract [...], in which the acknowledgement of all the members that constitute the territory will revise its shape' (257). Importantly, however, the short fiction penned by the London author transcends the confines of the postcolonial, or the black British, insofar as it expresses the desire for such a new social contract in more general terms. Indeed, the short stories address questions of communal identity on a more general, even ontological level pertaining to all human beings.

<26>In so doing, Kureishi's short stories also point to the unique capability of literature to think of alternative forms of being. Arguing that 'being-in-common is literary' (*The Inoperative Community* 64), Nancy contends that literature is particularly suited to expose the co-appearance or 'compearance' (66) of singular beings by articulating a singularly plural sharing of voices (see 80). While genre-theoretical reflections suggest that the (single) short story 'offer[s] an opportunity to explore new ways of being' (Liggins, Maunder and Robbins 9), this paper has indicated that the Nancean sharing of voices becomes particularly obvious if a writer's short fiction *œuvre* is considered as a whole. While each short story tends to focus on one specific character, exposing their singularity, Kureishi's stories *in toto* imagine a deconstructivist, differential community of singular plural beings.

## Notes

[1] This article grew out of a paper delivered at the international conference 'In Analysis: The Work of Hanif Kureishi' organised by Sebastian Groes and Susan Alice Fischer and held at the University of Roehampton (London) in February 2012. It is indebted to its first critical reader, Sebastian Jansen. [[^](#)]

[2] All subsequent quotations from Kureishi's short stories are likewise taking from his *Collected Stories*. [[^](#)]

[3] For an in-depth analysis of the representation of masculinities in Kureishi's short fiction cf. Schötz: "'What is a man?'" [[^](#)]

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