

Performing Bodies as Elephants in the Room: A Postcolonial Queer Approach to Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia*

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Introduction

In this paper, we will read *The Buddha of Suburbia*^[1] as a novel that not only contextualises the trials and tribulations of South Asian diasporic communities living in England but also registers the impact of the histories of racial and familial violence on the development of characters' queer orientations. We will examine how Hanif Kureishi deftly uses his queer constructions in order to evoke an unconventional understanding of his diasporic experience. Through different evocations interspersed on various vignettes, the novel displays a nexus of interactions between the Asian diasporic community and their English counterparts and lodges into the reader's imagination a hotchpotch of intricate identity issues which further its characters' journey to queer manifestations. In the novel, the characters being the victims of racial and familial violence trespass the normative and embody socially deviant behaviour bearing witness to their familial and racial traumas. Kureishi is a British-Pakistani author who is considered to be a mouthpiece of the South Asian diaspora of England.^[2] In this regard, the problems of race, religion and culture are some of the perennial issues that are normally associated with his oeuvre. The critics find his works to be a manifestation of cultural conflicts and examine his queer constructions and accentuate that his bold and queer characters either advocate sexual freedom or represent the fictional counterpart of Kureishi's life.^[3] Hence investigating diasporic and queer manifestations on a discrete basis from Kureishi's works is what creates a vacuum for a more variegated investigation which may combine diasporic mediations and queer manifestations under McCormack's^[4] intervening studies into queer postcolonial narratives to yield a fresh understanding of his fictional works.

We argue that 'diasporic queer' has been restricted to the traditional categories of postcolonial and queer theories, which, in turn, has undermined the role of racial and familial violence in the construction of queer identities. In addition, the interpretations of Kureishi's diasporic queer bodies about racial and familial violence negate and undermine the gravity of the issue and have therefore earned them the status of 'elephants in the room.' In other words, the segregation of 'postcolonial' and 'queer' concerning Kureishi's works might have undermined the histories of racial and familial violence which contribute to the development of postcolonial queer bodies and therefore require assimilation of both concepts to provide a better rationale for such identity formation processes.

Traditionally, cultural conflicts and their ramifications dominate Kureishi's queer constructions and the 'colonial subject reconstructs themselves in all social domains of tradition, customs, behavioral pattern, and language in order to assimilate in Britain society.'^[5] Many researchers have claimed that the queer side of Kureishi's works is an act of mimicry and his diasporic characters' identities represent camouflaged identities.^[6] For example, Hayley Toth asserts that Kureishi forefronts an 'endless negotiation between space and identity,' because London is a place that 'one could easily represent and make representative' of his own very self.^[7] Toth implies that the representation of London by the immigrants that comes as a result of endless negotiations between space (London) and identity (Asian and African) yields a camouflaged identity which is not real and complete.^[8] The above discussion is

enough to showcase that over-emphasis on postcoloniality ignores altogether the debates about queer constructions in Kureishi's works and by ascribing the queer as a deliberate act of mimicry, it leaves no possibility of intersectional identities.

This gap between postcolonial and queer, especially in relation to Kureishi's novel, *The Buddha of Suburbia* is what may hinder the possibility of linking postcolonial and queer together, in terms of a cause-and-effect relationship which has the potential of revealing the normative power patterns of the master class. The attachment of the idiom 'elephants in the room' with queer bodies confirms the potency of these bodies to reveal the power structures on one hand and highlight their intentional subjugation on the other. McCormack, while developing a link between postcolonial and queer, separates traditional queer from postcolonial queer who, she argues, should be viewed and studied in relation to the histories of colonial, racial and familial violence.^[9] She thus holds that the postcolonial queer bodies bear witness to racial and familial violence 'performatively' by developing as well as performing queer behaviour, and by so doing, they highlight and unveil the hidden power structures underneath them. In this article, we aim to examine the postcolonial queers as 'performing bodies' in Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* to map the way they reveal the hidden power structures of 1990's English society in relation to the non-White Asian diasporic communities.

The debate regarding Kureishi's narrative in terms of its coverage of queer constructions is indicative of limited insight, that is, camouflaging, mimicking, or narrating his personal experience.^[10] The existing body of research on Kureishi is either about the workings of queer bodies as a progression or it is about the reworking of his personal life in his fictional works. This limited approach to examining queer bodies' roles in his works, makes the problem statement of this study which advocates a different mode of investigation of such phenomenon. The paper aims at approaching postcolonial queer bodies as autonomous identities in order to examine their relationship with the external world, foregrounding historical violence, racial discrimination, familial clashes and childhood traumas.

Literature review: Tracing missing connections between postcolonial and queer in *The Buddha of Suburbia*

Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* since its publication in 1990, has accommodated several critical expeditions. Some of them offered critical insights by contextualising the book within traditional postcolonial theory, whereas, others viewed it within the backdrop of a purely queer domain without embarking on a cross-sectional study that would view both in a cause-and-effect relationship. This section provides an overview of some of these essays to substantiate the gap between these critical investigations. Berthold Schoene charges Kureishi for finding his 'utopian zest' hindered by racism.^[11] He argues that by highlighting diasporic problems, Kureishi strays into the wrongly created category of multiculturalism. By linking racism with multiculturalism, he views the racist behaviour of Whites as 'the last resort' of a culturally besieged British society. He maintains that Kureishi demonstrates racism as 'the last desperate resort of the culturally beleaguered to ascertain their difference and phantasmic superiority.'^[12] Schoene's stance about Kureishi's attachment of racism and multicultural experience as a 'disingenuous rhetoric of multiculturalism' puts multicultural British society into a neutral position, with racism being the natural consequence of the prevailing pluralistic experience.^[13] By making this argument, Schoene neglects the adverse psychological impacts of racial violence on the personalities of the diasporic subjects in the novel.^[14]

Similarly, Cristiana Cornea^[15] discusses some prominent stereotypes in *The Buddha of Suburbia*. She points out the existing differences between English and Indian cultures as well as the impacts of racially strong cultures and mindsets on the marginal culture. She holds that 'various discrepancies' exist 'between the English and the Indian culture[s]' and the most dominating stereotype regarding the characters of the novel is racial segregation which problematises identity construction for those who are

on the margins. For her, racism is the major factor driving all of Kureishi's characters and it exists side by side with the problems of acceptance and tolerance. Her exposition, that the novel presents the 'stereotypes that are brought about when the individual is an immigrant, dealing with numerous issues: the condition of England, identity and loss of identity, moral beliefs, youth and popular culture, political background, immigration, race, religion, the suburbs,' [16] contributes significantly to understanding of the diasporic space but is still void of a holistic investigation. The treatment of Kureishi's dominating queer space and the understanding of that space in relation to postcolonial diasporic experience is largely missing which, as this study argues, could have played an instrumental role in the understanding of East-West dichotomy within postcolonial queer spaces.

However, the critical insights of Cornea [17] and Schoene [18] forefront Kureishi's encapsulation of multiculturalism which also yields an intense desire for a homeland in a diasporic community within the boundaries of a foreign land. Consequently, Kureishi's novel 'scrutinizes the moral and emotional aspect of ethnicity in a period of re-defining Britishness,' and creates a society that is striving hard to construct an 'imagined homeland' where his characters celebrate a new form of creativity on one hand and mock and ridicule fundamentalism and racial supremacy on the other. [19] The characters in Kureishi's works symbolise freedom as well as rebellion because they play as 'stimulus for creativity, innovation and ingenious ideas' and this is how the 'challenge against authority' is justified and 'celebrated for the sake of heterogeneous identity.' [20] Nevertheless, this 'heterogeneous identity' is in fact ironical as it reflects the basic issue of in-betweenness caused by the stereotypes of nation and race.

Radek Glabazña discusses 'subjectivity and identity' as an effect of powerful western culture and sees the protagonist mimicking it, unintentionally. [21] Glabazña applies Homi Bhabha's and Judith Butler's theories to examine the character of Karim Amir, the protagonist of the novel, in terms of the issues related to identity and subjectivity. [22] According to him, the protagonist of the novel moves a step further in mimicking the dominant culture and he regards him as an exemplification of Bhabha's theory of mimicry as he returns the colonial gaze by 'way of a complete mockery' of the 'colonial clichés' rampant in British society. [23] Parallel to this debate, Sebastian Groes sees London in the writings of Kureishi and Monica Ali as furnishing 'energies' necessary to fill the 'cultural vacuum.' [24] According to Groes, contemporary postcolonial writers like Kureishi are filling this vacuum by bringing up London from a dull and ethnically riotous city to a vibrant fascinating city. [25] Groes's assertion about Kureishi's contribution to the construction of London as a vibrant fascinating city no doubt seeks for a harmonious space where multiculturalism is celebrated, but at the same time, it negates the worst part of the diasporic experience [26]—the part that shoves aside the immigrant characters' unprecedented identity crises and other complexities due to their queer constructions in the novel.

Similarly, Özge Demir reads *The Buddha of Suburbia* in comparison with *The Black Album*, Kureishi's second novel, focusing on the generation gap between first- and second-generation immigrants, displacement and dislocation. [27] Demir examines the in-betweenness in diasporic identities which results in double consciousness, ultimately leading to the intervening forms of identity. [28] He analyses the main protagonists of these two novels and shows how they are struggling to get settled in a foreign place. Demir maintains that the characters experience verbal as well as physical racial attacks which develop into a double consciousness in them. [29] Like other published literature on Kureishi's works, this article also scrutinises these newly formed queer identities in terms of traditional postcolonial concepts such as mimicry and hybridity. Demir's reading suggests that Kureishi has explored the problems faced by the South Asian diaspora in England and *The Buddha of Suburbia* is a perfect example of the reflection of the uneven and socially unbalanced society that is predominantly affected by racial prejudices and class conflicts. [30] He emphasises that the racist attacks in London suburbs pave the way for in-between spaces for those marginal communities who suffer from the problems of exclusion and displacement. The result of their 'exclusion' ranges from 'complete rejection of British culture' to indulgence in 'drugs, raves, and sex.' [31] Whatever the reason, the indulgence of Muslim youth living in

England in forbidden activities—whether they are related to intimate relationships or their social conduct—confirms the fissures and cracks in their identities.

In sum, the above discussion has provided an overview of the existing body of literature that examines Kureishi's queer constructions through the traditional lens of postcolonial theory. Conflating queer with traditional postcolonial constructions such as mimicry, hybridity and multiculturalism, these insights have ignored the gigantic psychological impact of racial and familial violence on the physical orientations of diasporic subjects in general, and Kureishi's characters in particular. In order to fill this gap, we, therefore, suggest that the fissures and cracks in the personalities of these characters cast doubt on the traditional approaches of critical investigation and demand an all-encompassing approach that imagines the protagonists as victims of racial, familial and colonial violence on a simultaneous basis and that is where McCormack's [32] postcolonial queer narrative approach can be utilised to embody histories of characters' unaccustomed behaviours and orientations. This paper not only covers this neglected perspective about queer bodies but also unveils the way that queer bodies disrupt and unveil the recurring power structures.

Methodology and theoretical framework

The paper includes Kureishi's debut novel, *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990) as its primary source, whereas the secondary sources for this critical endeavour have been developed from pertinent articles and books about postcolonial and queer constructions. The theoretical framework of this article is based, primarily, on McCormack's model of 'queer postcolonial narratives' as espoused in her ground-breaking work, *Queer Postcolonial Narratives and The Ethics of Witnessing* to reimagine, reinterpret and recontextualise the novel in postcolonial spaces in general and postcolonial-queer space in particular. [33] In fact, McCormack's 'queer postcolonial narrative' provides a model of 'performative listening' and views queer characters communicating 'performatively' while demanding a gathering of listeners who can lessen their burden. [34] This theory of postcolonial-queer has been congenial in developing a 'postcolonial private space' in the context of diasporic communities of England. Moreover, the model is equally useful to the deconstruction of postcolonial queer bodies in a broader social and cultural setup, with particular emphasis on *The Buddha of Suburbia*.

Postcolonial-queer bodies performing in postcolonial contexts

The word 'body' normally refers to a biological body performing different biological functions. But the body, when viewed in social and political contexts, bears some varied meanings depending on critics' and philosophers' understandings of the same. For example, according to Nadia Brown and Sarah Allen Gershon, bodies are 'sights on which social constructions of differences are mapped onto human beings' and such social constructions of differences confine and also prescribe the functions of a particular body within a given traditional construction like male-female, master-slave and dominant-submissive. [35] But when Michel Foucault argues that power and body have a strong connection in a way that the study of one without the other is incomplete, the body is accorded a different status that enables it to stand alone for *meaning*. [36] In this regard, the present study claims that the status of queer bodies especially postcolonial queer bodies has been subjugated for they have been denied citizenship entitlements. Brown and Gershon have argued that while these postcolonial queer bodies flout 'cultural, social, sexual, and/or political boundaries,' they are deprived of 'citizenship entitlements.' [37] In an attempt to justify citizenship entitlements to these bodies, the postcolonial queer bodies need to be studied differently from queer bodies because they carry within themselves a significant symbolic value, that is histories of racial, familial and colonial violence.

Importantly, Achille Mbembe and Libby Meintjes, while comparing the destructive potential of a common

body to that of a tank or missile, maintain that the latter is not the only thing that contains explosive/destructive material, but the body too can act in an explosive way.^[38] For example, the body of a suicide bomber destroys him/herself as well as others, and in doing so, it 'does not only conceal a weapon', but is also 'transformed into a weapon, not in a metaphorical sense but in the truly ballistic sense.' Although at outset, the association of a queer body with a suicide bomber's body may seem an odd comparison, they still have a common desire to be heard and noticed. At this point, we invoke McCormack's comparison that extends the particular offensive function of bodies to postcolonial queer bodies by arguing that in the process of destroying 'the body in a political act' that attacks the 'occupying colonial authorities,' the (suicide bomber's body) strives to make them realise the 'vision of an independent, postcolonial nation.'^[39] Hence, a postcolonial queer body's self-destructive-oriented resistance to colonial authorities not only indexes its heteronormative peripheral status but also refuses to comply with the existing power structures and mainstream power politics.

Accordingly, this study assumes that bodies are the containers of histories—of sexuality and gender—and their power-driven working plays an important role in the formation of a controlled society. Hugo Cordova Quero remarks that the performance of a body is 'conditioned by culture, political environment, economic relations, historical events and social processes.'^[40] Thus, in the case of postcolonial queer bodies, as reflected in *The Buddha of Suburbia*, it is to be established that they also carry with them certain historical traces of colonialism, familial traumas and racial violence. McCormack asserts that bodies connote flesh and flesh is 'woven into history as both the bloody deaths necessary to achieve the desired goals and the skin on which it has become possible to write these new foundational narratives.'^[41] McCormack's model revolves around the embeddedness of national histories in the flesh that can be used as a tool to explore the subject's unconscious for the acquisition of *truth*.^[42] The theory of postcolonial-queer examines the ways in which bodies hold and communicate their truth, simultaneously demanding responses from others by questioning language's ability to *communicate*. Hence, language's ability to communicate has been challenged by the body's status as a *symbolic text*, onto which the meaning is imprinted by cultural, religious, social and political forces. Sarah Coakley has aptly shown how the 'body' has been a sight for enunciating contesting philosophies over a period of time:

In materialist philosophy of mind, for instance, the 'body' may be everything else except the brain; in feminist analyses of pornography and cultural manipulation it represents the female that males seek to control; in both Freudian and Foucaultian accounts of sexuality it becomes the site of either forbidden or condoned pleasures, rather than the more-or-less unconscious medium of all human existence; and in popular magazine discussions of slimming and fitness it still stands for the rebellious fleshliness that has to be controlled and subdued from some other place of surveillance.^[43]

The symbolic status of the 'body' accords it the status of a *text* which is open to different trajectories of meaning. This textual status of 'body,' therefore, enables McCormack to contextualise its symbolic value into national histories and racial and familial violence.^[44] She studies postcolonial queer bodies and entitles their performative acts as 'destructive cries.' Her model encapsulates the range of possible responses to such destructive cries where postcolonial queer characters' traumatised histories, trespassing linguistics forms or narrative structures, are articulated. McCormack asserts:

Increasingly queer postcolonial narratives give voice—although already words fail to grasp the literary form—to characters who have survived trauma by having them articulate their histories without sole recourse to linguistic forms or narrative structures. These histories are expressed through subtle bodily gestures, ex-centric sexual acts and a *mélange* of sensory evocations.^[45]

Being considered texts or symbolic bodies requires listeners in order to be heard and interpreted. Due to the already constructed meanings by heteronormative, patriarchal societies and the political nature of gender constructions, the interpretation and listening of bodies are equally challenging but inviting tasks. According to Elizabeth Grosz, bodies are 'concerned with the process by which the subject is marked, scarred and transformed, and written upon or constructed by the various regimes of institutional,

discursive, and non-discursive power as a particular type of body.'^[46] But this study suggests that the aforementioned stagnant position of bodies requires a new method of interpretation that can correspond to the ever-changing status of bodies. While talking about postcolonial queer bodies, McCormack therefore holds that these bodies need a listening community that can give words and narratives to their polyvalent and precarious traumatic traces.^[47]

As far as listening to these postcolonial queer bodies is concerned, McCormack considers the listener as the one who translates the unexpressed, inconspicuous and untamed histories as she maintains that 'embodied witnessing is an act that is eventually translated into words by a gathering of listeners.'^[48] For her, the listener does not need any professional qualifications so there can be friends, lovers, strangers, or family members 'who tentatively, inexpertly, and haphazardly take on the responsibility for listening to the unspoken' words.^[49] This postulate of McCormack is related to but also different from the listener of trauma studies,^[50] as Cathy Caruth has discussed in her book, *Unclaimed Experiences*. The listener should be a knowledgeable person and must have developed expertise in traumatic neurosis.^[51] But unlike trauma studies, postcolonial queer studies' listeners can be ordinary people who can just listen but listen attentively.

In sum, the main scholarship of this paper is based on McCormack's model of a 'multisensory embodiment' which suggests that 'the intimate and collective process of embodied witnessing is integral to the possibility of seeking out non-violent belonging, intimacy and friendship in the performative assemblage of power.'^[52] The scope of this research covers the development of postcolonial queer bodies that symbolises past histories and familial and racial violence, as well as the role of listening in interpreting this phenomenon via 'multisensory epistemologies' in Kureishi's selected novel.

Performative listening in postcolonial queer studies

The advent of postmodernism—as a cultural movement—has fragmented any fixed notions about reality. Postmodernism, according to Peter Barry is an 'exhilarating, liberating phenomenon, symptomatic of our escape from the claustrophobic embrace of fixed systems of belief.'^[53] The fragmentation of the fixed system of belief introduces numerous postmodern concepts, in which performativity holds a significant place in the interpretation of postmodern characters. Sometimes, it appears in the form of a reversal of the male-female binary or social roles and sometimes it connotes several other social attributes.^[54] In this study, McCormack's concept of *performative listening* is being used in order to map out the working of postcolonial queer characters in Kureishi's novel, *The Buddha of Suburbia*.^[55] It has been maintained by critics like Jon Binnie,^[56] Anne Fausto-Sterling,^[57] Moira Gatens,^[58] Gayatri Gopinath^[59] and Anikó Imre^[60] that there lies a strong connection between characters' queer behaviour and social factors. According to McCormack, performativity highlights the gap in the reiterative patterns of normative structure, and it emerges in response to the failure of normative cum heteronormative repetitions in maintaining imposed meaning.^[61] Performativity's association with queerness, particularly postcolonial queerness, therefore, enables it to disrupt the existing patterns of western hegemony that appear in the form of racial, familial and colonial violence. Contextualising this thesis within a diasporic setting, we intend to view the way postcolonial queer bodies expose the western narrative of White supremacy by performatively bearing the histories of racial and familial violence. For this purpose, we not only explore the symbolic value of postcolonial queer characters, as constructed by Kureishi in the novel, but also elaborate on how they question the authority of normative, familial and institutionalised structures of a postcolonial society.

Additionally, we suggest that if the authority of heteronormative norms exists due to its very reiterative structure, *performativity* is a disruption to it. The idea of McCormack's performativity can be linked to Butler's notion of gender performativity.^[62] Because both critics consider sex and power politics intertwined as well as symbiotic in the construction of performing bodies. But they also differ to some

degree, the former studies queer construction in a postcolonial context whereas the latter deals generally with gender as a social construct. Gill Jagger, while commenting on Butler's basic premise on sexuality and gender, asserts that 'embodied selves do not pre-exist the cultural conventions which essentially signifies bodies' but rather the 'foundational categories of identity—the binary of sex, gender and the body—can be shown as productions that create the effect of the natural, the original and the inevitable.'^[63]

Since postcolonial literature deals with the problems of colonisation and its impact on postcolonial societies,^[64] we argue that postcolonial queer literature stands for the same problems but in a different way. As in the case of 'performativity,' McCormack asserts that the radical potential of postcolonial queer bodies is the only way to eliminate the prevailing institutional and personal violence which further builds a new world that is less violent and less traumatic.^[65] Her reading of performing bodies explains a break in the reiterative patterns of power structures and explores new ways of being with others that are intersubjective in nature. The relationship between power and inter-subjective modes of being with others holds a vital place in postcolonial conditions as reflected in the novel. This notion of fissuring the reiterative institutional patterns and the inter-subjective mode of existence has the potential to reimagine and reinterpret *The Buddha of Suburbia's* postcolonial queer characters in a more holistic way.

Foucault in *The History of Sexuality* has investigated how power and norms play a significant role in the construction of one's sexuality.^[66] McCormack also critically views the role of law and institutionalised norms in the construction and supervision of the subjects.^[67] This relationship between subject formation and the nexus of power helps us understand that *heteronormativity* and *gender normativity* are the sites which not only demonstrate an individual's conformity to the law but also expose how the law affects the bodies of individuals. This linkage between subject formation and power is therefore instrumental in displaying bodies' citation of and embodiment of customary law. We argue that the mutual relationship between norms and institutions and the individual identity (body) as critiqued by Foucault validates McCormack's idea of *performativity*.^[68] According to her, *performativity* emerges when the bodies consolidated by law for their recognition fail 'to be adequately consolidated.'^[69] However, in the backdrop of this assertion that postcolonial queer bodies are the 'unconsolidated' bodies which cast a fissure in the normative power structures, this study examines the politics of these unconsolidated bodies in their quest to disrupt the peace of the heteronormative—in order to expose the histories of racial violence—with particular reference to the Pakistani diasporic community living in England and portrayed in *The Buddha of Suburbia*.

Postcolonial-queer bodies, performative listening and *The Buddha of Suburbia*

The Buddha of Suburbia is Kureishi's debut novel, and it narrates the story of Karim Amir an interracial child—born to a Pakistani father (Haroon) and an English mother (Margaret). Having possessed the inheritance of two different cultures, his personality suffers from sheer alienation, and he remains torn between the two cultures. As the narrator, he opens the novel with these lines: 'My name is Karim Amir, and I am an Englishman born and bred, almost. I am often considered to be a funny kind of Englishman, a new breed as it were, having emerged from two old histories.'^[70] Karim Amir represents a breed that emerges from two histories, cultures and nationalities but belongs to none. The feeling of nowherehood leads to culturally alienated identities. Cornea, while affirming the alienation in the characters of *The Buddha of Suburbia*, accounts for them relating to their immigrant status.^[71] Contrary to this traditional interpretation of interracial characters, we hold that their alienation is the result of racial and familial violence they have been through in their past, and due to this alienation, which comes in tandem with racial, familial and colonial violence, they become prone to acting out queer behaviour as a way of bearing witnesses to their traumatised histories. The character of Karim Amir solidifies our stance in an all-encompassing manner. Karim Amir, while speaking out about racial violence, tells us that they 'were

supposed to be English' but to the English, they 'were always wogs and nigs and Pakis.'^[72] The subsequent lines from the novel reiterate Karim Amir's queer construction and also describe his mental state and behavioural inclinations:

I didn't believe in monogamy or anything old like that ... I wanted to sleep with boys as well as girls. I liked strong bodies and the backs of boys' necks. I liked being handled by men ... and I liked objects—the ends of brushes, pens, fingers—up my arse. But I liked cunts and breasts, all of women's softness ... I felt it would be heartbreaking to have to choose one or the other, like having to decide between the Beatles and the Rolling Stones.^[73]

We assert that the suffering of Karim Amir and his queer behavioural predispositions have a relation of stimulus and response; and that his body—as maintained by McCormack—is a 'performing body' that becomes a witnessing site for the traumas of racial violence he has been subjected to in his childhood.^[74] And since performativity is a way of witnessing these instances of racial violence, Amir's queer performativity separates him from the traditional category of queer to the new category of postcolonial queer. In the backdrop of this premise, a reader can see clearly that his abandonment of Asian culture and the hostile behaviour of English people leave him in an abyss of despair. As discussed in the theoretical framework, the histories of colonial, familial and racial violence have far-reaching effects on the personalities of the sufferers, Karim's character justifies this proposition by embodying these effects as the consequences of the vicious attitudes and actions he has experienced.^[75]

I'd been punched and kicked to the ground by a teacher ... I was sick too of being affectionately called Shit face and Curry face, and of coming home covered in spit and snot and chalk and woodshavings ... They held chisels to our throats and cut off our shoelaces ... right in front of our eyes ... one of the lads put another kid's prick in a vice and started to turn the handle. Fuck you, Charles Dickens, nothing's changed. One kid tried to brand my arm with a red-hot lump of metal. Someone else pissed over my shoes ... Every day I considered myself lucky to get home from school without serious injury.^[76]

The paper propounds that this hostile treatment of Karim Amir in his childhood created a vacuum in his personality that ended up developing queerness in his character. As discussed previously, when the bodies experience any kind of violence, they start bearing witness to that act of violence performatively by adopting queer behaviours. McCormack asserts that these histories of racial violence 'are expressed through subtle bodily gestures, ex-centric sexual acts and a mélange of sensory evocations.'^[77] Therefore, we suggest that Karim's queer behaviour is a reflection of the racial violence, he faced during his childhood. He becomes bored and restless and starts longing for adventures. According to McCormack, when exposed to familial, racial and colonial violence, the bodies start communicating in non-discursive forms.^[78] We argue that the non-discursive form of communication expressed by Karim suggests that queer behaviour is an act of witnessing his bitter experiences of the past. In the novel, Karim confirms that very proposition, when he says:

Perhaps it is the odd mixture of continents and blood, of here and there, of belonging and not, that makes me restless and easily bored ... I was looking for trouble, any kind of movement, action and sexual interest I could find, because things were so gloomy, so slow and heavy, in our family, I don't know why.^[79]

It becomes clear at this point that Karim Amir's personality is engraved with the uneven and cruel realities of the past. The disturbed familial and social life exposes him to different adventures which are explicitly queer in nature. In this way, his character reinforces McCormack's conception that when 'bodies' deviate from the normal and conventional path due to racial and familial violence, they end up developing a desire to create 'something queerer' even if they 're-emerge along the same.'^[80] Thus, it can be argued that Karim's body due to his worst experiences of the past develops 'something queerer' that desires a listening community throughout his stay in the suburbs as well as in the main city, London.

However, in the novel, Karim is not the only character who is affected by racial and familial violence, there are others. For example, Jamila, an intimate friend of Karim, comes out as lesbian at the end of the novel and begets an illegitimate child as an act of rebellion against her forced marriage. Eva indulges in

an extramarital affair with Karim's father, Haroon due to her disturbed marital relationship. The inclusion of extramarital affairs in the category queer is based on Foucault's generalisation of deviance as he affirms that 'on the list of grave sins ... separated only by their relative importance, there appeared debauchery (extramarital relations), adultery, rape, spiritual or carnal incest, but also sodomy, or the mutual "caress".'^[81] Haroon's involvement in debauchery also seems to be a ramification of his contrasting past, that is the luxuries he enjoyed in India and the hardships he faces while living in England, and most importantly, the repentance of not seeing his mother again. Karim while revealing the traumatised past of his father, says:

But Dad had no idea when he set off that he'd not see his mother's face again. This was the great undiscussed grief of his life, and, I reckon, explained his helpless attachment to women who would take care of him, women he could love as he should have loved the mother to whom he never wrote a single letter.^[82]

As mentioned previously, according to McCormack, having developed a queer attitude the postcolonial queer bodies remain in incessant strife to find a listening community which can lessen their traumas by listening to their traumatic past.^[83] By seeing this phenomenon of finding a listening community in the novel we learn that Karim finds a good listener in Eva, the girlfriend of his father. The way she reacts to Karim's behaviour by not making him feel guilty about his homosexuality is an epitome of a good listener. Karim's anxiousness about visiting Eva with his father is again a solidifying instance of a trauma bearer's anxiety for an ideal listener. He says, 'It took me several months to get ready: I changed my entire outfit three times. At seven o'clock I came downstairs in what I knew were the right clothes for Eva's evening.'^[84] Caruth views the listening community as a group of professionals.^[85] Contrary to her proposition, the paper explores a different situation in the novel which aligns with McCormack's proposition that a listening community may not necessarily be a group of professionals, even an ordinary person such as one's friends, family and relatives can also become good listeners.^[86] The character of Eva is a perfect example of an ideal listening community to a postcolonial queer body like Karim Amir.

Similarly, Eva's disabled body also symbolises her disturbed matrimonial life which ultimately ends up in an extramarital affair with Karim's father, Haroon. Though the nature of the traumas possessed by Eva and Amir are different, the ramifications of these traumas in their lives are, ostensibly, similar. Both end up having indulged in socially deviated relationships which, in the case of our study, purports to the negation of the normative. Hence, we interpret the mutual relationships between Eva and Karim Amir and between Haroon and Eva as illustrations of a good listening community in which they listen to each other's traumas and scratch each other's backs in order to lessen the burdens of their past. This proposition can also be substantiated when Karim describes his relationship with Eva and her disturbed life as:

The most thrilling time was when Eva, lying on my bed and *listening to the records I wanted to play her*, started to get pretty intimate and everything, telling me the secrets of her love life. Her husband hit her, she said. They never made love. She wanted to make love, it was the most ravishing feeling on offer. She used the word 'fuck'. She wanted to live, she said [emphasis added].^[87]

Karim's sexual relationship with Charlie can also be linked to his desire to share his traumas with a sensorial expression. According to McCormack, the trauma witnessed by postcolonial queer bodies is not only communicated via verbal expressions as testimony because it is 'not only a speech act that renders a traumatic event "real", but it is also a sensorial experience of the unspeakable or the unarticulated.'^[88] Against the backdrop of this definition, it can be claimed that Karim's homosexuality is an act of bearing witness and at the same time it is a communication of the unarticulated and the unspeakable traumatic event. As discussed earlier, the listening community lessens the burden of the past and Charlie's loyal and kind image in Karim's eyes confirms his role as an ideal listener. He views him as 'the cruellest and most lethal type of seducer,' and for him, 'He extorted not only sex but love and loyalty, kindness and encouragement.'^[89] Moreover, according to McCormack, postcolonial queer bodies disrupt the existing structures of power which include prevailing heteronormative norms and

structures in any society.[90] In the novel, when Haroon learns about his son Karim having lain with Charlie, he scolds him for being a 'bum-banger,'[91] while ignoring his own extramarital affair with Eva. He does this because of his heteronormative patriarchal Asian normative, where homosexuality, particularly the adoption of a passive role is considered a sin, even bigger than debauchery. We suggest at this point that the unravelling of such power structures within as well outside the Asian and western spaces questions the prevailing normative structures, be it the case of White ethnocentrism or Asian stereotypical beliefs and practices. However, in light of the above discussion, it can be argued that postcolonial queer bodies, entitled in this essay as 'performing bodies' challenge and question the White supremacist ideology on one hand and the heteronormative patriarchal Asian society on the other.

Conclusion

The paper has found that the queer bodies in Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* provide a prototypical representation of racial and familial violence and while doing so they disrupt the existing power structures—Asian as well as British. On the one hand, these queer bodies bear witness to the unspoken and unarticulated histories of racial and familial violence and on the other, they express their repulsion from rotten, heteronormative, patriarchal power structures. Interestingly, most of the diasporic characters in the novel are suffering from one or the other kind of crisis and develop, in return, a different identity which does not abide by the existing normative standards. The study contributes differently to the already existing literature on Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* by making an intersection of postcolonial and queer theoretical domains. The detailed textual analysis of the novel in light of McCormack's critique of performative listening confirms that postcolonial queer bodies hold a symbolic value which can bring to the surface a different interpretation if put in the context of familial and racial traumas.[92] Furthermore, this research provides a contribution to an emerging field of inquiry, that is, postcolonial queer, that encourages future researchers to delve into the field to unfold different facets of reality by viewing queer literature and culture in the backdrop of postcolonial and diasporic experiences.

By doing so, the study establishes that postcolonial queer bodies are real and bear witness to the histories of familial and racial violence by performing and manifesting queer behaviour. Although the idea of postcolonial queer bodies has been substantiated above within Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia*, as a matter of fact, these postcolonial queer bodies are still under consideration despite their immense potential to reveal the hidden power structures. We suggest at this point that 'performing bodies' have been imagined within traditional postcolonial categories, which have accorded them the status of 'elephants in the room' and an underprivileged position in society. They need a good listening community; a community that would be able to contextualise the queerness of the elephants in relation to traumas resulting from racial and familial violence.

Notes

[1] Hanif Kureishi, *The Buddha of Suburbia*, London: Faber & Faber, 1990.

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[3] Toth, 'No longer young'; [Berthold Schoene](#), 'Herald of hybridity: The emancipation of difference in Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia*,' in *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 1, no. 1 (1998): 109–28, accessed 26 Oct. 2022; [Özge Demir](#), 'Neither here nor there: How to fit in British society in Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* and the *Black Album*?' in *Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies* 4, no. 3 S1 Special issue (2015): 689–96, accessed 10 Aug. 2021.

[4] Donna McCormack, *Queer Postcolonial Narratives*, London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014.

[5] Hira Ali and Naveed Ahmed, 'Identity crisis in Hanif Kureishi's *My Son the Fanatic*,' in *European Online Journal of Natural and Social Sciences* 7, no. 2 (2018): 285–91, specifically p. 285.

[6] Schoene, 'Herald of hybridity'; Toth, 'No longer young.'

[7] Toth, 'No longer young,' p. 50.

[8] Toth, 'No longer young.'

[9] McCormack, *Queer Postcolonial Narratives*, p. 5.

[10] Ali and Ahmed, 'Identity crisis'; Schoene, 'Herald of hybridity'; Toth, 'No longer young.'

[11] Schoene, 'Herald of hybridity,' p. 111.

[12] Schoene, 'Herald of hybridity,' p. 112.

[13] Schoene, 'Herald of hybridity.'

[14] Schoene, 'Herald of hybridity.'

[15] [Cristiana Cornea](#), 'Stereotypes in Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia*,' in *The Criterion: An International Journal in English* 1, no. 3 (2010): 1–10, specifically p. 1, accessed 15 Jul. 2022.

[16] Cornea, 'Stereotypes in Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia*,' p. 10.

[17] Cornea, 'Stereotypes in Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia*.'

[18] Schoene, 'Herald of hybridity'

[19] [Neslihan Gunaydin](#), 'Racial tensions and identity conflicts in Hanif Kureishi's major works,' presented at The European Conference on Literature and Librarianship, Brighton, UK, **date** 2014, organised by The International Academic Forum, accessed 15 Oct. 2022.

[20] Gunaydin, 'Racial tensions'.

[21] [Radek Glabazña](#), 'Theater of identity: *The Buddha of Suburbia*,' in *Moravian Journal of Literature and Film* 2, no. 1 (2010): 65–78, accessed 22 Sep. 2021.

[22] Glabazña, 'Theater of identity', p. 71.

[23] Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, London: Routledge, 1994.

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[25] Groes, *The Making of London*.

[26] Groes, *The Making of London*.

[27] Demir, 'Neither here nor there.'

[28] Demir, 'Neither here nor there.'

[29] Demir, 'Neither here nor there.'

[30] Demir, 'Neither here nor there.'

[31] Demir, 'Neither here nor there,' p.691.

[32] McCormack, *Queer Postcolonial Narratives*.

[33] McCormack, *Queer Postcolonial Narratives*.

[34] McCormack, *Queer Postcolonial Narratives*.

[35] Nadia Brown and Sarah Allen Gershon, 'Body politics,' in *Politics, Groups, and Identities* 5, no. 1 (2017): 1–3, specifically p. 1, doi: [10.1080/21565503.2016.1276022](https://doi.org/10.1080/21565503.2016.1276022).

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[38] Achille Mbembe, trans. Libby Meintjes, 'Necropolitics,' *Public Culture* 15, no. 1 (2003): 11–40, specifically p. 36, doi: [10.1215/08992363-15-1-11](https://doi.org/10.1215/08992363-15-1-11).

[39] McCormack, *Queer Postcolonial Narratives*, p. 1.

[40] Hugo Cordova Quero, 'This body trans/forming me: Indecencies in transgender/intersex bodies, body fascism and the doctrine of the incarnation,' in *Controversies in Contextual Theology*, ed. Marcella Althaus-Reid and Lisa Isherwood, 80–128, Norwich: Hymns Ancient & Modern, 2008, specifically p. 110.

[41] McCormack, *Queer Postcolonial Narratives*, p. 2.

[42] McCormack, *Queer Postcolonial Narratives*.

[43] Sarah Coakley, 'Introduction: Religion and the Body,' in *Religion and the Body*, ed. Sarah Coakley, 1–14, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, specifically p. 6.

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[48] McCormack, *Queer Postcolonial Narratives*, p. 21.

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- [67] McCormack, *Queer Postcolonial Narratives*.
- [68] Foucault, *History of Sexuality*; McCormack, *Queer Postcolonial Narratives*, p. 15.
- [69] McCormack, *Queer Postcolonial Narratives*, p. 15.
- [70] Kureishi, *The Buddha of Suburbia*, p. 1.
- [71] Cornea, 'Stereotypes in Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia*.'
- [72] Kureishi, *The Buddha of Suburbia*, p. 53.
- [73] Kureishi, *The Buddha of Suburbia*, p. 55.
- [74] McCormack, *Queer Postcolonial Narratives*.
- [75] McCormack, *Queer Postcolonial Narratives*.
- [76] Kureishi, *The Buddha of Suburbia*, pp. 62–63.
- [77] McCormack, *Queer Postcolonial Narratives*, p. 2.
- [78] McCormack, *Queer Postcolonial Narratives*, pp. 8–9.
- [79] Kureishi, *The Buddha of Suburbia*, p. 1.
- [80] McCormack, *Queer Postcolonial Narratives*, p. 9.
- [81] Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, p. 38.
- [82] Kureishi, *The Buddha of Suburbia*, p. 24.
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- [84] Kureishi, *The Buddha of Suburbia*, p. 6.
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- [86] McCormack, *Queer Postcolonial Narratives*.

[87] Kureishi, *The Buddha of Suburbia*, p. 11.

[88] McCormack, *Queer Postcolonial Narratives*, p. 27.

[89] Kureishi, *The Buddha of Suburbia*, p. 119.

[90] McCormack, *Queer Postcolonial Narratives*, p. 27.

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