by the same author

PLAYS

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SCREENPLAYS

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FICTION

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Collected Stories

NON-FICTION

The Faber Book of Pop (edited with Jon Savage)
Dreaming and Scheming
My Ear at His Heart
The Word and the Bomb

Collected Essays

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WRITING

DOMESTIC

Introduction: The Writer's Time

This collection begins in the mid-1980s, and as far as I can recall, 'The Rainbow Sign' was the first essay I ever wrote. My then editor at Faber, Robert McCrum, had approached me about publishing the screenplay of *My Beautiful Laundrette* and suggested I write an introduction to it, since it might seem thin on its own.

I'm not keen on reading screenplays myself; I can't recall wanting to read one purely for pleasure, except for *The Third Man*. Certainly, when I write a screenplay, how it reads is not primary. A screenplay is more of a map than a work of art, and should show the director how he might get from here to there, while telling the actors what they should say.

In the 1980s Faber began to sell a lot of screenplays, especially Tarantino's. 'The Rainbow Sign' was an opportunity for me to think more about some of the issues raised in *My Beautiful Laundrette* and in the plays I'd written before that, which were concerned with race, class, sexuality and so on, questions provoked by my childhood and family situation, and which I couldn't help continuing to try to formulate and think around. These were questions – particularly the ones around race – which, it seemed to me, contemporary artists were reluctant to engage with, as if they didn't know where to begin.

Although I'd enjoyed the new extravagant and wild American journalism, a written version of rock 'n' roll, where, mostly, the writer appeared as a character and, inevitably, as the headline – Mailer, Wolfe, Hunter Thompson – I can't say they set a good example. You couldn't see the story for the star.

I preferred the modest intensity of James Baldwin's work. It seemed to me that he had more to say than the others, particularly

about what it is to live in a society where one's identity is always in doubt, if not under attack. (If other people have too many ideas about you it's impossible for them to see you. You are both over-scrutinised and ignored.)

And anyhow, whatever else other writers were doing, what I wanted was to describe myself in terms of the country I lived in, Britain. Adolescents read partly to find others who understand their situation, who suffer as they do, and have similar sexual experiences to them. But I had found very little in contemporary British writing which spoke for me. Immigration and social change were mostly off the agenda as subjects, and I was yet to begin my own account of being of mixed race, *The Buddha of Suburbia*.

'The Rainbow Sign', then, was an opportunity for me to consider some of these things, and to see if I could use the essay form expressively. After all, the writers I'd admired as a young man wrote essays as well as novels, stories, plays; it was part of the writer's work to use forms which tested and extended him. He was a different kind of writer according to what he was attempting; he could say different things. The theatre I came from, and where I'd worked since I was eighteen, and whose tradition of acting, directing and writing I admired – the Royal Court in Sloane Square – had been committed since the mid-50s to exploring Britain's post-war decline and the effects of the end of the empire, and what sort of renewal might be possible. It wanted to put the contemporary on stage. It recognised that without lively new voices the culture died.

I have wanted, too, to write about London, as so many others have done, and its fascination for me as a young man, particularly areas which were once considered louche, bohemian and 'mixed', and where, for a time after the war, the most lively people gathered: Chelsea, Notting Hill and Soho. These places have now become expensive and bland. Since the mid-80s and the construction of Canary Wharf, the centre of gravity of the city has shifted to the East, and it seems to me that I am once more living in a suburb. Luckily, there's no community spirit or noticeable

identity in Hammersmith, just immigrants moving in and out. People live here mainly because of its proximity to other places. But it's as good a point as any in which to take the temperature of this massive, diverse city.

I had wanted to be a writer – to devote myself to words and storytelling – from the age of fourteen. I can remember the moment it occurred to me, one day at school, and how differently I felt about the world after, the door to the future opening. But I hadn't given much thought as to how I would support myself, and later, a family. I seemed to believe that I'd get by somehow. The details didn't matter, particularly since I made the decision to write in 1968 – a time when creativity rather than 'bread' was the key. And the writers I'd admired – Kafka, Beckett, Kerouac, Henry Miller, amongst others – hardly had 'professional writer' on their passports. They were artists, which was different, and none of them, to my knowledge, seemed concerned about the price of prams, or had children at private school – both of which, according to a rather arch idea of Cyril Connolly's, were lethal for writers: 'There is no more sombre enemy of good art than the pram in the hallway.'

Perhaps, for some people, becoming an artist implies abandoning ordinary life for the excitement of bohemianism, but I can't say I know many writers like that. Writing is as steady a job as any job can be. Routine makes the imagination possible. 'Acting in', you could call it, as opposed to acting out. Writers are envied because writing, or perhaps any form of art, is the most gratifying sublimation of all; it is one thing you don't have to leave the house to do – warm but not impressive underwear being the only requirement, apart from some talent.

I guess I inherited the idea of 'professionalism' from my father, who is referred to often in this collection, as well as in my memoir *My Ear at His Heart*. His deepest wish was to write for a living rather than work as a clerk in an embassy, and he thought that being paid was a higher accolade, and a more dependable and useful form of praise, than a good review, something any writer would agree with.

When I dropped out of the first university I attended, and my father was ill – and things were beginning to fall apart for me, almost before they'd begun – someone suggested they might be able to get me work in Fleet Street. I considered this, but knew even then that I could never be a journalist. Journalism didn't resemble in any way what I wanted to do. It was too functional; I thought it would dilute my style; and it was too quick for me. Later, newspapers would call up with a request for a piece, often about a fascinating subject, and they'd want it overnight or in two and a half hours. I can write fast; I like to, it's sometimes the best way, charging ahead without hesitation or inhibition. But I have no interest in being continually under that kind of pressure; I panic, freeze and head for the pub.

The piece of writing I usually most enjoy doing is inevitably the thing I'm not supposed to be doing, so it can seem illicit. I like to work on something over a long period, returning to it repeatedly, adding, subtracting and altering, and taking advice from editors and friends, until I can't bear to look at it, which is when I guess it's done. Writing is highly labour intensive. It takes a lot of time – and much patient toleration of boredom, frustration and self-loathing – to achieve anything. Then you try to sell something to the world it doesn't know it needs.

George Orwell writes, with some baffled amusement, about people who just decide to write, without quite knowing what they might write about. No writer knows this, or would want to. He or she will probably be aware of some sort of impulse to speak, and will begin writing to explore, to discover – to create a self; it is a form of play more like a conversation than a programme. For me, the occasion of an essay is the opportunity to walk and think and dip into my library. It is an opportunity to continue to be a student – the finest thing in the world – and to try to find out if I have something to say. Writers often think of themselves, and are often characterised, as idlers, loafers or bums, since much of what we do takes place when we're not working, in the unconscious, and in cafés. I can't begin to tell you what hard work it is looking out of

the window and wondering about your favourite pen, and which colour ink you prefer that day, but few will be convinced.

Nevertheless, loafing is always more generative than obsessive concentration. It wouldn't be as if I knew in advance what I thought, particularly about the important subjects – writing, teaching, liberalism, and so-called religious fundamentalism. But I know I'm interested in the area where philosophy, literature and psychoanalysis cross over – the mind in the world. And I want to take the essential strangeness of the human being – both to himself and to others – as my subject.

At school in the 1950s and 1960s, the system wanted you to shut up; they had no desire to hear from you. Creativity in the young, and their engagement with the new Pop, existed only in spite of the authorities. More or less the whole of my formal education was concerned with enforced inhibition and constraint. I had to unfetter my imagination myself and learn to let it run. It sounds awkward to say that you might train your imagination, but you might learn, at least, to hear what it has to say, and to respond. Since a period in the early 1980s when I found I couldn't move forward with my work, I have used, in the morning, Freud's method of free association, which he himself discovered, oddly enough, in a wonderfully titled writing manual by Ludwig Borne: *The Art of Becoming an Original Writer in Three Days.* I found I could create ideas and avoid anxiety by throwing words at the page at random – putting down whatever occurred to me – the same way I used dreams as a way of uncovering ideas and connections. My unconscious might know more than I did – it was quicker, funnier and more economical – but its emanations, which could be prolific, had to be organised and considered.

I was always aware that I wanted to make a living as a writer, since it implied a level of commitment and seriousness which were crucial to me. For a start, I wouldn't have to wonder about what else I might like to do. It was the end of a certain kind of doubt. And vocational choices in the suburbs were limited, mostly to crime or clerking. I knew that the desire to make art and the desire

to make money are only sometimes compatible. Oddly, the curious public is often more concerned about the writer's routine than they are about how he actually gets food on his table, which is his major concern.

When I first began to write plays I was on the dole, and earned little money. Eight years after leaving university, I wrote a hit film and began to be surprised and a little overwhelmed at the number of cheques which turned up at my council flat. After all, I had nothing but myself to spend it on, and I wasted months wondering if I deserved it, or had truly earned it. If writing is, finally, a pleasure, and if you find that people envy you your vocation, you might wonder if you should be financially rewarded. But at last I decided to buy the most valuable commodity there is for a writer – time. I began the novel I'd always wanted to write. Being a screenwriter is always uncomfortable: the real artist in film is the director and, if you're lucky, the actors will make the dialogue sound good. The novelist works alone. It's all his responsibility.

However, I recall a morning, ten years after this, when my eldest sons were babies. They were playing with their au pair; an underpaid illegal immigrant was cleaning the house. Later, a no-doubt ruinously expensive man was coming to fix the central heating, and I was working on a dull short story for which I'd earn a hundred pounds, if I were lucky – and anyway I was blocked on that. I wondered if we'd ever survive. (We did, but I had to concentrate, particularly in the afternoons.)

Since then, as with most writers, there have been numerous dips and surges, and, I guess, it'll continue that way. I've written at least one book, my first novel *The Buddha of Suburbia*, which has remained in print worldwide for twenty years and provided a steady if not spectacular income. (An author should write at least one work the title of which the general public will remember and associate with him.) However, it's almost impossible for most writers to predict what they will earn in a year's time, let alone in five years. Perhaps this is a common writer's fear and wish, that he'll run out of money and will have to do something else. I have

many fears, among them that I will run out of paper, and also that I'll never finish anything, my computer being filled with incompleted pieces.

The position of the writer has altered a lot during the period I've been writing. In the 1980s small, individual publishing houses were bought by conglomerates, and advances increased hugely for some writers. Where before publishers could only afford relatively modest advances, some became extravagant and, luckily for some writers, even foolish. The publisher might have justified having the writer on their list in order to add weight, or respectability, or excitement. But the problem with a large advance is how much publicity and press the writer might have to do attempting to pay it off – not that he would be compelled to. However, next time the advance could well be lower.

I must give at least one interview a week, and I don't mind it much, unless the journalist calls me irritable, or diminutive. It does mean that the questions and the answers will always seem pre-packaged, although they may appear to be new to someone somewhere. If you are asked the same question repeatedly, you either sulkily refuse to answer it, or you are forced to find ways to make it appear interesting – mostly to yourself. Over a period of time, in interviews, you work up an account of yourself, then you develop it and one day you find you even believe it; finally it has become the story of your life.

The problem with being interviewed is that, on the whole, the two people are at cross-purposes. One wants to flog a few copies of their new book at full price and escape without personal injury, while the other wants to find out something new, and perhaps shocking, about the subject, which they will then inform the world about under a lurid headline. Fortunately both are usually disappointed. At the end, you always ask yourself, how many people are there who can only sell their product by also selling a part of themselves?

These days you can't put a cigarette paper between a writer and a performing flea. There is far more publicity, and more media,

than before. Critics and reviewers have less influence, as do individual newspapers. Every year there are new festivals, and occasions for writers, accompanied by an army of PR girls with clipboards, to display their work and their bodies, meeting readers and scratching in the front of their books. For a writer there are few sights more heartening than that of a long line at a book signing, and few experiences worse than sharing a table with a writer whose queue stretches outside the tent. Writing has almost become part of light entertainment, a form of cabaret. Some writers are good at this form of speaking, being adaptable and cheap – I have come to enjoy it. But many writers don't. There's no connection between being able to write and being able to explain your work in a rain-swept tent to an audience staring at you like hungry animals contemplating a suspect steak. Listening and reading are different experiences. Reading, writing for a reader, and being read, are intimate acts, and there's something about trying to articulate what you've done that can flatten and reduce it, horrifyingly so. Some writers choose the written word because they find it difficult to speak directly; many writers are in love with solitude. Whichever it is, good writing should resist interpretation, summary and the need for applause.

A lot of writers, of course, work as teachers, for money, pleasure and distraction, and I write in this collection about the importance and place of teaching, how useful it is and what idiocy it can encourage. It has been said that at least 2 per cent of the population is writing a novel; apparently that number is rising. There's been a gigantic increase in the number of writing courses available, both in universities and other institutions. Many of these students can only become teachers themselves, and I am sceptical of professional creative writing teachers. The most helpful teachers are usually 'real' writers who see working with students as part of their work. Scarcer is practical and realistic advice for young writers, particularly about how difficult it is to make a consistent living. Any artist has to exist in some functional relation to the real world. Of my students, the film students are the most

knowing and pragmatic, since to work in film at all is to be faced continuously with questions of budgets and time.

Writers are mad and promiscuous, if they're lucky; they make people up for a living, give them something to say, enter their minds, toy with them and often ruin their lives. One might like to think of oneself as a realist, but a good proportion of the important world is insubstantial, being made up of dream, fantasy, paranoid projections and the imagination. The only figure which comes close to showing the whole chaotic caboodle is literature.

But if a novel is concerned with numerous voices, and wants to keep them in play until the dispute is done, an essay is a monologue, a form of direct speech, and a whisper at that. The essay is as flexible a form as a story or novel; it is amenable to most forms of content. It can be as intellectual as Roland Barthes, Adam Phillips or Susan Sontag, as informal and casual as Max Beerbohm, or as cool and minimalist as Joan Didion. Unlike academic writing, the essay is usually written for the general or 'common' reader rather than for experts or students; for someone in a deck chair rather than at a desk. There should neither be footnotes nor much information in an essay; as a form, it is a meditation rather than an act of persuasion – though Robert Louis Stevenson's fine essay 'An Apology for Idlers' has encouraged me, as it should, towards a greater indolence: 'Perpetual devotion to what a man calls his business, is only to be sustained by perpetual neglect of many other things.'

Idleness may be the midwife of art, but the desire to write has not diminished in me over the years. If anything, it has increased. There is still that daily pressure to achieve something true, or at least put down a few words. Or, best of all, to have a good idea before bedtime which takes the work forward. I like to be surprised by what I write, and sometimes I even laugh at what comes out. I am my own first reader, and if I enjoy something, the reader might too.

I often wonder if I haven't said it all by now; I'd be happy to say it all again at half the price, but one doesn't stop developing,

burying old selves, seeking new difficulty and resistances in the material, and wanting to pin words to things. I'm not sure any writer gets over feeling clumsy, or, at times, over-facile. There are things he will never be able to get right, things he'll want to work on. Ageing writers slow down, they read more, and struggle with despair. But there are few artists who have the desire to give up their creativity as they decline. It is always exciting to have a good idea. The end of a life is as interesting as the beginning. If anyone asks a writer which of their pieces is their favourite, the answer can only be the one to come.

Hanif Kureishi, August 2010

POLITICS AND CULTURE

The Rainbow Sign

First published with the screenplay of *My Beautiful Laundrette*, 1986

'God gave Noah the rainbow sign,
No more water, the fire next time!'

ONE: ENGLAND

I was born in London of an English mother and Pakistani father. My father, who lives in London, came to England from Bombay in 1947 to be educated by the old colonial power. He married here and never went back to India. The rest of his large family, his brothers, their wives, his sisters, moved from Bombay to Karachi, in Pakistan, after partition.

Frequently during my childhood, I met my Pakistani uncles when they came to London on business. They were important, confident people who took me to hotels, restaurants and Test matches, often in taxis. But I had no idea of what the subcontinent was like or how my numerous uncles, aunts and cousins lived there. When I was nine or ten a teacher purposefully placed some pictures of Indian peasants in mud huts in front of me and said to the class: Hanif comes from India. I wondered: did my uncles ride on camels? Surely not in their suits? Did my cousins, so like me in other ways, squat down in the sand like little Mowglis, half-naked and eating with their fingers?

In the mid-1960s, Pakistanis were a risible subject in England, derided on television and exploited by politicians. They had the worst jobs, they were uncomfortable in England, some of them had difficulties with the language. They were despised and out of place.

From the start I tried to deny my Pakistani self. I was ashamed. It was a curse and I wanted to be rid of it. I wanted to be like everyone else. I read with understanding a story in a newspaper about a black boy who, when he noticed that burnt skin turned white, jumped into a bath of boiling water.

At school, one teacher always spoke to me in a 'Peter Sellers' Indian accent. Another refused to call me by my name, calling me Pakistani Pete instead. So I refused to call the teacher by *his* name and used his nickname instead. This led to trouble; arguments, detentions, escapes from school over hedges, and eventually suspension. This played into my hands; this couldn't have been better.

With a friend I roamed the streets and fields all day; I sat beside streams; I stole yellow lurex trousers from a shop and smuggled them out of the house under my school trousers; I hid in woods reading hard books; and I saw the film *Zulu* several times.

This friend, who became Johnny in my film, *My Beautiful Laundrette*, came one day to the house. It was a shock.

He was dressed in jeans so tough they almost stood up by themselves. These were suspended above his boots by Union Jack braces of 'hangman's strength', revealing a stretch of milk-bottle white leg. He seemed to have sprung up several inches because of his Dr Martens boots, which had steel caps and soles as thick as cheese sandwiches. His Ben Sherman shirt with a pleat down the back was essential. And his hair, which was only a quarter of an inch long all over, stuck out of his head like little nails. This unmoving creation he concentratedly touched up every hour with a sharpened steel comb that also served as a dagger.

He soon got the name Bog Brush, though this was not a moniker you would use to his face. Where before he was an angel-boy with a blond quiff flattened down by his mother's loving spit, a clean handkerchief always in his pocket, as well as being a keen cornet player for the Air Cadets, he'd now gained a brand-new truculent demeanour.

My mother was so terrified by this stormtrooper dancing on her doorstep to the 'Skinhead Moonstomp', which he moaned to himself continuously, that she had to lie down.

I decided to go out roaming with B.B. before my father got home from work. But it wasn't the same as before. We couldn't have our talks without being interrupted. Bog Brush had become Someone. To his intense pleasure, similarly dressed strangers greeted Bog Brush in the street as if they were in a war-torn foreign country and in the same army battalion. We were suddenly banned from cinemas. The Wimpy Bar in which we sat for hours with milkshakes wouldn't let us in. As a matter of pride we now had to go round the back and lob a brick at the rear window of the place.

Other strangers would spot us from the other side of the street. B.B. would yell 'Leg it!' as the enemy dashed through traffic and leapt over the bonnets of cars to get at us, screaming obscenities and chasing us up alleys, across allotments, around reservoirs, and on and on.

And then, in the evening, B.B. took me to meet with the other lads. We climbed the park railings and strolled across to the football pitch, by the goal posts. This is where the lads congregated to hunt down Pakistanis and beat them. Most of them I was at school with. The others I'd grown up with. I knew their parents. They knew my father.

I withdrew, from the park, from the lads, to a safer place, within myself. I moved into what I call my 'temporary' period. I was only waiting now to get away, to leave the London suburbs, to make another kind of life, somewhere else, with better people.

In this isolation, in my bedroom where I listened to Pink Floyd, the Beatles and the John Peel Show, I started to write down the speeches of politicians, the words which helped create the neo-Nazi attitudes I saw around me. This I called 'keeping the accounts'.

In 1965, Enoch Powell said: 'We should not lose sight of the desirability of achieving a steady flow of voluntary repatriation for the elements which are proving unsuccessful or unassimilable.'

In 1967, Duncan Sandys said: 'The breeding of millions of half-caste children would merely produce a generation of misfits and create national tensions.'

I wasn't a misfit; I could join the elements of myself together. It was the others, they wanted misfits; they wanted you to embody within yourself their ambivalence.

Also in 1967, Enoch Powell – who once said he would have loved to have been Viceroy of India – quoted a constituent of his as saying that because of the Pakistanis 'this country will not be worth living in for our children'.

And Powell said, more famously: 'As I look ahead I am filled with foreboding. Like the Roman, "I seem to see the River Tiber foaming with much blood"'.

As Powell's speeches appeared in the papers, graffiti in support of him appeared in the London streets. Racists gained confidence. People insulted me in the street. Someone in a café refused to eat at the same table with me. The parents of a girl I was in love with told her she'd get a bad reputation by going out with darkies.

Powell allowed himself to become a figurehead for racists. He helped create racism in Britain and was directly responsible not only for the atmosphere of fear and hatred but, through his influence, for individual acts of violence against Pakistanis.

Television comics used Pakistanis as the butt of their humour. Their jokes were highly political: they contributed to a way of seeing the world. The enjoyed reduction of racial hatred to a joke did two things: it expressed a collective view (which was sanctioned by its being on the BBC), and it was a celebration of contempt in millions of living rooms in England. I was afraid to watch TV because of it; it was too embarrassing, too degrading.

Parents of my friends, both lower-middle-class and working-class, often told me they were Powell supporters. Sometimes I heard them talking, heatedly, violently, about race, about 'the Pakis'. I was desperately embarrassed and afraid of being identified with these loathed aliens. I found it almost impossible to answer questions about where I came from. The word 'Pakistani' had been made into an insult. It was a word I didn't want used about myself. I couldn't tolerate being myself.

The British complained incessantly that the Pakistanis wouldn't assimilate. This meant they wanted the Pakistanis to be exactly like them. But of course even then they would have rejected them.

The British were doing the assimilating: they assimilated Pakistanis to their world view. They saw them as dirty, ignorant and less than human – worthy of abuse and violence.

At this time I found it difficult to get along with anyone. I was frightened and hostile. I suspected that my white friends were capable of racist insults. And many of them did taunt me, innocently. I reckoned that at least once every day since I was five years old I had been racially abused. I became incapable of distinguishing between remarks that were genuinely intended to hurt and those intended as 'humour'.

I became cold and distant. I began to feel I was very violent. But I didn't know how to be violent. If I had known, if that had come naturally to me, or if there'd been others I could follow, I would have made my constant fantasies of revenge into realities, I would have got into trouble, willingly hurt people, or set fire to things.

But I mooched around libraries. There, in an old copy of *Life* magazine, I found pictures of the Black Panthers. It was Eldridge Cleaver, Huey Newton, Bobby Seale and their confederates in black vests and slacks, with Jimi Hendrix haircuts. Some of them were holding guns, the Army .45 and the 12-gauge Magnum shotgun with 18-inch barrel that Huey specified for street fighting.

I tore down my pictures of the Rolling Stones and Cream and replaced them with the Panthers. I found it all exhilarating. These people were proud and they were fighting. To my knowledge, no one in England was fighting.

There was another, more important picture.

On the cover of the Penguin edition of *The Fire Next Time* was James Baldwin holding a child, his nephew. Baldwin, having suffered, having been there, was all anger and understanding. He was intelligence and love combined. As I planned my escape I read Baldwin all the time, I read Richard Wright and I admired Muhammad Ali.

A great moment occurred when I was in a sweet shop. I saw through to a TV in the back room on which was showing the 1968 Olympic Games in Mexico. Tommie Smith and John Carlos were raising their fists on the victory rostrum, giving the Black Power salute as 'The Star Spangled Banner' played. The white shopkeeper was outraged. He said to me: they shouldn't mix politics and sport.

During this time there was always Muhammad Ali, the former Cassius Clay, a great sportsman become black spokesman. Now a Muslim, millions of fellow Muslims all over the world prayed for his victory when he fought.

And there was the Nation of Islam movement to which Ali belonged, led by the man who called himself the Messenger of Islam and wore a gold-embroidered fez, Elijah Muhammad.

Elijah was saying in the mid-1960s that the rule of the white devils would end in fifteen years. He preached separatism, separate development for black and white. He ran his organisation by charisma and threat, claiming that anyone who challenged him would be chastened by Allah. Apparently Allah also turned the minds of defectors into a turmoil.

Elijah's disciple Malcolm X, admirer of Gandhi and self-confirmed anti-Semite, accepted in prison that 'the key to a Muslim is submission, the attunement of one towards Allah'. That this glorious resistance to the white man, the dismissal of Christian meekness, was followed by submission to Allah and worse, to Elijah Muhammad, was difficult to take.

I saw racism as unreason and prejudice, ignorance and a failure of sense; it was Fanon's 'incomprehension'. That the men I wanted to admire had liberated themselves only to take to unreason, to the abdication of intelligence, was shocking to me. And the separatism, the total loathing of the white man as innately corrupt, the 'All whites are devils' view, was equally unacceptable. I had to live in England, in the suburbs of London, with whites. My mother was white. I wasn't ready for separate development. I'd had too much of that already.

Luckily James Baldwin wasn't too keen either. In *The Fire Next Time* he describes a visit to Elijah Muhammad. He tells of how close he feels to Elijah and how he wishes to be able to love him. But when he tells Elijah that he has many white friends, he receives Elijah's pity. For Elijah the whites' time is up. It's no good Baldwin telling him he has white friends with whom he'd entrust his life.

As the evening goes on, Baldwin tires of the sycophancy around Elijah. He and Elijah would always be strangers and 'possibly enemies'. Baldwin deplores the black Muslims' turning to Africa and to Islam, this turning away from the reality of America and 'inventing' the past. Baldwin also mentions Malcolm X and the chief of the American Nazi party saying that racially speaking they were in complete agreement: they both wanted separate development. Baldwin adds that the debasement of one race and the glorification of another in this way inevitably leads to murder.

After this the Muslims weren't too keen on Baldwin, to say the least. Eldridge Cleaver, who once raped white women 'on principle', had a picture of Elijah Muhammad, the great strength-giver, on his prison wall. Later he became a devoted supporter of Malcolm X.

Cleaver says of Baldwin: 'There is in James Baldwin's work the most gruelling, agonising, total hatred of the blacks, particularly of himself, and the most shameful, fanatical, fawning, sycophantic love of the white that one can find in the writing of any black American writer of note in our time.'

How strange it was to me, this worthless abuse of a writer who could enter the minds and skins of both black and white, and the good just anger turning to passionate Islam as a source of pride instead of to a digested political commitment to a different kind of whole society. And this easy thrilling talk of 'white devils' instead of close analysis of the institutions that kept blacks low.

I saw the taking up of Islam as an aberration, a desperate fantasy of worldwide black brotherhood; it was a symptom of extreme alienation. It was also an inability to seek a wider political view or cooperation with other oppressed groups – or with the working

class as a whole – since alliance with white groups was necessarily out of the question.

I had no idea what an Islamic society would be like, what the application of the authoritarian theology Elijah preached would mean in practice. I forgot about it, fled the suburbs, went to university, got started as a writer and worked as an usher at the Royal Court Theatre. It was over ten years before I went to an Islamic country.

TWO: PAKISTAN

The man had heard that I was interested in talking about his country, Pakistan, and that this was my first visit. He kindly kept trying to take me aside to talk. But I was already being talked to.

I was at another Karachi party, in a huge house, with a glass of whisky in one hand, and a paper plate in the other. Casually I'd mentioned to a woman friend of the family that I wasn't against marriage. Now this friend was earnestly recommending to me a young woman who wanted to move to Britain, with a husband. To my discomfort this go-between was trying to fix a time for the three of us to meet and negotiate.

I went to three parties a week in Karachi. This time, when I could get away from this woman, I was with landowners, diplomats, businessmen and politicians: powerful people. This pleased me. They were people I wouldn't have been able to get to in England and I wanted to write about them.

They were drinking heavily. Every liberal in England knows you can be lashed for drinking in Pakistan. But as far as I could tell, none of this English-speaking international bourgeoisie would be lashed for anything. They all had their favourite trusted bootleggers who negotiated the potholes of Karachi at high speed on disintegrating motorcycles, with the hooch stashed on the back. Bad bootleggers passed a hot needle through the neck of your bottle and drew your whisky out. Stories were told of guests politely sipping ginger beer with their ice and soda, glancing at other guests

to see if they were drunk and wondering if their own alcohol tolerance had miraculously increased.

I once walked into a host's bathroom to see the bath full of floating whisky bottles being soaked to remove the labels, a servant sitting on a stool serenely poking at them with a stick.

So it was all as tricky and expensive as buying cocaine in London, with the advantage that as the hooch market was so competitive, the 'leggers delivered video tapes at the same time, dashing into the room towards the TV with hot copies of *The Jewel in the Crown*, *The Far Pavilions*, and an especially popular programme called *Mind Your Language*, which represented Indians and Pakistanis as ludicrous caricatures.

Everyone, except the mass of the population, had videos. And I could see why, since Pakistan TV was so peculiar. On my first day I turned it on and a cricket match was taking place. I settled in my chair. But the English players, who were on tour in Pakistan, were leaving the pitch. In fact, Bob Willis and Ian Botham were running towards the dressing rooms surrounded by armed police and this wasn't because Botham had made derogatory remarks about Pakistan. (He said it was a country to which he'd like to send his mother-in-law.) In the background a section of the crowd was being tear-gassed. Then the screen went blank.

Stranger still, and more significant, was the fact that the news was now being read in Arabic, a language few people in Pakistan understood. Someone explained to me that this was because the Koran was in Arabic, but everyone else said it was because General Zia wanted to kiss the arses of the Arabs.

The man at the party, who was drunk, wanted to tell me something and kept pulling at me. The man was worried. But wasn't I worried too? I was trapped with this woman and the marriage proposal.

I was having a little identity crisis. I'd been greeted so warmly in Pakistan, I felt so excited by what I saw, and so at home with all my uncles, I wondered if I were not better off here than there. And when I said, with a little unnoticed irony, that I was an Englishman,

people laughed. They fell about. Why would anyone with a brown face, Muslim name and large well-known family in Pakistan want to lay claim to that cold little decrepit island off Europe where you always had to spell your name? Strangely, anti-British remarks made me feel patriotic, though I only felt patriotic when I was away from England.

But I couldn't allow myself to feel too Pakistani. I didn't want to give in to that falsity, that sentimentality. As someone said to me at a party, provoked by the fact I was wearing jeans: we are Pakistanis, but you, you will always be a Paki – emphasising the slang derogatory name the English used against Pakistanis, and therefore the fact that I couldn't rightfully lay claim to either place.

In England I was a playwright. In Karachi this meant little. There were no theatres; the arts were discouraged by the state – music and dancing are un-Islamic – and ignored by practically everyone else. So despite everything I felt pretty out of place.

The automatic status I gained through my family obtained for me such acceptance, respect and luxury that for the first time I could understand the privileged and their penchant for marshalling ridiculous arguments to justify their delicious and untenable position as an élite. But as I wasn't a doctor, businessman or military person, people suspected that this writing business I talked about was a complicated excuse for idleness, uselessness and general bumming around. In fact, as I proclaimed an interest in the entertainment business, and talked much and loudly about how integral the arts were to a society, moves were being made to set me up in the amusement arcade business, in Shepherd's Bush.

Finally the man got me on my own. His name was Rahman. He was a friend of my intellectual uncle. I had many uncles, but Rahman preferred the intellectual one who understood Rahman's particular sorrow and like him considered himself to be a marginal man.

In his fifties, a former Air Force officer, Rahman was liberal, well travelled and married to an Englishwoman who now had a Pakistani accent.

He said to me: 'I tell you, this country is being sodomised by religion. It is even beginning to interfere with the making of money. And now we are embarked on this dynamic regression, you must know, it is obvious, Pakistan has become a leading country to go away from. Our patriots are abroad. We despise and envy them. For the rest of us, our class, your family, we are in Hobbes's state of nature: insecure, frightened. We cling together out of necessity.' He became optimistic. 'We could be like Japan, a tragic oriental country that is now progressive, industrialised.' He laughed and then said, ambiguously: 'But only God keeps this country together. You must say this around the world: we are taking a great leap backwards.'

The bitterest blow for Rahman was the dancing. He liked to waltz and foxtrot. But now the expression of physical joy, of sensuality and rhythm, was banned. On TV you could see where it had been censored. When couples in Western programmes got up to dance there'd be a jerk in the film, and they'd be sitting down again. For Rahman it was inexplicable, an unnecessary cruelty that was almost more arbitrary than anything else.

Thus the despair of Rahman and my uncles' 'high and dry' generation. Mostly educated in Britain, like Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan – who was a smoking, drinking, non-Urdu-speaking lawyer and claimed that Pakistan would never be a theocracy ('that Britisher', he was sometimes called) – their intellectual mentors were Tawney, Shaw, Russell, Laski. For them the new Islamisation was the negation of their lives.

It was a lament I heard often. This was the story they told. Karachi was a goodish place in the 1960s and 1970s. Until about 1977 it was lively and vigorous. You could drink and dance in the Raj-style clubs (providing you were admitted) and the atmosphere was liberal – as long as you didn't meddle in politics, in which case you'd probably be imprisoned. Politically there was Bhutto: urbane, Oxford-educated, considering himself to be a poet and revolutionary, a veritable Chairman Mao of the subcontinent. He said he would fight obscurantism and illiteracy, ensure the equality of men

and women, and increase access to education and medical care. The desert would bloom.

Later, in an attempt to save himself, appease the mullahs and rouse the dissatisfied masses behind him, he introduced various Koranic injunctions into the constitution and banned alcohol, gambling, horse-racing. The Islamisation had begun, and was fervently continued after his execution.

Islamisation built no hospitals, no schools, no houses; it cleaned no water and installed no electricity. But it was direction, identity. The country was to be in the hands of the divine, or rather, in the hands of those who elected themselves to interpret the single divine purpose. Under the tyranny of the priesthood, with the cooperation of the army, Pakistan would embody Islam in itself.

There would now be no distinction between ethical and religious obligation; there would now be no areas in which it was possible to be wrong. The only possible incertitude was of interpretation. The theory would be the written eternal and universal principles which Allah created and made obligatory for men; the model would be the first three generations of Muslims; and the practice would be Pakistan.

As a Professor of Law at the Islamic University wrote: 'Pakistan accepts Islam as the basis of economic and political life. We do not have a single reason to make any separation between Islam and Pakistan society. Pakistanis now adhere rigorously to Islam and cling steadfastly to their religious heritage. They never speak of these things with disrespect. With an acceleration in the process of Islamisation, governmental capabilities increase and national identity and loyalty become stronger. Because Islamic civilisation has brought Pakistanis very close to certainty, this society is ideally imbued with a moral mission.'

This moral mission and the over-emphasis on dogma and punishment resulted in the kind of strengthening of the repressive, militaristic and nationalistically aggressive state seen all over the world in the authoritarian 1980s. With the added bonus that in Pakistan, God was always on the side of the government.

But despite all the strident nationalism, as Rahman said, the patriots were abroad; people were going away: to the West, to Saudi Arabia, anywhere. Young people continually asked me about the possibility of getting into Britain and some thought of taking some smack with them to bankroll their establishment. They had what was called the Gulf Syndrome, a condition I recognised from my time living in the suburbs. It was a dangerous psychological cocktail consisting of ambition, suppressed excitement, bitterness and sexual longing.

Then a disturbing incident occurred which seemed to encapsulate the going-away fever. An eighteen-year-old girl from a village called Chakwal dreamed that the villagers walked across the Arabian Sea to Karbala where they found money and work. Following this dream the village set off one night for the beach which happened to be near my uncle's house, in fashionable Clifton. Here lived politicians and diplomats in LA-style white bungalows with sprinklers on the lawn, a Mercedes in the drive and dogs and watchmen at the gates.

Here Benazir Bhutto was under house arrest. Her dead father's mansion was patrolled by the army who boredly nursed machine-guns and sat in tents beneath the high walls.

On the beach, the site of barbecues and late-night parties, the men of the Chakwal village packed the women and children into trunks and pushed them into the Arabian Sea. Then they followed them into the water, in the direction of Karbala. All but twenty of the potential émigrés were drowned. The survivors were arrested and charged with illegal emigration.

It was the talk of Karachi. It caused much amusement but people like Rahman despaired of a society that could be so confused, so advanced in some respects, so very naive in others.

And all the (more orthodox) going away disturbed and confused the family set-up. When the men who'd been away came back, they were different, they were dissatisfied, they had seen more, they wanted more. Their neighbours were envious and resentful. Once more the society was being changed by outside forces, not by its own volition.

About twelve people lived permanently in my uncle's house, plus servants who slept in sheds at the back, just behind the chickens and dogs. Relatives sometimes came to stay for months. New bits had to be built on to the house. All day there were visitors; in the evenings crowds of people came over; they were welcome, and they ate and watched videos and talked for hours. People weren't so protective of their privacy as they were in London.

This made me think about the close-bonding within the families and about the intimacy and interference of an extended family and a more public way of life. Was the extended family worse than the little nuclear family because there were more people to dislike? Or better because relationships were less intense?

Strangely, bourgeois-bohemian life in London, in Notting Hill and Islington and Fulham, was far more formal. It was frozen dinner parties and the division of social life into the meeting of couples with other couples, to discuss the lives of other coupling couples. Months would pass, then this would happen again.

In Pakistan, there was the continuity of the various families' knowledge of each other. People were easy to place; your grandparents and theirs were friends. When I went to the bank and showed the teller my passport, it turned out he knew several of my uncles, so I didn't receive the usual perfunctory treatment. This was how things worked.

I compared the collective hierarchy of the family and the performance of my family's circle with my feckless, rather rootless life in London, in what was called 'the inner city'. There I lived alone, and lacked any long connection with anything. I'd hardly known anyone for more than eight years, and certainly not their parents. People came and went. There was much false intimacy and forced friendship. People didn't take responsibility for each other.

Many of my friends lived alone in London, especially the women. They wanted to be independent and to enter into relationships – as many as they liked, with whom they liked – out of choice. They didn't merely want to reproduce the old patterns of living. The future was to be determined by choice and reason, not

by custom. The notions of duty and obligation barely had positive meaning for my friends; they were loaded, Victorian words, redolent of constraint and grandfather clocks, the antithesis of generosity in love, the new hugging, and the transcendence of the family. The ideal of the new relationship was no longer the S and M of the old marriage – it was F and C, freedom plus commitment.

In the large, old families where there was nothing but the old patterns, disturbed only occasionally by the new ways, this would have seemed a contrivance, a sort of immaturity, a failure to understand and accept the determinacies that life necessarily involved.

So there was much pressure to conform, especially on the women.

'Let these women be warned,' said a mullah to the dissenting women of Rawalpindi. 'We will tear them to pieces. We will give them such terrible punishments that no one in future will dare to raise a voice against Islam.'

I remember a woman saying to me at dinner one night: 'We know at least one thing. God will never dare to show his face in this country – the women will tear him apart!'

The family scrutiny and criticism was difficult to take, as was all the bitching and gossip. But there was warmth and continuity for a large number of people; there was security and much love. Also there was a sense of duty and community – of people's lives genuinely being lived together, whether they liked each other or not – that you didn't get in London. There, those who'd eschewed the family hadn't succeeded in creating some other form of supportive common life. In Pakistan there was that supportive common life, but at the expense of movement and change.

In the 1960s of Enoch Powell and graffiti, the Black Muslims and Malcolm X gave needed strength to the descendants of slaves by 'taking the wraps off the white man'; Eldridge Cleaver was yet to be converted to Christianity and Huey P. Newton was toting his Army ·45. A boy in a bedroom in a suburb, who had the King's

Road constantly on his mind and who changed the picture on his wall from week to week, was unhappy, and separated from the 1960s as by a thick glass wall against which he could only press his face. But bits of the 1960s were still around in Pakistan: the liberation rhetoric, for example, the music, the clothes, the drugs, not as the way of life they were originally intended to be, but as appendages to another, stronger tradition.

As my friends and I went into the Bara Market near Peshawar, close to the border with Afghanistan, in a rattling motorised rickshaw, I became apprehensive. There were large signs by the road telling foreigners that the police couldn't take responsibility for them: beyond this point the police would not go. Apparently the Pathans there, who were mostly refugees from Afghanistan, liked to kidnap foreigners and extort ransoms. My friends, who were keen to buy opium, which they'd give to the rickshaw driver to carry, told me everything was all right, because I wasn't a foreigner. I kept forgetting that.

The men were tough, martial, insular and proud. They lived in mud houses and tin shacks built like forts for shooting from. They were inevitably armed, with machine-guns slung over their shoulders. In the street you wouldn't believe women existed here, except you knew they took care of the legions of young men in the area who'd fled from Afghanistan to avoid being conscripted by the Russians and sent to Moscow for re-education.

Ankle deep in mud, I went round the market. Pistols, knives, Russian-made rifles, hand grenades and large lumps of dope and opium were laid out on stalls like tomatoes and oranges. Everyone was selling heroin.

The Americans, who had much money invested in Pakistan, in this compliant right-wing buffer-zone between Afghanistan and India, were furious that their children were being destroyed by a flourishing illegal industry in a country they financed. But the Americans sent to Pakistan could do little about it. Involvement in the heroin trade went right through Pakistan society: the police, the judiciary, the army, the landlords, the customs officials were all

involved. After all, there was nothing in the Koran about heroin, nothing specific. I was even told that its export made ideological sense. Heroin was anti-Western; addiction in Western children was a deserved symptom of the moral vertigo of godless societies. It was a kind of colonial revenge. Reverse imperialism, the Karachi wits called it, inviting nemesis. The reverse imperialism was itself being reversed.

In a flat high above Karachi, an eighteen-year-old kid strung-out on heroin danced cheerfully around the room in front of me and pointed to an erection in the front of his trousers, which he referred to as his Imran Khan, the name of the handsome Pakistan cricket captain. More and more of the so-called multinational kids were taking heroin now. My friends who owned the flat, journalists on a weekly paper, were embarrassed.

But they always had dope to offer their friends. These laid-back people were mostly professionals: lawyers, an inspector in the police who smoked what he confiscated, a newspaper magnate, and various other journalists. Heaven it was to smoke at midnight on the beach, as local fishermen, squatting respectfully behind you, fixed fat joints; and the 'erotic politicians' themselves, the Doors, played from a portable stereo while the Arabian Sea rolled on to the beach. Oddly, since heroin and dope were both indigenous to the country, it took the West to make them popular in the East.

In so far as colonisers and colonised engage in a relationship with the latter aspiring to be like the former, you wouldn't catch anyone of my uncle's generation with a joint in their mouth. It was *infra dig* – for the peasants. Shadowing the British, they drank whisky and read *The Times*; they praised others by calling them 'gentlemen'; and their eyes filled with tears at old Vera Lynn records.

But the kids discussed yoga exercises. You'd catch them standing on their heads. They even meditated. Though one boy who worked at the airport said it was too much of a Hindu thing for Muslims to be doing; if his parents caught him chanting a mantra he'd get a backhander across the face. Mostly the kids listened to the Stones,

Van Morrison and Bowie as they flew over ruined roads to the beach in bright red and yellow Japanese cars with quadraphonic speakers, past camels and acres of wasteland.

Here, all along the railway track, the poor and diseased and hungry lived in shacks and huts; the filthy poor gathered around rusty standpipes to fetch water; or ingeniously they resurrected wrecked cars, usually Morris Minors; and here they slept in huge sewer pipes among buffalo, chickens and wild dogs. Here I met a policeman who I thought was on duty. But the policeman lived here, and hanging on the wall of his falling-down shed was his spare white police uniform, which he'd had to buy himself.

If not to the beach, the kids went to the Happy Hamburger to hang out. Or to each other's houses to watch Clint Eastwood tapes and giggle about sex, of which they were so ignorant and deprived. I watched a group of agitated young men in their mid-twenties gather around a 1950s medical book to look at the female genitalia. For these boys, who watched Western films and mouthed the lyrics of pop songs celebrating desire ('come on, baby, light my fire'), life before marriage could only be like spending years and years in a single-sex public school; for them women were mysterious, unknown, desirable and yet threatening creatures of almost another species, whom you had to respect, marry and impregnate but couldn't be friends with. And in this country where the sexes were usually strictly segregated, the sexual tension could be palpable. The men who could afford to, flew to Bangkok for relief. The others squirmed and resented women. The kind of sexual openness that was one of the few real achievements of the 1960s, the discussion of contraception, abortion, female sexuality and prostitution which some women were trying to advance, received incredible hostility. But women felt it was only a matter of time before progress was made; it was much harder to return to ignorance than the mullahs thought.

A stout intense lawyer in his early thirties of immense extrovert charm – with him it was definitely the 1980s, not the 1960s. His

father was a judge. He himself was intelligent, articulate and fiercely representative of the other 'new spirit' of Pakistan. He didn't drink, smoke or fuck. Out of choice. He prayed five times a day. He worked all the time. He was determined to be a good Muslim, since that was the whole point of the country existing at all. He wasn't indulgent, except religiously, and he lived in accordance with what he believed. I took to him immediately.

We had dinner in an expensive restaurant. It could have been in London or New York. The food was excellent, I said. The lawyer disagreed, with his mouth full, shaking his great head. It was definitely no good, it was definitely meretricious rubbish. But for ideological reasons only, I concluded, since he ate with relish. He was only in the restaurant because of me, he said.

There was better food in the villages; the new food in Pakistan was, frankly, a tribute to chemistry rather than cuisine. Only the masses had virtue, they knew how to live, how to eat. He told me that those desiccated others, the marginal men I associated with and liked so much, were a plague class with no values. Perhaps, he suggested, eating massively, this was why I liked them, being English. Their education, their intellectual snobbery, made them un-Islamic. They didn't understand the masses and they spoke in English to cut themselves off from the people. Didn't the best jobs go to those with a foreign education? He was tired of those Westernised elders denigrating their country and its religious nature. They'd been contaminated by the West, they didn't know their own country, and the sooner they got out and were beaten up by racists abroad the better.

The lawyer and I went out into the street. It was busy, the streets full of strolling people. There were dancing camels and a Pakistan trade exhibition. The lawyer strode through it all, yelling. The exhibition was full of Pakistan-made imitations of Western goods: bathrooms in chocolate and strawberry, TVs with stereos attached; fans, air-conditioners, heaters; and an arcade full of space-invaders. The lawyer got agitated.

These were Western things, of no use to the masses. The masses didn't have water, what would they do with strawberry bathrooms?

The masses wanted Islam, not space-invaders or . . . or elections. Are elections a Western thing? I asked. Don't they have them in India too? No, they're a Western thing, the lawyer said. How could they be required under Islam? There need only be one party – the party of the righteous.

This energetic lawyer would have pleased and then disappointed Third World intellectuals and revolutionaries from an earlier era, people like Fanon and Guevara. This talk of liberation – at last the acknowledgement of the virtue of the toiling masses, the struggle against neo-colonialism, its bourgeois stooges, and American interference – the entire recognisable rhetoric of freedom and struggle, ends in the lawyer's mind with the country on its knees, at prayer. Having started to look for itself it finds itself . . . in the eighth century.

Islam and the masses. My numerous meetings with scholars, revisionists, liberals who wanted the Koran 'creatively' interpreted to make it compatible with modern science. The many medieval monologues of mullahs I'd listened to. So much talk, theory and Byzantine analysis.

I strode into a room in my uncle's house. Half-hidden by a curtain, on a verandah, was an aged woman servant wearing my cousin's old clothes, praying. I stopped and watched her. In the morning as I lay in bed, she swept the floor of my room with some twigs bound together. She was at least sixty. Now, on the shabby prayer mat, she was tiny and around her the universe was endless, immense, but God was above her. I felt she was acknowledging that which was larger than her, humbling herself before the infinite, knowing and feeling her own insignificance. It was a truthful moment, not empty ritual. I wished I could do it.

I went with the lawyer to the Mosque in Lahore, the largest in the world. I took off my shoes, padded across the immense courtyard with the other men – women were not allowed – and got on my knees. I banged my forehead on the marble floor. Beside me a man in a similar posture gave a world-consuming yawn. I waited

but could not lose myself in prayer. I could only travesty the woman's prayer, to whom it had a world of meaning.

Perhaps she did want a society in which her particular moral and religious beliefs were mirrored, and no others, instead of some plural, liberal mélange; a society in which her own cast of mind, her customs, way of life and obedience to God were established with full legal and constituted authority. But it wasn't as if anyone had asked her.

In Pakistan, England just wouldn't go away. Despite the Lahore lawyer, despite everything, England was very much on the minds of Pakistanis. Relics of the Raj were everywhere: buildings, monuments, Oxford accents, libraries full of English books, and newspapers. Many Pakistanis had relatives in England; thousands of Pakistani families depended on money sent from England. Visiting a village, a man told me through an interpreter that when his three grandchildren visited from Bradford, he had to hire an interpreter to speak to them. It was happening all the time – the closeness of the two societies, and the distance.

Although Pakistanis still wanted to escape to England, the old men in their clubs and the young eating their hamburgers took great pleasure in England's decline and decay. The great master was fallen. Now it was seen as strikebound, drug-ridden, riot-torn, inefficient, disunited, a society which had moved too suddenly from puritanism to hedonism and now loathed itself. And the Karachi wits liked to ask me when I thought the Americans would decide the British were ready for self-government.

Yet people like Rahman still clung to what they called British ideals, maintaining that it is a society's ideals, its conception of human progress, that define the level of its civilisation. They regretted, under the Islamisation, the repudiation of the values which they said were the only positive aspect of Britain's legacy to the subcontinent. These were: the idea of secular institutions based on reason, not revelation or scripture; the idea that there were no final solutions to human problems; and the idea that the health

and vigour of a society was bound up with its ability to tolerate and express a plurality of views on all issues, and that these views would be welcomed.

But England as it is today, the ubiquity of racism and the suffering of Pakistanis because of it, was another, stranger subject. When I talked about it, the response was unexpected. Those who'd been to England often told of being insulted, or beaten up, or harassed at the airport. But even these people had attitudes similar to those who hadn't been there.

It was that the English misunderstood the Pakistanis because they saw only the poor people, those from the villages, the illiterates, the peasants, the Pakistanis who didn't know how to use toilets, how to eat with knives and forks because they were poor. If the British could only see *them*, the rich, the educated, the sophisticated, they wouldn't be so hostile. They'd know what civilised people the Pakistanis really were. And then they'd like them.

The implication was that the poor who'd emigrated to the West to escape the strangulation of the rich in Pakistan deserved the racism they received in Britain because they really were contemptible. The Pakistani middle class shared the disdain of the British for the émigré working class and peasantry of Pakistan.

It was interesting to see that the British working class (and not only the working class, of course) used the same vocabulary of contempt about Pakistanis – the charges of ignorance, laziness, fecklessness, uncleanliness – that their own, British middle class used about them. And they weren't able to see the similarity.

Racism goes hand-in-hand with class inequality. Among other things, racism is a kind of snobbery, a desire to see oneself as superior culturally and economically, and a desire to actively experience and enjoy that superiority by hostility or violence. And when that superiority of class and culture is unsure or not acknowledged by the Other – as it would be acknowledged by the servant and master in class-stable Pakistan – but is in doubt, as with the British working class and Pakistanis in England, then it has to be demonstrated physically. Everyone knows where they stand then –

the class inequality is displayed, just as any other snob demonstrates superiority by exhibiting wealth or learning or ancestry.

So some of the middle class of Pakistan, who also used the familiar vocabulary of contempt about their own poor (and, incidentally, about the British poor), couldn't understand when I explained that British racists weren't discriminating in their racial discrimination: they loathed all Pakistanis and kicked whoever was nearest. To the English all Pakistanis were the same; racists didn't ask whether you had a chauffeur, TV and private education before they set fire to your house. But for some Pakistanis, it was their own poor who had brought this upon them.

THREE: ENGLAND

It has been an arduous journey. Since Enoch Powell in the 1960s, there have been racist marches through south London approved by the Labour Home Secretary; attacks by busloads of racists on Southall, which the Asians violently and successfully repelled; and the complicated affair of young Asians burned to death and Asian shops razed to the ground by young blacks in Handsworth, Birmingham. The insults, the beatings, the murders continue. Although there has been white anger and various race relations legislation, Pakistanis are discriminated against in all areas.

Powell's awful prophecy was fulfilled: the hate he worked to create and the party of which he was a member brought about his prediction. The River Tiber has indeed overflowed with much blood – Pakistani blood. And seventeen years later Powell has once more called for repatriation, giving succour to those who hate.

The fight back is under way. The defence committees, vigilante groups, study groups, trade union and women's groups are flourishing. People have changed, become united, through struggle and self-defence. My white friends, like Bog Brush, didn't enjoy fighting Pakistanis. They had a reputation for premature sobbing and cowardice. You didn't get your money's worth fighting a Paki. That's quite different now.

The fierce truculent pride of the Black Panthers is here now, as is the separatism, the violence, the bitterness and pathetic elevation of an imaginary homeland. This is directly spawned by racism.

Our cities are full of Asian shops. Where one would want black united with black, there are class differences as with all groups. Those Pakistanis who have worked hard to establish businesses now vote Tory and give money to the Conservative Party. Their interests are the same as those of middle-class business people everywhere, though they are subject to more jealousy and violence. They have wanted to elevate themselves out of the maelstrom and by gaining economic power and the opportunity and dignity it brings, they have made themselves safe – safer. They have taken advantage of England.

But what is the Conservative view of them? Roger Scruton in his book *The Meaning Of Conservatism* sets out the case against mutual respect and understanding.

Firstly he deplores all race relations legislation and tries to justify certain kinds of racism by making it seem a harmless preference for certain kinds of people. He calls this preference a 'natural offshoot' of allegiance. Secondly, and more tellingly, he says that 'illiberal sentiments . . . arise inevitably from social consciousness: they involve natural prejudice, and a desire for the company of one's kind. That is hardly sufficient ground to condemn them as "racist"'.

The crucial Conservative idea here is Scruton's notion of 'the company of one's kind'. What is the company of one's kind? Who exactly is of one's kind and what kind of people are they? Are they only those of the same 'nation', of the same colour, race and background? I suspect that that is what Scruton intends. But what a feeble, bloodless, narrow conception of human relationships and the possibilities of love and communication that he can only see 'one's kind' in this exclusive and complacent way!

One does seek the company of one's kind, of those in the same street, in the same club, in the same office. But the idea that these are the only people one can get along with or identify with, that

one's humanity is such a held-back thing that it can't extend beyond this, leads to the denigration of those unlike oneself. It leads to the idea that others have less humanity than oneself or one's own group or 'kind'; and to the idea of the Enemy, of the alien, of the Other. As Baldwin says: 'this inevitably leads to murder', and of course it has often done so in England recently.

Scruton quotes approvingly those who call this view 'death camp chic'. He would argue, I suppose, that loyalty and allegiance to one's kind doesn't necessarily lead to loathing of those not of one's kind. But Scruton himself talks of the 'alien wedge' and says that 'immigration cannot be an object of merely passive contemplation on the part of the present citizenship'.

The evil of racism is that it is a violation not only of another's dignity, but also of one's own person or soul; the failure of connection with others is a failure to understand or feel what it is one's own humanity consists in, what it is to be alive, and what it is to see both oneself and others as being ends not means, and as having souls. However much anodyne talk there is of 'one's kind', a society that is racist is a society that cannot accept itself, that hates parts of itself so deeply that it cannot see, does not want to see – because of its spiritual and political nullity and inanition – how much people have in common with each other. And the whole society and every element in it is reduced and degraded because of it. This is why racism isn't a minor or sub-problem: it reflects on the whole and weighs the entire society in the balance.

Therefore, in the end, one's feeling for others, one's understanding of their humanity cannot be anything to do with their being of 'one's kind' in the narrow way Scruton specifies. It can't be to do with others having any personal qualities at all. For paradoxically, as Simone Weil says: 'So far from its being his person, what is sacred in a human being is the impersonal in him. Everything which is impersonal in man is sacred, and nothing else.'

What of Labour?

The Pakistani working class is as unprotected politically as it has ever been. Despite various paternalistic efforts and an attempt at a

kind of 'Raj decency', racism is the Trojan horse within the Labour movement. The Labour Party has failed to show that it is serious about combating racism and serious in representing the black working class. There are few black councillors, few black Parliamentary candidates, few blacks on the General Management Committees of Constituency Labour Parties, no blacks on the NEC and so on, right through the Labour and trade union movement.

In my own ward and management committee, I have seen racist attitudes that would shame some Tories. People have stood up at Labour Party meetings I have attended and delivered racist diatribes. I have seen blacks discouraged from joining the Labour Party, and when they have joined, actively discouraged from canvassing in case they discouraged white racists from voting Labour.

The Labour Party wishes to be egalitarian and liberal on the race issue but knows that vast numbers of its voters are neither. The party is afraid – in some parts consciously and in other parts unconsciously – that blacks and black issues are a vote loser. If the Labour Party occasionally wishes blacks to serve it, it does not desire to serve blacks. Hence it acknowledges that thousands of its supporters are racist. It refuses to confront that.

Others in the party believe that racism is a sub-issue which has to be subordinate to the class issues of the time: housing, unemployment, education, maintenance of the social services and so on. They believe that winning elections and representing the mass of the working class in Parliament is more important than giving office or power to blacks. This is the choice it has made. This is the kind of party it is, and in so far as this is true, the Labour Party is a truly representative party, representing inequality and racism.

Coming back to England was harder than going. I had culture shock in reverse. Images of plenty yelled at me. England seemed to be overflowing with . . . things. Things from all over the world. Things and information. Information, though, which couldn't bite through the profound insularity and indifference.

In Pakistan people were keen to know: not only about Asia and

the Middle East, but about Europe and the United States. They sought out information about the whole world. They needed it. They ordered books from Europe, listened to international radio and chewed up visiting academics like pieces of orange.

In Britain today, among the middle class, thinking and argument are almost entirely taboo. The other taboo, replacing death in its unacceptability, is money. As our society has become more divided, the acknowledgement of that division – which is a financial division, a matter of economic power – is out of the question. So money is not discussed. It is taken for granted that you have it; that you have means of obtaining it; that you are reasonably well off and gain status and influence over others because of it.

Accompanying this financial silence, and shoring up both the social division and the taboo, is the prohibition on thought. The discussion of a serious subject to a conclusion using logic, evidence and counter-evidence is an unacceptable social embarrassment. It just isn't done to argue: it is thought to be the same as rowing. One has opinions in England, but they are formed in private and clung to in public despite everything, despite their often being quite wrong.

There is real defensiveness and insecurity, a Victorian fear of revealing so much as a genital of an idea, the nipple of a notion or the sex of a syllogism. Where sexual exhibitionism and the discussion of positions and emissions is fashionable, indeed orthodox, thinking and argument are avoided.

In Pakistan it was essential to have knowledge because political discussion was serious. It mattered what you thought. People put chairs in a circle, sat down, and *talked*. What was said to each other was necessary. Intellectual dignity was maintained, earned anxiety was expressed; you weren't alone; ideas and feelings were shared. These things had to be said, even in low voices, because absolute silence was intolerable, absolute silence was the acceptance of isolation and division. It was a relief to argue, to exercise intelligence in a country where intelligence was in itself a weapon and a threat.

I will never forget the hospitality, warmth and generosity of the people of Pakistan; the flowers on the lawn of the Sind Club, the sprawling open houses, full of air and people and the smell of spices; the unbelievable brightness of the light shining through a dust haze; the woman walking perfectly straight-backed along a street with an iron balanced on her head; the open-air typists outside the law courts; butterflies as big as clock faces; the man who slept with a chicken in his bed; my uncle's library, bought in the 1940s in Cambridge, where he was taught by Russell – though when I opened the books after being given the library, they were rotten with worms, the pitted pages falling apart just as I stood there. And the way the men shake hands. This is worth going into.

First you offer them your hand and they grasp it. The clasped hands are slapped then with their spare hand as an affirmation of initial contact. This is, as it were, the soup. Now they pull you to them for the main course, the full embrace, the steak. As you look over their shoulder, your bodies thrust together, your heat intermingled, they crack you on the back at least three times with their open palm. These are not negligible taps, but good healthy whacks, demonstrating equality and openness. Depending on the nature of the friendship, these whacks could go on a considerable time and may debilitate the sick or weak. But they must be reciprocated. This done, they will let you move away from them, but still holding your right hand. You are considered fully, with affection overbrimming, as they regard all of you, as they seem to take in your entire being from top to toe, from inside to out. At last, after complete contact has been made, all possibility of concealment or inhibition banished, they carefully let go of your hand as if it were a delicate object. *That is a greeting.*

And there was the photograph of my father in my uncle's room, in which he must have been about the same age as me. A picture in a house that contained fragments of my past: a house full of stories, of Bombay, Delhi, China; of feuds, wrestling matches, adulteries, windows, broken with hands, card games, impossible loves, and magic spells. Stories to help me see my place in the

world and give me a sense of the past which could go into making a life in the present and the future. This was surely part of the way I could understand myself. This knowledge, garnered in my mid-twenties, would help me form an image of myself: I'd take it back to England where I needed it to protect myself. And it would be with me in London and the suburbs, making me stronger.

When I considered staying in Pakistan to regain more of my past and complete myself with it, I had to think that that was impossible. Didn't I already miss too much of England? And wasn't I too impatient with the illiberalism and lack of possibility of Pakistan?

So there was always going to be the necessary return to England. I came home . . . to my country.

This is difficult to say. 'My country' isn't a notion that comes easily. It is still difficult to answer the question, where do you come from? I have never wanted to identify with England. When Enoch Powell spoke for England I turned away in final disgust. I would rather walk naked down the street than stand up for the National Anthem. The pain of that period of my life, in the mid-1960s, is with me still. And when I originally wrote this piece I put it in the third person: Hanif saw this, Hanif felt that, because of the difficulty of directly addressing myself to what I felt then, of not wanting to think about it again. And perhaps that is why I took to writing in the first place, to make strong feelings into weak feelings.

But despite all this, some kind of identification with England remains.

It is strange to go away to the land of your ancestors, to find out how much you have in common with people there, yet at the same time to realise how British you are, the extent to which, as Orwell says: 'the suet puddings and the red pillar boxes have entered into your soul'. It isn't *that* you wanted to find out. But it is part of what you do find out. And you find out what little choice you have in the matter of your background and where you belong. You look forward to getting back; you think often of England and what it means to you – and you think often of what it means to be British.

Two days after my return I took my washing to a laundrette and gave it to the attendant only to be told she didn't touch the clothes of foreigners: she didn't want me anywhere near her blasted laundrette. More seriously: I read in the paper that a Pakistani family in the East End had been firebombed. A child was killed. This, of course, happens frequently. It is the pig's head through the window, the spit in the face, the children with the initials of racist organisations tattooed into their skin with razor blades, as well as the more polite forms of hatred.

I was in a rage. I thought: who wants to be British anyway? Or as a black American writer said: who wants to be integrated into a burning house anyway?

And indeed I know Pakistanis and Indians born and brought up here who consider their position to be the result of a diaspora: they are in exile, awaiting return to a better place, where they belong, where they are welcome. And there this 'belonging' will be total. This will be home, and peace.

It is not difficult to see how much illusion and falsity there is in this view. How much disappointment and unhappiness might be involved in going 'home', only to see the extent to which you have been formed by England and the depth of attachment you feel to the place, despite everything.

It isn't surprising that some people believe in this idea of 'home'. The alternative to believing it is more conflict here; it is more self-hatred; it is the continual struggle against racism; it is the continual adjustment to life in Britain. And blacks in Britain know they have made more than enough adjustments.

So what is it to be British?

In his 1941 essay 'England Your England' Orwell says: 'the gentleness of the English civilisation is perhaps its most marked characteristic'. He calls the country 'a family with the wrong members in control' and talks of the 'soundness and homogeneity of England'.

Elsewhere he considers the Indian character. He explains the 'maniacal suspiciousness' which, agreeing, he claims, with

E. M. Forster in *A Passage to India*, he calls 'the besetting Indian vice . . .' But he has the grace to acknowledge in his essay 'Not Counting Niggers' 'that the overwhelming bulk of the British proletariat [lives] . . . in Asia and Africa'.

But this is niggardly. The main object of his praise is British 'tolerance' and he writes of 'their gentle manners'. He also says that this aspect of England 'is continuous, it stretches into the future and the past, there is something in it that persists'.

But does it persist? If this version of England was true then, in the 1930s and 1940s, it is under pressure now. From the point of view of thousands of black people it just does not apply. It is completely without basis.

Obviously tolerance in a stable, confident wartime society with a massive Empire is quite different to tolerance in a disintegrating uncertain society during an economic depression. But surely this would be the test; this would be just the time for this much-advertised tolerance in the British soul to manifest itself as more than vanity and self-congratulation. But it has not. Under real continuous strain it has failed.

Tolerant, gentle British whites have no idea how little of this tolerance is experienced by blacks here. No idea of the violence, hostility and contempt directed against black people every day by state and individual alike in this land once described by Orwell as being not one of 'rubber truncheons' or 'Jew-baiters' but of 'flower-lovers' with 'mild knobbly faces'. But in parts of England the flower-lovers are all gone, the rubber truncheons and Jew-baiters are at large, and if any real contemporary content is to be given to Orwell's blind social patriotism, then clichés about 'tolerance' must be seriously examined for depth and weight of substantial content.

In the mean time it must be made clear that blacks don't require 'tolerance' in this particular condescending way. It isn't this particular paternal tyranny that is wanted, since it is major adjustments to British society that have to be made.

I stress that it is the British who have to make these adjustments.

It is the British, the white British, who have to learn that being British isn't what it was. Now it is a more complex thing, involving new elements. So there must be a fresh way of seeing Britain and the choices it faces: and a new way of being British after all this time. Much thought, discussion and self-examination must go into seeing the necessity for this, what this 'new way of being British' involves and how difficult it might be to attain.

The failure to grasp this opportunity for a revitalised and broader self-definition, in the face of a real failure to be human, will be more insularity, schism, bitterness and catastrophe.

The two countries, Britain and Pakistan, have been part of each other for years, usually to the advantage of Britain. They cannot now be wrenched apart, even if that were desirable. Their futures will be intermixed. What that intermix means, its moral quality, whether it is violently resisted by ignorant whites and characterised by inequality and injustice, or understood, accepted and humanised, is for all of us to decide.

This decision is not one about a small group of irrelevant people who can be contemptuously described as 'minorities'. It is about the direction of British society. About its values and how humane it can be when experiencing real difficulty and possible breakdown. It is about the respect it accords individuals, the power it gives to groups, and what it really means when it describes itself as 'democratic'. The future is in our hands.

Bradford

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Some time ago, I noticed that there was something unusual about the city of Bradford, something that distinguished it from other northern industrial cities.

To begin with, there was Ray Honeyford. Three years ago Honeyford, the headmaster of Bradford's Drummond Middle School, wrote a short, three-page article that was published in the *Salisbury Review*. The *Salisbury Review* has a circulation of about 1,000, but the impact of Honeyford's article was felt beyond the magazine's readership. It was discussed in the *Yorkshire Post* and reprinted in the local *Telegraph and Argus*. A parents' group demanded Honeyford's resignation. His school was then boycotted, and children, instructed by their parents not to attend classes, gathered outside, shouting abuse at the man who weeks before was their teacher. There were fights, sometimes physical brawls, between local leaders and politicians. The 'Honeyford Affair', as it became known, attracted so much attention that it became common every morning to come upon national journalists and television crews outside the school. And when it was finally resolved that Honeyford had to go, the Bradford district council had to pay him over £160,000 to get him to leave: ten times his annual salary.

But there were other things about Bradford. The Yorkshire Ripper was from Bradford. The prostitutes who came down to London on the train on 'cheap day return' tickets were from Bradford. At a time when the game of soccer was threatened by so many troubles, Bradford seemed to have troubles of the most extreme kind. Days after the deaths in Brussels at the Heysel stadium, fifty-six Bradford football supporters were killed in one of the worst fires in the