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# Fractured Identities: Hybridity and Generational Conflict in Hanif Kureishi's "My Son the Fanatic"

ALAA ALGHAMDI
Taibah University, Saudi Arabia

**Abstract**
This article examines the complex interplay of hybridity and identity formation in Hanif Kureishi's 1994 short story "My Son the Fanatic." Through a close analysis of the father-son relationship between Parvez and Ali, this study argues that Kureishi's work challenges simplistic notions of cultural integration, revealing instead the profound psychological and social challenges faced by immigrant families. By situating the narrative within the context of post-1960s cultural shifts and the widening generational gap, this article demonstrates how "My Son the Fanatic" serves as a microcosm for broader debates on multiculturalism, belonging, and cultural resistance. Drawing from postcolonial theory and contemporary scholarship on immigrant experiences, this analysis explores how Kureishi's portrayal of hybridity as both a transformative force and a site of personal crisis resonates with current societal discourses on cultural identity and the pressures of globalization. Ultimately, the article argues that the story offers a nuanced critique of the failures of hybridity in Western multicultural societies, compelling readers to reconsider assumptions about integration and identity formation among immigrant communities.

**Keywords**: Hybridity, Identity Formation, Multiculturalism, Postcolonial Theory, Belonging.

## Introduction

In the landscape of postcolonial and multicultural studies, hybridity has long been heralded as a transformative concept, promising cultural synthesis and integration. However, Hanif Kureishi's 1994 short story "My Son the Fanatic" presents a more nuanced and often disquieting portrait of hybrid identities. This article argues that Kureishi's work serves as a critical examination of the failures of hybridity in Western multicultural societies, challenging the prevailing notion that cultural blending inevitably leads to harmonious coexistence.

Hybridity, in the context of this article, refers to the blending or enmeshing of various external factors, cultures, and identities to create something altogether new and different. It speaks to the ways in which transformation happens – for better or for worse – across generational lines given the circumstances of societal placement, faith, cultural othering, and many of the other predominant themes highlighted in Kureishi's short story. To this effect, we will mainly refer to cultural hybridity. In the words of Marwan Kraidy, "Hybridity is best understood as an ongoing, negotiated process rather than a fixed identity. It is deeply implicated in power relations, globalization, and cultural politics" (6). This is showcased throughout the story as the characters therein must navigate and reconcile their immigrant status in England and decide for themselves what they are going to, or are willing to, adopt for the sake of societal integration. Cultural hybridity is also defined as "the result of selective appropriations, where traditional and modern, local and global are not simply blended but contested and re-elaborated" (García Canclini 13). Parvez's son, Ali, provides a striking example of this over the course of Kureishi's story.

"My Son the Fanatic" centers on the relationship between the main character Parvez and his son Ali. Parvez, an immigrant from

Pakistan, and his wife are living and raising their son in England. A hard worker, Parvez drives a taxicab and has put much of his time and energy into the social successes of his son – making sure that he has enough money to put him through accounting school and praising his academic triumphs to his friends at the taxi office. At a certain point in Ali's adulthood however, things begin to change. Ali begins throwing away and giving away his personal effects, leading his father to believe that Ali has fallen prey to the common entrapments of the Western world. Ironically, as Parvez turns a more watchful eye to his son, Ali keeps behaving in the same way, his new faith in Islam as a radical rejection of the tenets of Western civilization being to blame. As tensions rise between the two in relation to what is becoming irreconcilably different fundamental beliefs, the story calls into question society's role in all of this and the very definition of fanaticism altogether, leaving the reader to ponder on the effects of extremism. Parvez, hurt by his son's rejection of everything he had worked so hard for, fanatically confronts Ali with physical assault at the conclusion of the story, prompting Ali to pose the question of who the fanatic truly is between the two.

Through the lens of the father-son relationship, Kureishi explores the psychological and social dimensions of hybridity, revealing it as both a transformative force and a site of profound personal crisis. This article contends that the struggles between Parvez and Ali encapsulate broader tensions of postcolonial identity formation, reflecting the complex realities faced by immigrant communities in Western societies. The generational divide between father and son becomes a microcosm for the larger societal conflicts surrounding integration, assimilation, and cultural preservation.

Building on Homi Bhabha's concept of the 'third space,' which posits hybridity as a liminal area where cultural differences interact and are negotiated, this analysis situates Kureishi's narrative within the context of post-1960s cultural shifts and the widening generational gap. The 1960s marked a period of significant social and cultural upheaval in Western societies,

challenging traditional values and reshaping notions of identity. For immigrant communities, these changes added another layer of complexity to their already fraught process of adaptation and integration. By examining "My Son the Fanatic" through this historical lens, we can better understand how Kureishi's work resonates with contemporary societal discourses on cultural identity, extremism, and the pressures of globalization.

Parvez, as a first-generation immigrant, embodies the struggle for acceptance and economic stability, often at the cost of cultural authenticity. His journey reflects the experiences of many who came to the West seeking opportunity, only to find themselves caught between the demands of assimilation and the pull of their cultural heritage. In a heated moment of self-defense, he exclaims that "This is England. We have to fit in!" (Kureishi 293). Ali, on the other hand, represents the second-generation immigrant experience, born into a hybrid identity yet rejecting it in favour of a more rigid, fundamentalist worldview. Through these characters, Kureishi interrogates the sustainability of hybrid identities and the potential for cultural alienation to breed extremism.

This study contributes to existing scholarship in several key ways. It examines how Kureishi's portrayal of hybridity challenges idealized notions of multiculturalism, revealing the gap between the rhetoric of inclusion and the lived experiences of immigrant communities. The article analyses the psychological impact of hybridity on both first- and second-generation immigrants, exploring how the pressure to navigate multiple cultural identities can lead to internal conflict and alienation. It explores the role of religious fundamentalism as a response to the failures of cultural integration, considering how extremist ideologies can offer a sense of belonging and purpose to those who feel marginalized by mainstream society. The study investigates how Kureishi's narrative reflects and critiques Western attitudes towards immigrant communities, challenging readers to confront their own assumptions about integration and cultural difference. By situating "My Son the Fanatic" within the broader context of postcolonial literature, this article examines how Kureishi's work contributes to

ongoing debates about identity, belonging, and the legacy of colonialism in contemporary multicultural societies. By closely examining Kureishi's text and drawing from postcolonial theory, identity politics, and psychological frameworks, this article argues that "My Son the Fanatic" compels readers to reconsider assumptions about integration, belonging, and cultural resistance. The story's ambiguous ending, which leaves both Parvez and Ali in a state of unresolved conflict, mirrors the complex and often contradictory nature of hybrid identities in the real world. Furthermore, this analysis considers how Kureishi's narrative techniques, including his use of irony, symbolism, and dialogue, serve to underscore the tensions inherent in the immigrant experience. By juxtaposing Parvez's attempts at assimilation with Ali's rejection of Western values, Kureishi creates a powerful commentary on the challenges of maintaining cultural identity in the face of societal pressure to conform.

Ultimately, this article posits that Kureishi's work offers a nuanced critique of hybridity, revealing the complex challenges faced by individuals caught between conflicting cultural paradigms in an increasingly globalized world. "My Son the Fanatic" serves not only as a literary exploration of immigrant experiences but also as a call for a more critical examination of multiculturalism and its implementation in Western societies. By highlighting the potential for hybridity to lead to alienation and extremism, Kureishi challenges readers to consider the responsibilities of both immigrant communities and host societies in fostering genuine integration and mutual understanding.

## Hybridity Failures in the Western World

Kureishi's "My Son the Fanatic" presents a stark critique of hybridity, challenging the idealized notion of cultural synthesis often celebrated in postcolonial theory. Through the experiences of Parvez and Ali, Kureishi reveals the complex realities of hybrid identities in Western societies, exposing various ways in which

hybridity fails to deliver on its promise of harmonious cultural blending.

One of the primary failures of hybridity is the persistence of structural inequalities that continue to marginalize immigrant communities. Despite rhetoric of multiculturalism and inclusion, many immigrants and their descendants face significant barriers to social and economic mobility. In the story, Parvez's position as a taxi driver symbolizes this limitation. Kureishi writes: "Parvez had been a taxi driver for twenty years. . . . Like him, most of the other drivers were Punjabis. They preferred to work at night, the roads were clearer and the money better" (288). Despite his efforts to assimilate and embrace Western customs, Parvez remains confined to a working-class existence, unable to fully access the opportunities and privileges of mainstream British society. Adding to that, his existence is not only seen here as merely working class, but nocturnal, relegated to a time where not even respectable English society is awake to encounter him.

This economic disparity reflects a broader reality faced by many immigrant communities in Western countries. Studies show that immigrants, particularly those from non-Western backgrounds, often experience higher rates of unemployment, lower wages, and limited access to quality education and healthcare compared to their native-born counterparts (Esses 503). These structural inequalities persist even for second and third-generation immigrants, challenging the notion that cultural hybridity naturally leads to social and economic integration.

The failure of hybridity is also evident in the cultural dissonance experienced by individuals caught between two worlds. Kureishi portrays this through Ali, who, despite being born and raised in Britain, feels profoundly alienated from both his father's adopted Western values and his own Pakistani heritage. In an increasingly heated conversation regarding his father's love for England, Ali states "The problem is this. . . You are too implicated in Western Civilization." Following this, Ali goes on to assert that "Western materialists hate us" and to ask his father, "Papa, how can you love something which hates you?" (Kureishi 293). Though Ali

was not raised in the traditional Pakistani culture like his father, his longing for a connection with it, and his subsequent adoption of Islam, have altered his view of his current life, his father, and himself as he takes on an attitude of being in the English culture, but not of it. However, the truth is that he is not fully entrenched in either one.

This sense of not belonging fully to either culture is common among second-generation immigrants, who often struggle to reconcile the expectations of their parents' culture with the norms of the society in which they were raised. The psychological toll of this cultural dissonance can be severe, with research showing that individuals experiencing prolonged cultural conflict are at higher risk for mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, and identity crises (Kachru 32). Ali's turn towards religious fundamentalism can be seen as an extreme response to this internal conflict, a desperate attempt to find a stable identity in a world that seems to offer no clear place for him.

Another significant failure of hybridity in Western societies is the superficial nature of multicultural acceptance. While many Western countries pride themselves on their diversity and cultural pluralism, the reality often falls short of this ideal. Kureishi hints at this through Parvez's relationships with his British acquaintances, which maintain a subtle undercurrent of otherness despite appearing friendly. This reflects the broader tendency in Western societies to exoticize and tokenize immigrant cultures rather than to genuinely incorporate them into the social fabric.

The rise of nationalist and exclusionary ideologies in many Western countries further exemplifies the failure of hybridity. The backlash against multiculturalism, often fuelled by economic insecurity and cultural anxiety, has led to increased hostility towards immigrant communities. This hostile environment makes it even more difficult for hybrid identities to flourish, as individuals feel pressured to choose between assimilation and cultural preservation.

Kureishi's portrayal of Ali's radicalization can be seen as a response to this exclusionary atmosphere. Unable to find

acceptance in mainstream British society and disillusioned with his father's attempts at assimilation, Ali turns to a form of religious fundamentalism that offers him a clear sense of identity and belonging. This trajectory mirrors real-world patterns of radicalization among some second-generation immigrants, highlighting the dangerous consequences of failed integration and cultural alienation.

The intergenerational conflicts depicted in "My Son the Fanatic" represent another aspect of hybridity failure. The stark ideological divide between Parvez and Ali reflects a broader phenomenon where first-generation immigrants and their children develop radically different approaches to cultural identity and integration. While Parvez sees assimilation as a path to success and acceptance, Ali views it as a betrayal of his cultural and religious heritage.

Western education systems also play a role in the failures of hybridity. While multicultural education policies aim to promote diversity and inclusion, they often fall short in providing meaningful engagement with diverse cultural perspectives. Research shows that immigrant students often feel marginalized in Western educational settings, with their cultural knowledge and experiences undervalued or ignored (Tsai 91).

The pressure on immigrants to perform their cultural identity in ways palatable to the dominant culture is a significant aspect of hybridity failure. This 'cultural taxation' requires individuals to constantly explain, justify, or modify their cultural practices to fit Western expectations. The pressure to conform can lead to 'covering' – the downplaying of cultural differences to fit in with the majority culture – which can erode cultural identity and create a sense of inauthenticity. Ali recognizes this phenomenon, asking his father "why he didn't have a beard, or at least a moustache" since the appearance of facial hair is such a significant part of their culture that Parvez has 'covered' in order to appear more palatable (Kureishi 295).

Lastly, the lack of political representation for immigrant communities in Western societies reflects another failure of

hybridity. While many Western democracies have seen an increase in elected officials from diverse backgrounds, overall political power often remains concentrated in the hands of the dominant cultural group. This lack of representation can lead to policies that fail to address the needs and concerns of immigrant communities, further entrenching social and economic inequalities.

Kureishi's "My Son the Fanatic" serves as a powerful critique of hybridity failures in Western societies. Through the contrasting experiences of Parvez and Ali, Kureishi illustrates how these failures can lead to divergent responses: desperate attempts at assimilation or reactionary embrace of religious fundamentalism. Both paths ultimately result in alienation and conflict, suggesting that current models of multiculturalism and integration in Western societies are deeply flawed. The narrative challenges readers to move beyond simplistic celebrations of diversity and to confront the complex realities of hybrid identities, compelling us to reconsider our assumptions about cultural integration and to work towards more equitable and inclusive models of social cohesion.

## The Wounded Immigrant Psyche

The psychological impact of immigration is a profound and often overlooked aspect of the immigrant experience. Kureishi's "My Son the Fanatic" provides a nuanced exploration of this psychological terrain, revealing the deep emotional scars that can result from cultural displacement and the struggle for identity. Through the characters of Parvez and Ali, Kureishi illustrates how the immigrant psyche can be wounded by the very process of adaptation and the conflicting demands of two cultures.

For first-generation immigrants like Parvez, the psychological struggle often revolves around the tension between adaptation and preservation of cultural identity. Parvez's efforts to assimilate into British society – his consumption of alcohol, his friendships with Westerners, his attempts to shed traditional Pakistani customs – are not merely surface-level changes but reflect a deep internal conflict. Each act of assimilation represents a small

betrayal of his cultural roots, creating a sense of guilt and loss that gnaws at his psyche.

This internal conflict is compounded by the external pressures of racism and xenophobia. Even as Parvez strives to become 'more British,' he is constantly reminded of his otherness. The subtle (and sometimes not-so-subtle) discrimination he faces in his daily life as a taxi driver serves as a constant assault on his sense of belonging. This persistent outsider status can lead to what psychologists term "acculturative stress," a phenomenon characterized by anxiety, depression, and a sense of marginalization (Berry 7).

Moreover, Parvez's psychological wounds are exacerbated by the sacrifices he has made in pursuit of a better life. The loss of status – from a respectable position in Pakistan to a working-class job in Britain – can be deeply damaging to an immigrant's self-esteem. This downward social mobility, often referred to as "status inconsistency" in sociological literature, can lead to feelings of shame, inadequacy, and resentment (Aycan and Berry 244).

For second-generation immigrants like Ali, the psychological challenges are different but equally profound. Born into a hybrid identity, Ali struggles with what W. E. B. Du Bois termed "double consciousness" – the sense of always looking at oneself through the eyes of others (qtd. in Bruce 299). This split consciousness can lead to a fragmented sense of self, as the individual attempts to reconcile the often conflicting expectations of their family's culture and the dominant society.

Ali's rejection of Western values and embrace of religious fundamentalism can be seen as a psychological defence mechanism against this fragmentation. In a conversation in which Parvez questions what has made him adopt such extremism, Ali retorts, "living in this country." At that, Parvez, having embraced cultural assimilation to survive, claims "But I love England. They let you do almost anything here." Ali responds resolutely that "that is the problem" (Kureishi 294). By adopting a rigid ideological framework, Ali seeks to resolve the ambiguities and contradictions of his hybrid identity. This search for certainty in the face of

cultural confusion is a common response among second-generation immigrants, particularly those who feel marginalized by the dominant culture (Verkuyten and Yildiz 1449).

The intergenerational conflict between Parvez and Ali further illuminates the psychological wounds of the immigrant experience. Parvez's inability to understand his son's radicalization and Ali's contempt for his father's assimilation reflect a deeper psychological rift. This breakdown in communication and understanding between generations is a common source of distress in immigrant families, often leading to feelings of isolation and alienation on both sides (Kwak 10).

Furthermore, the psychological impact of living in a society that often views one's culture with suspicion or hostility cannot be overstated. The constant need to defend or explain one's cultural practices, or to prove one's loyalty to the host country, can be emotionally exhausting. This "cultural taxation" can lead to chronic stress and a sense of never truly belonging (Padilla 25).

The wounded immigrant psyche is also characterized by a profound sense of loss. This loss encompasses not only the tangible aspects of one's homeland – family, friends, familiar places – but also the intangible elements of cultural identity. Language, for instance, plays a crucial role in shaping identity, and the struggle to maintain one's mother tongue while mastering the language of the host country can be a source of significant psychological stress (Dewaele and van Oudenhoven 443).

The psychological wounds of the immigrant experience can also manifest in what psychologists call "cultural bereavement" – a profound sense of loss and grief for the culture left behind (Eisenbruch 673). This grief can be particularly acute for those who, like Parvez, have made conscious efforts to distance themselves from their cultural roots, only to find that complete assimilation remains elusive.

It is important to note that the wounded immigrant psyche is not solely characterized by negative experiences. Many immigrants and their children develop remarkable resilience and adaptability in the face of cultural challenges. However, Kureishi's focus on the

psychological struggles in "My Son the Fanatic" serves to highlight the often-overlooked emotional costs of migration and cultural hybridity.

The story also touches on the concept of "acculturative family distancing" (Hwang 397), where the differing rates of acculturation between parents and children lead to increased family conflict and emotional distance. This is evident in the growing gulf between Parvez and Ali, as their divergent paths of cultural adaptation drive them further apart.

Furthermore, the wounded immigrant psyche often grapples with issues of authenticity and cultural performance. Immigrants may feel pressure to perform their cultural identity in ways that are legible to the dominant culture, leading to a sense of inauthenticity or cultural commodification. This pressure to conform to stereotypical expectations can be psychologically damaging, eroding one's sense of self and cultural pride (Arenas and Urzua). The most glaring example of this cultural performance and commodification is seen in Parvez's occupation as a taxicab driver. Kureishi writes, "Parvez had been a taxi driver for twenty years. . . like him, most of the other drivers were Punjabis" (Kureishi 288). In this case, the immigrants have service jobs, driving nights, and being relegated to a relatively unseen corner of society where they are most accepted by their British counterparts. Through serving in this way, they perform their cultural identity in a manner acceptable to a dominant culture that has made its international mark through colonization. That is to say, this nation, known historically for and not too long removed from its harsh oppression and racism, would expect other cultures to perform unassuming service tasks, commodifying immigrant culture while keeping their own in the spotlight. Pakistani culture however is rich in tradition and self-respect. Parvez and the other cabbies have certain standards and expectations for themselves and their families. The bulk of Parvez' apprehension in relation to disclosing Ali's struggles stems from the fact that "they would blame him for the wrong turning his boy had taken, just as he had blamed other fathers whose sons had taken to running around with bad girls, truanting from school and joining

gangs" (Kureishi 288). This shame indicates that Parvez and the others' sense of cultural pride is, to some degree, still intact, amidst their assimilation attempts. With all of these factors at play, Kureishi showcases that efforts to maintain cultural authenticity while still having to perform do weigh on the immigrant psyche, especially on Parvez'.

Kureishi's "My Son the Fanatic" offers a poignant exploration of the wounded immigrant psyche, revealing the complex psychological terrain navigated by both first and second-generation immigrants. Through the characters of Parvez and Ali, Kureishi illustrates how the immigrant experience can lead to profound psychological distress, stemming from cultural displacement, identity conflicts, and the struggle for belonging. By shedding light on these often-hidden psychological wounds, Kureishi's work challenges us to consider the full human cost of migration and the urgent need for more nuanced approaches to cultural integration and support for immigrant communities.

## Cultural Shifts in the 1960s, A Widening 'Generational Gap,' and Intergenerationally Diverse Reactions to Hybridity

The 1960s marked a period of profound social and cultural transformation in Western societies, particularly in the United Kingdom where Kureishi's story is set. This era witnessed significant shifts in social norms, political ideologies, and cultural expressions that had far-reaching implications for immigrant communities and their experiences of hybridity. Although the events of "My Son the Fanatic" take place in the 1990s, they reflect the long-term consequences of the cultural shifts that occurred in the 1960s, particularly in the widening generational gap between immigrants like Parvez and their British-born children like Ali.

The 1960s saw the rise of counterculture movements, civil rights activism, and a general questioning of traditional values and authority structures. In the UK, this period was characterized by increased social mobility, the sexual revolution, and the emergence

of youth subcultures. These changes created a more permissive society that, on the surface, seemed more open to diversity and cultural difference. However, for immigrant communities, these shifts presented both opportunities and challenges.

For first-generation immigrants like Parvez, who arrived in the UK during or shortly after this period of change, the cultural landscape was already in flux. The traditional British society they might have expected to encounter was itself undergoing rapid transformation. This state of flux potentially made it easier for some immigrants to adapt, as the boundaries of 'Britishness' were being redefined. Parvez's embrace of Western habits like drinking alcohol and his friendships with individuals like Bettina can be seen as a product of this more permissive social environment.

However, the cultural shifts of the 1960s also contributed to a widening generational gap, which is starkly illustrated in the relationship between Parvez and Ali. This gap was not unique to immigrant families but was particularly pronounced within these communities due to the added layer of cultural difference. While Parvez attempts to adapt to a changing Britain, Ali, born into this new cultural landscape, experiences it differently.

The generational gap in immigrant families is often exacerbated by what sociologists call "dissonant acculturation" (Portes and Rumbaut 269). This occurs when children acculturate to the host society more quickly than their parents, leading to a reversal of traditional family roles and increased conflict. In "My Son the Fanatic," this dissonant acculturation is evident in Ali's fluency in British culture and his subsequent rejection of it, a move that bewilders his father.

Moreover, the cultural shifts of the 1960s and their aftermath created a society that, while ostensibly more open, still struggled with the realities of multiculturalism. The rhetoric of tolerance and diversity often masked ongoing structural inequalities and racism. This contradiction is reflected in Parvez's experiences – while he is able to adopt certain Western habits, he remains marginalized in his role as a taxi driver.

The widening generational gap also manifests in divergent reactions to hybridity. Parvez represents a generation of immigrants who saw adaptation and cultural mixing as a path to success and acceptance. His willingness to abandon certain aspects of his Pakistani identity in favour of British ones reflects a pragmatic approach to integration, common among many first-generation immigrants. This is true not only of the way Parvez views his own survival in England, but also that of his son's, and proves a major point of pride for him as a father. He holds fast to the belief that if he and his son assimilate well, then this spells success. This is evidenced even in the way in which Parvez speaks of his son. In this sense, Kureishi writes that "For years Parvez had boasted to the other men about how Ali excelled at cricket, swimming, and football, and how attentive a scholar he was, getting straight A's in most subjects" (Kureishi 288). He goes on to question, "Was it asking too much for Ali to get a good job, marry a nice girl, and start a family?" (Kureishi 288). Finally, the father's reaction to hybridity is directly revealed: "Once this happened. Parvez would be happy. His dream of doing well in England would have come true" (Kureishi 288).

Ali, on the other hand, embodies a different response to hybridity – one of rejection and return to cultural authenticity. His embrace of religious fundamentalism can be seen as a reaction against both his father's assimilation and the perceived moral decay of Western society. He speaks about this perceived decay with his father in the context of his decision to leave his job as an accountant. To this effect, he says "Western education cultivates an anti-religious attitude." Kureishi further explains that "according to Ali, in the world of accountants, it was usual to meet women, drink alcohol, and practice usury," which of course goes against traditional Pakistani religious values (295). This rejection of hybridity in favour of a more rigid identity is not uncommon among second-generation immigrants who feel alienated from both their parents' culture and the dominant society.

The intergenerational divide in the reactions to hybridity is further complicated by the changing nature of racism and

discrimination in post-1960s Britain. While overt racism became less socially acceptable, more subtle forms of discrimination persisted. Second-generation immigrants like Ali, raised with expectations of equality and inclusion, may feel a deeper sense of betrayal when confronted with these persistent inequalities.

Furthermore, the cultural shifts of the 1960s contributed to a reimagining of national identity in many Western countries. In Britain, this period saw the beginning of a transition from a more homogeneous notion of Britishness to a multicultural ideal. However, this transition was neither smooth nor complete, leading to ongoing tensions around national identity and belonging that are reflected in the experiences of Kureishi's characters.

The 1960s also saw significant changes in gender roles and family structures, which had particular implications for immigrant families. The rise of feminism and changing expectations for women in Western societies often clashed with more traditional gender roles maintained in many immigrant communities. While this aspect is not foregrounded in "My Son the Fanatic," it adds another layer of complexity to the intergenerational negotiations of culture and identity.

Additionally, the expansion of higher education in the 1960s created new opportunities for social mobility, particularly for the children of immigrants. This shift is hinted at in Ali's education, which presumably offered him opportunities not available to his father. However, increased education also often led to a greater awareness of social inequalities and cultural conflicts, potentially contributing to the disillusionment experienced by characters like Ali.

The media landscape also underwent significant changes in the post-1960s era, with the rise of more diverse representations of minority communities. However, these representations were often stereotypical or superficial, contributing to a sense of misrepresentation and alienation among many second-generation immigrants. This media environment forms part of the cultural backdrop against which Ali formulates his rejection of Western values.

The cultural shifts of the 1960s and their aftermath profoundly shaped the context in which Kureishi's characters navigate their hybrid identities. The widening generational gap and diverse reactions to hybridity depicted in "My Son the Fanatic" reflect the complex legacy of this transformative period. By situating his story against this backdrop of cultural change, Kureishi offers a nuanced exploration of how broader societal shifts intersect with the personal experiences of immigrants and their children, shaping their negotiations of identity, belonging, and cultural authenticity in often unexpected ways.

## The Cultural 'Othering' of Second-Generation Immigrants

The concept of 'othering' – the process by which individuals or groups are perceived as fundamentally different or alien – is a crucial aspect of the immigrant experience, particularly for second-generation immigrants. In "My Son the Fanatic," Kureishi explores this phenomenon through the character of Ali, highlighting the complex ways in which cultural 'othering' shapes identity formation and social interactions for those caught between two cultures.

Second-generation immigrants like Ali occupy a unique and often precarious position in Western societies. Born and raised in the host country, they are, in many ways, cultural insiders. They typically speak the local language fluently, are educated in local schools, and are immersed in local popular culture. However, despite this apparent integration, they often face persistent 'othering' based on their ethnic background, religion, or physical appearance.

This 'othering' is expressed in Kureishi's narrative in various ways. Ali, despite being born and raised in Britain, is not fully accepted as 'British' by the dominant society. This exclusion is not always overt, but it often takes the form of subtle microaggressions, assumptions about his cultural background, or expectations that he should somehow be 'different' from his white British peers. The

persistent question of "Where are you really from?" – though not explicitly stated in the story – is a common experience for many second-generation immigrants, serving as a constant reminder of their perceived foreignness.

The cultural 'othering' of second-generation immigrants is often more psychologically damaging than that experienced by their parents. While first-generation immigrants like Parvez may have a strong sense of their original cultural identity to fall back on, their children are caught in a liminal space, belonging fully to neither their ancestral culture nor to the culture of their country of birth. This state of 'in-betweenness' can lead to a profound sense of alienation and identity crisis.

Kureishi skilfully portrays this crisis through Ali's radical shift towards religious fundamentalism. Ali's embrace of a strict interpretation of Islam can be seen as a response to the 'othering' he experiences. In his view, "Western materialists hate us," and it is clear that Ali does not "love something which hates [him]" (Kureishi 293). Unable to find acceptance as a British citizen, he turns to a religious identity that offers him a sense of belonging and purpose. This reaction is not uncommon among second-generation immigrants who, feeling rejected by mainstream society, seek alternative sources of identity and community.

The 'othering' of second-generation immigrants is also often internalized, leading to Du Bois' "double consciousness" – the sense of always viewing oneself through the eyes of others. This internalized 'othering' can manifest itself in various ways, from overcompensation and attempts to 'prove' one's belonging, to rejection of the dominant culture and retreat into ethnic or religious enclaves. Ali's trajectory in the story represents the latter response, as he rejects British culture entirely in favour of what he perceives as a more authentic identity.

Moreover, the 'othering' of second-generation immigrants often extends to their relationship with their ancestral culture. Paradoxically, while they may be seen as 'foreign' in their country of birth, they may also be perceived as not 'authentic' enough by members of their parents' culture. This dual exclusion can lead to a

profound sense of not belonging anywhere, contributing to the identity crisis experienced by characters like Ali.

The education system plays a significant role in the 'othering' of second-generation immigrants. While schools are often touted as sites of integration, they can also be spaces where cultural differences are highlighted and sometimes exacerbated. The Eurocentric curriculum common in many Western schools may fail to reflect the diverse cultural backgrounds of second-generation immigrants, leading to a sense of invisibility or misrepresentation. While not explicitly addressed in Kureishi's story, this educational 'othering' forms part of the backdrop against which Ali's alienation develops.

The media also contributes significantly to the 'othering' of second-generation immigrants. Representations of minority communities in Western media are often stereotypical or one-dimensional, failing to capture the complex realities of hybrid identities. This misrepresentation can lead to a sense of cultural alienation and may contribute to the rejection of the mainstream culture seen in characters like Ali.

Furthermore, the 'othering' of second-generation immigrants often intersects with issues of class and socioeconomic status. Many immigrant families, like Parvez and Ali's, occupy working-class positions in Western societies. This class position adds another layer to their 'otherness,' as they must navigate not only cultural differences but also class barriers in their quest for acceptance and upward mobility.

The pressure to be 'model minorities' is another form of 'othering' experienced by many second-generation immigrants. This expectation to excel academically and professionally, to be a 'credit to their race,' places an additional burden on individuals already struggling with complex identity issues. While not explicitly addressed in "My Son the Fanatic," this pressure forms an important part of the broader context of expectations and stereotypes that shape the experiences of second-generation immigrants and is evidenced in the fact that Parvez took to yearly

boasting about Ali's culturally English accomplishments in sports and academia.

The 'othering' of second-generation immigrants also has significant implications for national identity and citizenship. Despite being born and raised in the country, many second-generation immigrants find their loyalty and patriotism questioned. This questioning of belonging can lead to a sense of conditional citizenship, where acceptance is always contingent on conforming to certain cultural expectations.

Kureishi's portrayal of Ali's radicalization serves as a stark warning about the potential consequences of persistent 'othering.' When individuals are consistently made to feel like outsiders in their own country, they may seek alternative sources of identity and belonging, sometimes with extreme results. Ali's turn to religious fundamentalism can be seen as a direct response to his experiences of exclusion and alienation in British society.

The cultural 'othering' of second-generation immigrants as depicted in "My Son the Fanatic" is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon with profound implications for identity formation, social cohesion, and individual well-being. Kureishi's narrative challenges readers to consider the subtle and often unacknowledged ways in which Western societies continue to marginalize those who do not fit neatly into dominant cultural categories. By highlighting the destructive potential of persistent 'othering,' the story serves as a call for more inclusive approaches to multiculturalism and a more nuanced understanding of hybrid identities in increasingly diverse societies.

## Hybridity: A Concept Grounded in Reality

While hybridity is often discussed as a theoretical concept in postcolonial studies, Kureishi's "My Son the Fanatic" grounds this abstract notion in the lived experiences of its characters. Through the contrasting journeys of Parvez and Ali, Kureishi illustrates how hybridity manifests in real-world contexts, often with complex and sometimes painful consequences.

In the story, hybridity is not presented as a harmonious blending of cultures, but rather as a site of tension and negotiation. Parvez embodies an approach to hybridity that attempts to integrate aspects of British culture into his life while maintaining elements of his Pakistani heritage. His consumption of alcohol, for example, is an illustration of this integration. In a confrontation with his father, Ali discloses that drinking alcohol is "forbidden" in their culture and religious tradition (Kureishi 292). Yet, Parvez rationalizes that "[s]urely it wasn't a crime to have a drink" since he "worked more than ten hours a day, had few hobbies or enjoyments, and never went on holiday" (Kureishi 292). His friendships with Westerners like Bettina is another example. Though Parvez has a wife at home, in line with his culture's expectations and traditions, he also entertains Bettina, a local prostitute with whom he had maintained a three-year friendship. Kureishi states that, during this time, they had "come to care for one another" and that "he could talk to her about things he'd never been able to discuss with his own wife" (Kureishi 291). Ali, noticing his father's attachment to her, asks Bettina "why is he letting a woman like you touch him like that?," alluding to the fact that their relationship is unethical and inappropriate in the context of their culture (Kureishi 298). Parvez' attempts to participate in British social norms, despite the regulations of his tradition, represent efforts to construct a hybrid identity through compromise.

Kureishi is careful to show that Parvez's hybridity is not without its costs. Though this is not shown explicitly, Ali implies that his father's attempts at cultural integration are met with forms of exclusion and racism. On one occasion, Ali accuses his father of "groveling to the whites" and explains that "he was not 'inferior,'" placing this assertion "in contrast" to the cultural messages they had been receiving (Kureishi 296). Despite his efforts to 'fit in,' Parvez remains an outsider in many ways, highlighting the limitations of hybridity as a pathway to full social acceptance. This reflects the reality faced by many immigrants who find that, no matter how much they adapt to their new culture, they are still perceived as 'other.'

Ali's rejection of hybridity is in stark contrast to his father's approach. Born and raised in Britain, Ali theoretically embodies hybridity by virtue of his upbringing. However, his turn towards religious fundamentalism represents a rejection of this hybrid identity in favour of what he perceives as a more authentic self. "Real morality has existed for hundreds of years," Ali tells his father (Kureishi 297). "Around the world, millions and millions of people share my beliefs. Are you saying you are right and they are all wrong?" (Kureishi). Ali's use of the word 'real' here to begin the defense of his positioning indicates that not only does he reject his father's ideology, but he also outright believes that it is unreal or imagined, and, therefore, that his viewpoint is the more authentic one. Going on to ask his father if he believes that the millions of Muslims who share his beliefs are 'wrong' also blatantly showcases the fact that the boy believes that Parvez, and presumably the millions of complacently assimilating first-generation immigrants he represents, are the ones who are wrong. Again, this trajectory mirrors the experiences of some second-generation immigrants who, feeling alienated from both their parents' culture and the dominant society, seek refuge in more rigid forms of identity.

Kureishi's portrayal of Ali's radicalization serves as a critique of the notion that hybridity inevitably leads to cultural harmony. Instead, it suggests that the experience of growing up between cultures can sometimes lead to a crisis of identity, pushing individuals towards extremes in their search for belonging. It also shows that individuals in this predicament can become scarily critical of their host country, leading to feelings of contempt for it, for those who assimilate into it, and everything that it stands for. Ali refers to the West as "a sink of hypocrites, adulterers, homosexuals, drug takers, and prostitutes" (Kureishi 294). Such strong critical views, paired with extreme societal othering, can lead radicalized individuals to severe retaliatory measures. Thus, Ali states that "my people have taken enough. If this doesn't stop there will be jihad. I and millions of others will gladly give our lives for the cause" (Kureishi). Though seemingly fanatical, this mindset reflects real-world patterns where some second-generation

immigrants, struggling to accept their dual cultural heritage, turn to fundamentalist ideologies that offer clear-cut answers to complex questions of identity and belonging.

The intergenerational conflict between Parvez and Ali further illustrates the real-world complexities of hybridity. Their divergent approaches to cultural identity – Parvez's attempt at integration versus Ali's rejection of Western values – highlight how hybridity can be experienced and interpreted differently even within the same family. This mirrors the diverse reactions to cultural mixing often observed in immigrant communities, where different generations may have radically different approaches to navigating their cultural identities.

Moreover, Kureishi's narrative underscores how hybridity is not just a personal or familial issue, but one that intersects with broader social and political realities. The racism and exclusion faced by characters like Parvez, despite their attempts at cultural adaptation, reflect the structural barriers that often limit the potential of hybridity in Western societies. This speaks to the lived experiences of many immigrants who find that cultural mixing does not necessarily translate into social equality or acceptance.

The story also touches on the psychological toll of navigating hybrid identities. Parvez's confusion and distress at his son's transformation, and Ali's own apparent identity crisis, illustrate the emotional challenges that can accompany the negotiation of multiple cultural influences. Earlier on in the story, Parvez admits he is "bewildered" by his son's change and confides in his friends exclaiming "I can't understand it! . . . I can't talk to him anymore. We are not father and son, we are brothers! Where has he gone? Why is he torturing me?" (Kureishi 288). Parvez's outburst demonstrates the aforementioned emotional turmoil and exemplifies the stress and mental health challenges often associated with acculturation and identity formation in multicultural contexts (Berry 7).

Furthermore, "My Son the Fanatic" highlights how hybridity can be a site of both opportunity and loss. While Parvez's cultural adaptations allow him to navigate the British society to some extent,

they also represent a partial disconnection from his cultural roots. His drinking, for example, is emblematic of this. He fits in British society which promotes alcohol consumption, but distances himself from his traditional culture, which condemns it. The same is true for his lack of facial hair. Parvez assumes the part of the clean-shaven, approachable Punjabi, but distances himself from the standard, traditional outward representation of his people. In this way, he gains superficial societal acceptance, yet loses more and more of himself and his connection to his culture in the process by making external compromises that are indicative of a greater internal trade off. This duality of gain and loss is a common experience for many immigrants, who must often balance the benefits of cultural adaptation with the preservation of their heritage.

The story also touches on how hybrid identities are often perceived and judged by others. Parvez's Western acquaintances seem to approve of his cultural adaptations, while Ali views his father's behaviour as a betrayal of their cultural heritage. To this effect, Parvez confides in Bettina saying that "I feel as if I've lost my son. . . . I can't bear to be looked at as if I'm a criminal" (Kureishi 295). This external judgement of hybrid identities reflects the real-world pressures faced by immigrants and their children, who must often navigate conflicting expectations from different cultural spheres.

Kureishi's narrative also illustrates how hybridity can be a dynamic and evolving process rather than a fixed state. Parvez's journey of cultural adaptation and Ali's rejection of Western values both represent ongoing negotiations of identity rather than final destinations. This fluidity of hybrid identities reflects the reality that cultural identity is often in flux, particularly for individuals navigating multiple cultural influences.

The economic dimensions of hybridity are also touched upon in the story. Parvez's job as a taxi driver represents a common reality for many immigrants who must often take on low-status jobs despite having had, most likely, higher qualifications in their countries of origin. This economic aspect of the immigrant

experience adds another layer to the lived reality of hybridity, where cultural adaptation is often driven by economic necessity.

"My Son the Fanatic" thus presents hybridity not as an abstract concept but as a complex lived reality with far-reaching personal, familial, and social implications. Through the experiences of Parvez and Ali, Kureishi illustrates how hybridity can be a source of both opportunity and conflict, adaptation and alienation. By grounding the concept of hybridity in the concrete experiences of his characters, Kureishi offers a nuanced and critical perspective on the realities of cultural mixing in contemporary multicultural societies. This approach challenges idealized notions of hybridity, instead presenting it as a multifaceted and often challenging aspect of the immigrant experience that intersects with broader issues of identity, belonging, and social inclusion.

## Self-Examination and the Implications of "My Son the Fanatic" on the Western Reader

Kureishi's "My Son the Fanatic" not only provides insight into the immigrant experience but also serves as a mirror for Western readers, challenging them to examine their own assumptions, biases, and societal structures. The story's nuanced portrayal of cultural conflict and identity formation invites critical self-reflection on the part of Western audiences, particularly regarding attitudes towards multiculturalism, integration, and religious diversity.

One of the primary ways in which the story prompts self-examination is through its depiction of Parvez's attempts at assimilation. Western readers are confronted with the reality that even when immigrants make significant efforts to adapt to Western norms – as Parvez does by drinking alcohol, forming friendships with Westerners, and embracing certain aspects of British culture – they may still face exclusion and discrimination. This challenges the often-held belief in Western societies that assimilation is a straightforward path to acceptance and success for immigrants.

The story also forces Western readers to confront the limitations and contradictions inherent in their societies'

approaches to multiculturalism. While many Western nations pride themselves on being open and inclusive, "My Son the Fanatic" reveals the often superficial nature of this inclusivity. Parvez's experiences highlight how cultural acceptance often extends only to palatable or exotic aspects of immigrant cultures, while deeper structural inequalities and prejudices persist. This realization may prompt Western readers to question the authenticity and effectiveness of their societies' multicultural policies and practices.

Furthermore, Ali's radicalization serves as a stark warning about the potential consequences of failed integration and persistent marginalization. For Western readers, this aspect of the story may prompt uncomfortable questions about the role their societies play in fostering extremism. It challenges the often simplistic narrative that radicalization is solely a product of foreign ideologies, instead suggesting that it can be a response to experiences of alienation and exclusion within the Western societies themselves.

The intergenerational conflict between Parvez and Ali also invites Western readers to reflect on their own family dynamics and cultural evolution. While the specific cultural context may be different, the tension between older and younger generations' values and worldviews is a universal theme. This aspect of the story may encourage readers to consider how their own societies handle intergenerational cultural shifts and the integration of diverse perspectives.

Kureishi's portrayal of Ali's rejection of Western values challenges Western readers to confront their own cultural assumptions. The idea that someone born and raised in a Western country might wholly reject its values in favour of a more conservative or fundamentalist ideology can be deeply unsettling for many Western readers. This forces a reconsideration of the assumed superiority or universal appeal of Western liberal values.

The story also prompts reflection on the nature of religious freedom and secularism in Western societies. Ali's turn towards religious fundamentalism raises questions about how Western societies balance respect for religious diversity with concerns about extremism. It challenges readers to consider whether their societies

truly allow for the free expression of diverse religious beliefs, or if there are implicit expectations of secularization for immigrants and their children.

Moreover, "My Son the Fanatic" invites Western readers to examine their own potential complicity in systems of exclusion and marginalization. The subtle forms of racism and othering experienced by characters like Parvez may prompt readers to reflect on their own interactions with immigrants and minorities, and to consider whether they have unknowingly perpetuated harmful stereotypes or exclusionary practices.

The story's exploration of hybrid identities also challenges Western readers to reconsider rigid notions of cultural authenticity and national identity. By presenting characters who do not fit neatly into cultural categories, Kureishi forces readers to grapple with the complexity of identity in multicultural societies. This may prompt reflection on how Western nations define citizenship and belonging, and whether these definitions are truly inclusive of diverse experiences and identities.

Furthermore, the economic dimensions of the immigrant experience portrayed in the story invite Western readers to examine the structural inequalities present in their societies. Parvez's position as a taxi driver, despite his efforts to integrate, highlights the limited economic mobility often faced by immigrants. This may prompt readers to question the fairness of their societies' economic systems and the barriers that prevent the full participation of immigrant communities.

The story also challenges Western readers to reflect on their media consumption and the representation of immigrant communities in popular culture. Kureish presents nuanced portrayals of immigrant experiences through the complex characters he creates, thereby providing a point of reference for the modern reader to compare his character development with the modern portrayal of immigrants in other forms of media. This may encourage readers to seek out more diverse perspectives and to critically examine the media narratives they encounter about immigrant communities.

Additionally, “My Son the Fanatic” invites consideration of how Western educational systems address cultural diversity and the experiences of immigrant students. While not explicitly focused on education, the story’s themes raise questions about how schools can better support students from diverse backgrounds and promote genuine intercultural understanding.

The story’s ambiguous ending, which leaves the conflict between Parvez and Ali unresolved, challenges Western readers’ desire for neat resolutions to complex cultural issues. This ambiguity forces readers to sit with the discomfort of unresolved tension, mirroring the ongoing negotiations and conflicts that characterize real-world multicultural societies.

“My Son the Fanatic” therefore serves as a powerful tool for self-examination among Western readers. By presenting a nuanced and often uncomfortable portrayal of immigrant experiences and cultural conflict, Kureishi challenges readers to question their assumptions about multiculturalism, integration, and national identity. The story prompts critical reflection on personal biases, societal structures, and the complex realities of life in diverse societies. Ultimately, it calls on Western readers to move beyond superficial celebrations of diversity and to engage more deeply with the challenges and opportunities presented by multicultural coexistence. Through this process of self-examination, the story has the potential to foster greater empathy, understanding, and commitment in creating more genuinely inclusive societies.

## Conclusion

Kureishi’s “My Son the Fanatic” offers a nuanced exploration of hybridity, identity formation, and cultural conflict in immigrant experiences within Western societies. Through Parvez and Ali’s contrasting journeys, Kureishi critiques simplistic notions of multiculturalism and integration, revealing persistent structural inequalities and subtle forms of exclusion that continue to marginalize immigrant communities.

The story illuminates the psychological toll of cultural displacement and identity negotiation, highlighting how the pressure to adapt to Western norms while maintaining cultural heritage can lead to profound distress. By situating the narrative within broader societal changes, Kureishi underscores how changing social norms can exacerbate tensions within immigrant families, leading to divergent paths of cultural adaptation or rejection.

Kureishi's portrayal of the cultural 'othering' of second-generation immigrants serves as a stark warning about the potential consequences of failed integration and continued marginalization. By grounding hybridity in lived experiences, the story challenges idealized notions of cultural synthesis, presenting it as a complex process of negotiation and adaptation.

"My Son the Fanatic" also serves as a tool for self-examination among Western readers, challenging assumptions about multiculturalism, integration, and national identity. It prompts critical reflection on personal biases and societal structures, potentially fostering greater empathy and understanding.

Kureishi's work remains a relevant and provocative exploration of the challenges faced by immigrant communities in Western societies. It contributes to ongoing discussions about creating more inclusive societies, reminding us that the journey towards true multicultural understanding is ongoing and complex. The story challenges us to move beyond superficial celebrations of diversity and engage more deeply with the realities of hybrid identities and cultural conflict in the 21st century.

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