

Hanif Kureishi: My beautiful laundrette

1. Migration in Britain

- **1948 British Nationality Act:** permission for citizens of all Commonwealth members to settle down and work in Britain
- **late 1940s:** beginning of the post-war-wave of black migration to Britain
- **1950s** strengthened migration and first considerations of the UK government to control black immigration for “race reasons”
- Migration from the West Indies, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Africa occurred in varying flows due to policies of the UK aswell as the sending countries
- **1955 – 1965** Migrants from the West Indies are recruited for economic reasons (→ at the same time the UK government wants the West Indies to restrict emigration)
- **1954** the Indian government restricts emigration (aswell as the Pakistani and the Bangladeshi government)
- **1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Act** is meant to reduce immigration (strengthened flow of immigrants before the coming into power) no immigration without work permit
- **1967/1968 and 1972** Asian immigrants from East Africa (UK passport holders) arrive in Britain
- **1968 Commonwealth Immigrants Act** restriction of entry for non-patrials with UK passports (especially Asians from Kenya)
- **1971** Immigration Act: distinction of classes of Commonwealth citizens
- **70s/80s** stable immigration flows partly offset by the emigration → stricter immigration laws during the **80s**

2. British Society during the Thatcher period

→ *My Beautiful Laundrette* was shot in 1985 when Margaret Thatcher got her second term in office

- “Thatcherism”
- Reversion of the trends of the 60s
- Return to traditional moral values
- Financial reward for hard work and enterprise: “Making money became a virtue” (Mitchell/p. 4)
- No subsidies for businesses losing money
- Closure/privatisation of large sections of traditional industries (e.g coal-mining, steel-making)
 - Unemployment, growing underclass of young people
 - Xenophobia, agitation against immigration: “(...) and politicians like Enoch Powell lent respectability to racism by warning that rivers of blood would flow if immigration was not stopped immediately.” (Mitchell/p.4)
 - Polarization between “white people” and ethnic minorities → Asian families wish to acquire status by wealth → during the 70s - 90s Pakistanis and Indians started taking over small shops (e.g laundrettes, kiosks) running businesses characteristic for immigrants

3. Hanif Kureishi and “My Beautiful Laundrette”

- Born in 1954, English mother, Pakistani father
- Grown up in south London, experience of racial prejudices (e.g a childhood friend becomes a skinhead; an attendant of a laundrette refuses to touch a “dirty foreigners” things)
- Shot as a low budget film “My Beautiful Laundrette” was conceived for TV to reach a broader audience “The great thing about *Laundrette* was that no one knew exactly the proper way to do it. It was completely undercrewed, it was completely underfunded, it was completely, you know, ... The construction team was two people who both were on the set. We’d just grab extras off the street.” (Kaleta/p. 42)
- *My Beautiful Laundrette* deals with Kureishi’s own experiences of the polarization between the “whites” and the Asian immigrants in Britain as well as his knowledge of Pakistani society (acquired during two Pakistan trips before and during the writing of *MBL*)
 - No possibility of identification with neither the British nor the Pakistani society
 - *MBL* shows a world “in-between”
 - “(...)he insisted that contemporary cinema must reflect social and political reality.” (Kaleta/p.39) but not without humour and irony: “At the moment everything is so horrific that if you wrote straight social realism people wouldn’t be able to bear to watch it.” (Mitchell/p.5)
- *MBL* was one of the commercially and critically most successful British films of 1986
- *MBL* was nominated for the Oscar for the best screenplay in 1985
- *MBL* was successful in Britain as well as in the US and made Kureishi well-known

4. Stephen Frears, director of “My Beautiful Laundrette”

- Born in 1941 in Leicester/UK
- Study of law in Cambridge
- Assistant at London’s Royal Court Theatre
- Acclaim for his first feature “Gumshoe” (1972)
- Success in GB and the US (The Hit, My Beautiful Laundrette, Dangerous Liaisons, The Grifters, High Fidelity, Dirty Pretty Things)
- 1999 Silver bear for the best director (“The Hi-Lo Country”) at the Berlinale
- Next release: Mrs Henderson’s Presents (2005)
- Kureishi admired S.F “for his grittily realistic films” (Mitchell/p.4)
- “My Beautiful Laundrette” established Stephen Frears as a “major filmmaking talent” (Kaleta/p. 41)
- Further collaboration with Hanif Kureishi e.g “*Sammy and Rosie Get Laid*”

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