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Sing Who You Are: Music and Identity in Postcolonial British-South Asian Literature

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Declaration

I hereby declare that:

a) this thesis has been composed by me;

b) this thesis is my own work, and I have acknowledged material from the work of other people and I have clearly marked and given references to all quotations;

c) this thesis has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification except as specified.

16 April 2013

Signature Date

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Abstract

This thesis examines the role of music in British-South Asian postcolonial literature, asking how music relates to the possibility of constructing postcolonial identity. The focus is on novels that explore the postcolonial condition in India and the United Kingdom, as well as Pakistan and the United States: Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy* (1993), Amit Chaudhuri's *Afternoon Raag* (1993), Suhayl Saadi's *Psychoraag* (2004), Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990) and *The Black Album* (1995), and Salman Rushdie's *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* (1999). The analysed novels feature different kinds of music, from Indian classical to non-classical traditions, and from Western classical music to pop music and rock 'n' roll. Music is depicted as a cultural artefact and as a purely aestheticised art form at the same time. As a cultural artefact, music derives meaning from its socio-cultural context of production and serves as a frame of reference to explore postcolonial identities on their own terms. As purely aesthetic art, music escapes its contextual meaning. The transcendental qualities of music render music a space where identities can be expressed irrespective of origin and politics of location. Thereby, music in the novels marks a very productive space to imagine the postcolonial nation and to rewrite imperial history, to express the cultural hybridity of characters in-between nations, to analyse the state of the nation and life in the multicultural diaspora of contemporary Great Britain, and to explore the ramifications of cultural globalisation versus cultural imperialism. Analysing music's cultural meaning and aesthetic value in relation to postcolonial identity, this thesis opens up new frames of textual and cultural analysis that help understand the postcolonial condition from the interdisciplinary perspective of word and music studies.

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Introduction

Notes on Music in Postcolonial Literature

> Music […] gives us a way of being in the world, a way of making sense of it.
>
> ~Simon Frith, "Music and Identity" (114)

> How could you not talk of identity when talking about music?
>
> ~Josh Kun, *Audiotopia: Music, Race, and America* (13)

As the opening quotes by Simon Frith and Josh Kun indicate, identity and music are intimately linked, because music is a means to express identity and to make sense of our ways "of being in the world" (Frith, "Music and Identity" 114). Similarly, Paul Gilroy in *The Black Atlantic* writes about the significance of music and identity formation in the context of slavery and the black diaspora in the US: "music and its rituals can be used to create a model whereby identity can be understood neither as a fixed essence nor as a vague and utterly contingent construction to be reinvented by the will and whim of aesthetes, symbolists, and language gamers" (102). Three things are important here: first, Gilroy understands music within the context of social formations ("music and its rituals"); second, he understands identity as fluid and changeable ("[not] as a fixed essence"), and considers music to be capable of expressing this fluidity; and third, Gilroy stresses the emancipatory power of music to subvert the hierarchies involved in identity politics ("the will and whim of aesthetes, symbolists, and language gamers"). Gilroy argues that in the context of slavery, music – as opposed to words – always had the power to say the unsayable (38), and that music therefore has the power to express an identity that is self-determined.[1] Although

1 In "Sounds Authentic: Black Music, Ethnicity, and the Challenge of a 'Changing' Same", Gilroy employs the very useful term of "self-identity" in relation to music's ability to constitute racial identity.

Gilroy's focus is a very specific and historical one, his conclusions about music's significance for the formation of an identity that is fluid and a "*self-in-progress*" (to borrow Frith's term from his essay "Music and Identity", 109 [italics original]) also hold in the postcolonial context of the novels to be discussed. To understand music not as a fixed product but as a work in progress is to grasp its significance for the postcolonial condition, which itself is commonly defined as hybrid, fluid, and perpetually changing and transgressing fixed constructs of identity.

The narrative that permeates this project is therefore a musical story of postcolonial coming-of-age that examines the role that music plays in the formation of the postcolonial state and the postcolonial subject. To inform this study, I am looking at the use of music across six different novels, all of which are concerned with the British-South Asian postcolonial condition: Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy* (1993), Amit Chaudhuri's *Afternoon Raag* (1993), Suhayl Saadi's *Psychoraag* (2004), Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990) and *The Black Album* (1995), and Salman Rushdie's *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* (1999). Not all of these novels are primarily about music (*A Suitable Boy* and *The Buddha of Suburbia* feature music as part of cultural portraits of postcolonial India and Great Britain), but all these texts include music in ways that are significant for the interpretation of postcolonial identities and cultures. Music is an intrinsic part of the human condition, and it is particularly fruitful for the expression of postcolonial identities, because it easily escapes constructs of meaning just as the postcolonial condition defies meta-narratives of Western culture and supremacy. This holds true for all the texts to be discussed, and it holds true for all the different kinds of music featured in the texts. These range from Western classical to Indian classical music, Bollywood tunes, Indian folk tradition, Western pop, and rock 'n' roll as an originally Western art form that has been appropriated all over the world.

Music is integrated into the texts on the levels of structure, narrative, and as extra-textual references to historical composers and musicians (dead and alive), bands, and musical pieces. Musical references are part of the novels' plots and contexts, they act as symbols and metaphors, and they inform the characters' identification with their cultural heritage and surroundings (two aspects which do not necessarily coincide). Music's cultural roots inform the characters' cultural as well as national identities at home and abroad, which in this context means India, Pakistan and their postcolonial diasporas in the United Kingdom and the United States. Characters that find themselves in-between nations and cultures come

to rely on music's ability to cross borders between nations, cultures, and languages. Musical discourses in the six novels demonstrate that music can be seen as part of a socio-cultural context of production, an act of political resistance against cultural imperialism, or as an art that claims aesthetic truth and transcendence. Examples to be discussed include Carl Dahlhaus's *The Idea of Absolute Music*, a treatise on romantic musical aesthetics that considered music purely on aesthetic terms and divorced the art from any extra-musical meaning. Another example is the use of the Orpheus myth, which credits music with mythical roots and magical powers. Magical or not, the powers of music portrayed in the novels allow the protagonists to negotiate their identities across time and space, that is between past and present and between here and there.

Both my methodology and subject matter are interdisciplinary, as I am discussing the specificities and the meaning of one art form (music) within another (literature). Music is contained within the text and transcends it at the same time. In its original form as either sound or notation, music is not there in the text, is not represented. The whole exercise of writing music into literature is thereby an act of displacement and of transgression, where the text displaces the music and the music transgresses the text. The tension thus created between presence and absence opens up creative spaces within the text for the representation of postcolonial identities that traditionally are defined through their absence from written history. Just as music is uprooted, displaced, and relocated, so are the postcolonial characters, and just as music conveys and acquires new meaning within the context of an alien art form, so do postcolonial characters acquire a new cultural identity and in turn change what this cultural identity entails. Music reaches beyond the texts that contain it, and thereby allows for the expression of identities that are themselves, to rephrase Homi K. Bhabha, beyond.[2]

Edward W. Said and musical "transgression"

What renders music so suitable for the exploration and expression of postcolonial identities is what Edward W. Said defines in his *Musical Elaborations* as the "transgression" in music: "What I mean by 'transgression' is something completely literal and secular at the same time: that faculty music has to travel, cross over, drift from place to place in a society, even though many institutions and orthodoxies have sought to confine it" (xv). The dialectic in music that

2 See Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, and particularly his "Introduction: Locations of Culture" (10).

Said alludes to lies between the traditionally held belief in music's aesthetic universality, which, as Dahlhaus argues, has its roots in the late Classical and Romantic period, and the cultural turn in musicology – referred to as cultural musicology or new musicology – which gained momentum in the nineteen-eighties and which analyses music within the socio-political context of its cultural production. The central question at the heart of this aesthetic divide concerns musical meaning. As Lawrence Kramer puts it in *Musical Meaning: Toward a Critical History,* "[i]n its modern form, the problem of meaning arose with the development of European music as something to be listened to 'for itself' as art or entertainment rather than as something mixed in with social occasion, drama, or ritual" (1). This repertoire of classical music together with the modes of listening that it fostered, described in detail by Dahlhaus, encouraged "a sense of aesthetic self-sufficiency and an idealized, unitary concept of music" (1). The claim for music's autonomy is dependent on an understanding of music as essentially non-verbal: music is a language of tones rather than of words (as, for example, Theodor W. Adorno argues in "Music and Language"), hence it is able to drift free of the tethers of verbal signification. This conception of music was particularly common in the nineteenth century, not least as an underpinning for the idea of 'absolute music' devoid of any extra-musical meaning.

On the other side of the argument about musical meaning stand the cultural musicologists and amongst them Kramer, who understands music as "meaningfully engaged with language, imagery, and the wider world" (1). Integrating the study of music with social and cultural issues, cultural musicologists argue that music is not exempt from worldly or extra-musical meaning, but instead informed by it. In this light, music is not an exception to the rule of signification but perfectly in line with it. Rather than being mutually exclusive, this ambiguity in music between aesthetic autonomy and cultural contingency marks the "general, higher-order context and condition of intelligibility for most modern Western music" (2). In other words, music's essential ambivalence of meaning constitutes our experience and understanding of it. The workings of these conceptions and their interplay are variously at play in the novels under consideration, particularly so in Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy* and Salman Rushdie's *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, as discussed in Chapter One and Chapter Four respectively.

Throughout *Musical Elaborations*, Said negotiates music's position in society, of which it is at once an intrinsic part – "practised in a social and cultural setting" (x) – and marked by

an "ideal purity of […] individual experience" (x). As Katherine Fry notes in her article on "Elaboration, Counterpoint, Transgression: Music and the Role of the Aesthetic in the Criticism of Edward W. Said", Said's music criticism is marked by an "implicit tension between the criticism of art as part of a specific context or social structure and the analysis of art as a more independent or aesthetic phenomenon" (266). To ease this tension, Said employs his concept of the "transgression" of music, by which he tries to bridge aesthetic universality and social meaning and establish "the affiliations between music and society" (*Musical Elaborations* 70).

Said explains further that the transgressive element in music "is its nomadic ability to attach itself to, and become part of, social formations, to vary its articulations and rhetoric depending on the occasion as well as the audience, plus the power and the gender situations in which it takes place" (70). The transgressive element is therefore ultimately aesthetic, because it is independent of social formations and circumstantial meaning. Also, it is always already political, because the transgressive element in music subverts power structures. As Fry phrases it, for Said the "transgressive aspects of music allow it to engage in any number of social mediations, thus resisting determinist and totalizing narratives" ("Elaboration, Counterpoint, Transgression" 269). Thereby, Said's concept of transgression marks "an automatically emancipatory act of resistance" (272), which renders Said's musical aesthetics "a critical model for challenging the objectivity and permanence of historical knowledge, interpretation and identity" (276). Moreover, the transgressive in music makes music "resistant to totalization and continually open to possibility and multiplicity" (278). In Said's words, this accounts for music's aesthetic autonomy: "music manages in spite of everything to preserve its reticence, mystery, or allusive silence, which in turn symbolizes its autonomy as an art" (*Musical Elaborations* 16). It follows that this transgressive element is what renders music so fruitful for the analysis of postcolonial identities, because it supports postcolonial voices in resisting imperial histories. Moreover, transgression itself is a highly productive concept for the discussion of postcolonial identity, because it accommodates concepts of fluidity and the possibility of hybridity. Musical transgression troubles notions of fixed identity such as the imperial binary of self and other, against which postcolonial fiction writes. Music supports this writing back by allowing the novels' characters to partake in its transgression. With music, characters can "travel, cross over, drift from place to place in a society" (xv), defying politics of location such as the hierarchical binary of East and West or

of centre and periphery; they can identify as being in-between cultures and places and chart new spaces that are able to contain cultural hybridity. Throughout this thesis, Said's transgression is therefore not only to be read musically, but also as a postcolonial condition that is marked by a transgression of boundaries, be they geographical, historical, cultural, social, or related to differences in religious beliefs, gender, race, and class.

While Said focuses on Western classical music, my analysis of the multiple musical traditions found in the novels shows that the transgressive element that bridges social function and aesthetic universality is inherent to all types of music. The kinds of music described in the novels are at the same time worldly – "practiced in a social and cultural setting" (x), as Said puts it – and otherworldly: of a higher order (Seth, *A Suitable Boy* [see my Chapter One]), located "beyond the beyond" (Saadi, *Psychoraag* 210), a "self-created galaxy of notes" (Chaudhuri, *Afternoon Raag* 179), "another world" (Kureishi, *The Buddha of Suburbia* 62) or a mythical-magical force from another world (Rushdie, *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* [see my Chapter Four]). As Simon Frith argues, when it comes to how music works in relation to identity, there is no difference between high and low music, art and popular music, or Western and non-Western music: "different sorts of musical activity may produce different sorts of musical identity, but *how* the musics work to form identities is the same" ("Music and Identity" 112). Despite differences in cultural circumstances, the transgressive element in music is recognisable across cultures. It therefore marks a quality of music that can bridge the aesthetic approach and the cultural studies/social approach. It describes an essence that recognises sameness of shared aesthetic values (aesthetic approach) amongst and across different cultural meanings (cultural studies approach).

Musical transgression and the postcolonial novel

The transgression in music between aesthetic universality and cultural specificity results in inherently dialectic functions of music. All the novels depict music as intrinsically ambivalent and with seemingly contradictory characteristics. On the one hand, music is portrayed as part and product of a given cultural context (be it newly independent and postcolonial India in *A Suitable Boy*, or the postcolonial diaspora in London from the 1960s to the 1980s in *The Buddha of Suburbia* and *The Black Album*). On the other hand, music constantly escapes this context. Seth describes North Indian classical music as ineffable, and

Rushdie uses the same term in his description of rock music in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* (20). Music is at the same time affirmative and subversive of ideologies. Rock music in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* is a case in point here, seeing that the novel describes it as a force of political liberation on the one hand and as an agent of cultural imperialism on the other. Music locates and dislocates identities, which becomes clear when looking at the interrelations between music, place, and identity in *Afternoon Raag* and *Psychoraag*. Music signifies collective as well as individual identities; most prominently in Kureishi's novels, where the pop music of the 1960s to 1980s is as much a sign of the times of which it emerges as it is a very individual exploration of the protagonists' identities. Music carries and escapes meaning, and it escapes the texts which contain it. As an art form within another art form (as music in literature), music is present and absent from the novels at the same time. It is part of the narrative and thereby constitutes part of the characters' experiences. The underlying aesthetics of music inform music's function within the novels, as does the cultural context of its production.

Music in literature, however, cannot be truthfully represented; it is not present on the page and does not sound from the novel as soon as we open it, and in none of the novels to be discussed is music represented in its written form as staff notation (and even if it were, the debate about whether a score already constitutes music is one that in itself would merit a full-length study).[3] As Stephen Benson writes in *Literary Music*, "[t]he sounds of music may be precisely what literature lacks, but it is a felt absence nevertheless" (9). At the heart of this thesis therefore lies a tension of representation. Music is generally taken to be the art form that is least representational. Its inclusion in literature – and thereby its implied opposition to the other art form – only stresses this, as Benson explains: "Literature is constituted by its status as representation, its separation from a world which may itself be no less fictional, but there are few worldly objects or experiences as unlike the novel as music" (6). Gilroy argues that it is this refusal to represent that enables music to express the unsayable and thereby authentically express identity; and music in literature enables literature to do the same, as Peter Dayan argues in his conclusion to *Music Writing Literature*. Next to the socio-cultural circumstances of music, according to Dayan there is a singularity in music that remains "unspoken": "This singular music is never 'entendue', never understood as it is heard; it remains unspoken. Music returns the favour to literature: it provides the means to figure an

3 See Daniel Barenboim and Edward Said in *Parallels and Paradoxes*.

unspoken, unrepresentable, singularity of literature, through the endless network of images of languages that hybridize music and letters. Music saves language from representation" (131). For Dayan, this bears crucial consequences for the text's ability to capture the singularity of identity and self-hood:

> To be alive is to escape representation. It is to have that freedom which means one cannot be calculated; one cannot be imitated or translated or mechanically reproduced. It is never to be simply present; it is to have a singular character which no event or structure or description can manifest in its totality; not to be self-identical. In a word, to be alive is to be different; and at the same time, to share, through love, in the sense that an endless value exists. (132)

In *Culture and Imperialism*, Said similarly writes that to think about others – and the postcolonial other – must mean "not trying to rule others, not trying to classify them or put them in hierarchies" (336). Questions of representation are at the heart of the postcolonial agenda, and they constitute the core of music's significance for postcolonial literature. If music frees literature from representation, as Dayan argues, and if music unseats language and textuality as "preeminent expressions of human consciousness" (*The Black Atlantic* 74), as Gilroy sees it, then music in postcolonial literature provides a means to subvert the hierarchy of imperial history writing and to explore and express the singularity of the postcolonial condition.

Musico-literary relations

In 2007, Judith Butler and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak published the transcript of a conversation entitled *Who Sings the Nation-State*? This title asks two questions and makes one assumption, all of which are crucial for my thesis: it asks for agency ("who?") and location ("the nation-state"), and links the two with music ("sings"). This synthesis informs the main hypothesis of my thesis: how postcolonial authors use music to explain postcolonial identity, which, as will transpire throughout the analysis, is intrinsically linked to situations of (dis)location. By their postcolonial situation, the novels' characters almost by default define themselves in relation to location or, more often, dislocation. Experiences of migration, diaspora, cultural in-between-ness (to rephrase Homi Bhabha again) are central for the postcolonial subject and feature heavily in the novels I am discussing.[4] Yet, I do not begin this discourse discussing postcolonial theories of dislocation. My vantage point for

4 Bhabha, "Introduction: Locations of culture" (2).

analysis is always grounded in music, more specifically, the music as it is featured in the novels. First I explore the relationship between music and questions of identity, and I then interpret my analytical findings within the framework of postcolonial theory.

Next to the topical focus on music, the logic behind the selection of novels to be analysed is roughly chronological and, more neatly, geographical. While Seth portrays India shortly after Independence, we follow Chaudhuri's and Saadi's protagonists to the UK of the last decade of the twentieth century and the first decade of the twenty-first. More important than the historical time frame of the novels, we follow characters to a state of cultural in-between-ness where they have to negotiate the often contradictory influences from their home and host countries. Kureishi sets his narratives firmly in the South-Asian diaspora of 1960s to 1980s London, while Rushdie takes the journey of postcolonial migration to the global level and to the United States at the turn of the twenty-first century. These different postcolonial conditions will be examined through the lenses of the musical traditions in the novels, as they feature – to varying degrees – musical processes of belonging, displacement, relocation, and dissemination that mirror the postcolonial condition of home, being exiled from home, life in the diaspora, and migration as a global movement.

This project is situated within the interdisciplinary context of word and music studies, pioneered by Steven Paul Scher in the 1960s, and since then developed further by scholars coming from both disciplines, literature and musicology.[5] Scholars in this field that have been directly influential to my own project include (in alphabetical order): Stephen Benson, Walter Bernhart, Siglind Bruhn, Kieran Curran, Peter Dayan, Mario Dunkel, Axel Eglund, Lawrence Kramer, Charity McAdams, Emily Petermann, Robert Samuels, Delia da Sousa Correa, Werner Wolf. To date (and to my knowledge), this study is singular in undertaking a reading of musico-literary relations in postcolonial texts on a book-length scale, focusing on postcolonial India and Pakistan and their diaspora (particularly the UK). Notably related to my project are Mi Zhou's doctoral thesis on music in E.M. Forster, "Sublime Noise: Reading E.M. Forster Musically", which I will discuss in my first chapter in the context of analysing music in *A Passage to India*, and Michelle Fillion's *Difficult Rhythm: Music and the Word in E.M. Forster.* Bennett Zon and Phyllis Weliver more generally write on the role of music in

5 See, for example, Steven Paul Scher, *Music and Text: Critical Inquiries*, *Verbal Music in German Literature*, or *Literatur und Musik: ein Handbuch zur Theorie und Praxis eines komparatistischen Grenzgebietes*, to name only a few on Scher's publications on the interrelations between music and literature. Walter Bernhart's essay "Masterminding Word and Music Studies: A Tribute to Steven Paul Scher" provides an interesting and insightful overview of Scher's contributions to the field of word and music studies.

colonial literature set during the British Raj, and they analyse how non-Western music was used to cast the colonial subject as either naïve and primitive (Zon) or as the exoticised other (Weliver). Although looking at different places and times, other studies on the relationship between music, identity, and literature are useful to my present project, such as Robert H. Cataliotti's *The Songs Became the Stories: The Music in African-American Fiction, 1970-2005*, in which the author looks at music in African-American postcolonial literature. Also, Mai Al-Nakib analyses musical ekphrasis in an essay on the Algerian writer Assia Djebar, whose texts deal with the legacy of French imperialism. Writing on the relationship between music and identity in literature, Paul McCann focuses on jazz music in American fiction in *Race, Music, and National Identity: Images of Jazz in American Fiction, 1920-1960*.

The field of word and music studies is usually subdivided into studies focusing on music in literature, literature in music (for example programme music), or music and literature (a very prominent example here would be opera studies). While this study is situated within the first category, it will not do justice to the vast explorations in interdisciplinary methodology of word and music studies, most notably undertaken by Werner Wolf and Walter Bernhart.[6] Partly, this is due to the restrictions of time and space that underlie every research project, and partly it is because I have found a formalist approach to be less informative in answering questions of how music affects identity in postcolonial novels. Stephen Benson succinctly emphasises the point in relation to his book *Literary Music*: "If a novel draws on music, the question is not how, in the technical sense, but why: what idea of music is represented, to what end, and how does this relate to other discourses of music, including those of musicology? How is what a novel has to say about music caught up in questions of representation, of aesthetics and ethics?" (6) As already argued, these "questions of representation, of aesthetics and ethics" are pivotal for my postcolonial framework of interpretation, and an example from *A Suitable Boy* shows the limitations that a formalist approach bears in relation to such questions. In Seth's novel, the fictional novelist Amit Chatterji likens the performance of a rāga to the narrative structure of a novel:[7]

6 See, for example: Werner Wolf's essays "Musicalized Fiction and Intermediality. Theoretical Aspects of Word and Music Studies" and "Intermediality Revisited: Reflections on Word and Music Relations in the Context of a General Typology of Intermediality". Overall, the biannual publication *Word and Music Studies* of the International Association for Word and Music Studies provides a very good introduction to the research conducted in the field.

7 Throughout this dissertation and when I am not quoting from primary or secondary material that use different spellings, I will use the term *rāga* instead of *raag* or *Rāga*. All terms are synonymous with each other. I have made this decision in reference to Bimalakanta Roychaudhuri's *The Dictionary of Hindustani Classical Music* and *Grove Music Online*.

> 'I've always felt that the performance of a raag resembles a novel – or at least the kind of novel I'm attempting to write. You know,' he continued, extemporizing as he went along, 'first you take one note and explore it for a while, then another to discover its possibilities, then perhaps you get to the dominant, and pause for a bit, and it's only gradually that the phrases begin to form and the tabla joins in with the beat … and then the more brilliant improvisations and diversions begin, with the main theme returning from time to time, and finally it all speeds up, and the excitement increases to a climax.' (426)[8]

Amit's conclusions, while interesting and comprehensible in terms of formal musico-literary relations, do not shed any light on the value of writing music into literature. Therefore, this quotation is a very succinct and fitting summary of what this dissertation is not about. Like *Literary Music*, this study is not much concerned with "any of the ways in which narrative literature has sought to model itself after music, or on particular musical properties" (5).[9] I am not looking at structural parallels or any other resemblances between music and literature as described by Amit in *A Suitable Boy*, because the problems with such an "unapologetically formalist" approach are apparent. As Benson points out, it leads "to an unnecessary preoccupation with the question of verification: exactly how do we establish that such-and-such a text is musical and how might this allow us to evade the ever-present danger of the impressionistic metaphor?" (5) This is not to deny that literature consciously models itself after music; there are texts that do, and very consciously so, as exemplified by my analysis of Chaudhuri's *Afternoon Raag* and Saadi's *Psychoraag* in Chapter Two. Yet, this structural analysis and comparison between rāga and novel is not an end in itself, but serves to inform the larger focus of this dissertation, which is to study the effects of music on postcolonial identity.

To this effect, Chapter One looks at the role of music in Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy* and examines how music can constitute national identity and how India as a newly independent nation can thus be imagined through the different musical traditions that are featured in the novel. In addition, the role of music is examined in resisting cultural imperialism during the British Raj. Chapter Two is concerned with the role of music in shaping individual identity in Amit Chaudhuri's *Afternoon Raag* and Suhayl Saadi's *Psychoraag*. Both protagonists find themselves in situations of cultural dislocation, and they

8 Further details on the characteristics of rāga will be developed when discussing it in relation to *Afternoon Raag* and *Psychoraag* in Chapter Two.

9 Where Benson's exception to this rule is his analysis of formal analogies between music and literature in Bakhtin and Kundera, mine is the structural parallels between a rāga and Amit Chaudhuri's *Afternoon Raag* and Suhayl Saadi's *Psychoraag*, as analysed in detail in Chapter Two.

use music to access memories of homes that are either far away or that are imaginary homelands of the past, as Rushdie coins them in *Imaginary Homelands*. Chapter Three takes the concept of performance centre-stage in order to analyse the impact of music on Hanif Kureishi's characters in *The Black Album* and *The Buddha of Suburbia*. The core of the argument is that both identity and music come into being through performance. Through performance, music destabilises identity categories, such as race and gender, and undermines essentialising narratives of religious fundamentalism. Finally, Chapter Four looks at rock music and its relation to processes of cultural imperialism and globalisation as they are played out in Salman Rushdie's *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*. This will allow me to conclude that music affects people across boundaries of nations, languages, and cultures by connecting them on a musical level that forestalls differences resulting from the politics of location. In the postcolonial novels discussed in this thesis, music serves to undermine the postcolonial binary of East versus West and instead brings people together through a shared love and admiration.

Chapter 1

Singing the Nation: Music and 'The Discovery of India' in Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy*

> At the stroke of the midnight hour, when the world sleeps, India will awake to life and freedom. A moment comes, which comes but rarely in history, when we step out from the old to the new, when an age ends, and when the soul of a nation, long suppressed, finds utterance.
>
> ~Jawaharlal Nehru, "Tryst with Destiny" speech, delivered at the Constituent Assembly, New Dehli, 14 August 1947 (76-7)

> [P]erhaps it is because we hear a different drummer. Let us step to the music that we hear, we in India.
>
> ~Vikram Seth, *A Suitable Boy* (56)

Vikram Seth's novel, *A Suitable Boy*, is not primarily a novel about music, yet music pervades the text as much as it pervades the characters' lives.[10] It plays a crucial role at festivities and celebrations such as weddings, which open and close the novel, or religious festivals, where music is an intrinsic part of the devotional ceremonial. Moreover, music shapes everyday life: a large number of characters in the vast cast of the novel either play an instrument or sing, whistle or sing along to favourite film tunes, have and share opinions about music, or use fictional and non-fictional artists alike – such as the novel's most prominent classical musician Ustad Majeed Khan and Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) – as fixed points of cultural reference and identification. As a case in point, Lata Mehra, one of the novel's central characters for whom her mother Mrs. Rupa Mehra aims to find the titular suitable boy, has taken an interest in Indian classical music from her best friend Malati Trivedi, who in turn studies singing with Ustad Majeed Khan, as does Veena Tandon, the

10 In contrast, Seth's novel *An Equal Music* is predominantly about music, and I will briefly discuss it in terms of its portrayal of Western classical music at a later point in this chapter.

sister to Lata's brother-in-law. Lata herself plays the tanpura and has the habit of humming rāgas (*A Suitable Boy* 606, 636), of which Mrs. Rupa Mehra very much approves, because she regards Indian classical music as high culture which will foster her chances of marrying off her daughter. Mrs. Mehra's opinion of Saeeda Bai, ghazal singer and courtesan to the Raja of Marh, is less laudable due to implications of promiscuity and lower caste that accompany the profession of courtesans (17, 29), as will be outlined in more detail below. Lata's brother Arun, on the other hand, frowns at Lata's humming of Raag Todi during breakfast, not because he cannot stand that "awful wailing stuff" that in the Englishman Jock Mackay's ears "Indian singers make" (435), but because Indian classical music is too Indian for Arun,[11] who, as soon as Lata stops humming, starts whistling "Three Coins in the Fountain".[12]

In short, music is an intrinsic part of the characters' everyday lives and culture. Music thereby performs a crucial role in the formation of cultural identity and national consciousness, which are main topical concerns in Seth's post-independence, post-partition, and postcolonial epic of India as a nation in 1951/52. In the *BBC World Book Club*, Seth speaks of this time as "a very quiet place to begin"; despite this, he wrote what Sarah Johnson on *Literature Online* credits to be "the longest single volume novel ever to have been written in English" (n. pag.). In the course of its 1474 pages the author offers a richly detailed portrayal of India shortly after independence and partition, taking into account the country's recent history, colonial legacies, national and domestic politics, as well as India's religions and culture. The novel presents music as an intrinsic part of that culture. With its long history and tradition, music contributes to the overall portrait of the country as written by Seth. Vikram Seth's treatment of music in *A Suitable Boy* creates and expresses an independent and self-determined postcolonial national identity by asserting unified cultural authenticity on the one side, and by having resisted cultural imperialism and colonial appropriation on the other.

Different musical traditions are featured in the novel, which can broadly be classified into three groups, North Indian classical, Western classical, and Indian non-classical music. These three categories then can be subdivided into six different kinds of music, all of which have a distinct purpose in the narrative and in demonstrating the role of music culture in the

11 Arun Mehra constantly strives to be more English than the English, which is one of the highly satirised sub-plots and character caricatures in the novel.

12 British-born songwriter Jule Styne composed the soundtrack for Jean Negulesco's 1954 film *Three Coins in the Fountain*, including the title song of the same name.

transition of national identity from colony to independent state. All musical forms are represented or embodied by fictional and non-fictional figureheads. First, there is North Indian classical music – also known as Hindustani music – as embodied by the fictional character Ustad Majeed Khan, who is praised in the text as "one of the finest singers in north India" (25). Second, there is Western classical music, exemplified in the text by Schubert. The courtesan Saeeda Bai stands for the third tradition, which is ghazal poetry and music. The fourth field is that of music and religion. This includes devotional music (in the novel also sung by Saeeda Bai), and the role of drummers during religious processions. It also includes the Ustad's stance towards Hindustani music, which derives from Hindu scripts, but which is mostly performed by Muslims (such as the Ustad). Tagore's folk songs mark the fifth kind of music featured in *A Suitable Boy*, and I will analyse Tagore's importance as a figurehead of the incipient nationalism around the turn of the nineteenth century. A brief discussion of how Bollywood tunes transcend social class and caste in the novel will conclude the first part of this chapter.

Amongst these different kinds of music there is an implied hierarchy whereby classical music ranks highest and is considered a pure and absolute art, whereas the ghazal and folk traditions are of less aesthetic merit, seeing that they are depicted as serving programmatic purposes. These programmatic agendas, which imbue music with extramusical meaning and functions, express identities more clearly than the highly aestheticised art form of classical music does. Yet, all of these different kinds of music, including Hindustani music, stand for traditions that have shaped the cultural life and history of India and its people for centuries (in the case of classical and ghazal music), that have particularly influenced a growing nationalist consciousness and identity in the late nineteenth- to the mid-twentieth century (in the case of Tagore), and that have since shaped contemporary Indian culture (as exemplified by Bollywood). Thereby, the different kinds of music assemble to create a portrait of a cultural identity that is heterogeneous as well as self-determined and thus mirrors Jawaharlal Nehru's historiography of India as a country that finds unity in diversity. Moreover, music fulfils the Spivakean agenda of speaking – or in this case, singing – with one's own voice. Seth uses music in its various kinds and functions to provide a multifaceted cultural portrait of independent India from an insider's perspective, which defies homogenising accounts from the West and (re-)writes the nation from within the nation. What unites all the different kinds of music is music's ability to at the same time acquire meaning and thus serve as an

identity marker for a particular group of people, and to transcend political agendas, religious creeds, and social circumstances by its aesthetic value of being first and foremost an art form. In the context of an Indian postcolonial identity, still very much in flux in the years 1951/52, this quality is crucial, because it renders music a means of identification that is as flexible as the identity it represents. Together, the six musical forms portray India in its cultural variety and diversity.

In the second part of this chapter I will look at Indian classical music and its relationship to the West. I will argue that, given its long history and tradition, Indian classical music offers the newly found nation cultural stability which long pre-dates and has since outlasted the British Raj. As Gerry Farrell argues in his widely influential study *Indian Music and the West*, the characteristics of Hindustani music rendered it an ideal site of resistance against cultural imperialism: the oral tradition resisted Western staff notation as much as the melodic principles of rāga composition defied the Western harmonic tradition. Thereby, the promulgated aesthetic universalism of Hindustani music became political at the end of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century when it was appropriated by the incipient Hindu nationalism for the cause of the anti-colonial movement. This exemplifies a politicisation of the aesthetic and shows how music can be used to imagine the nation, an argument that I will substantiate with reference to both Benedict Anderson and Partha Chatterjee.

1.1 "Unity in Diversity"

1.1.1 The classical traditions

Of the six different musical traditions that are directly mentioned in the novel, the most prominent is Hindustani music, embodied and represented by the fictional musician Ustad Majeed Khan, "one of the finest singers in north India" (25).[13] He is also a music teacher at the Haridas College of Music, where he teaches Malati Trivedi and Veena Tandon Indian classical music. The Ustad practises what Regula Qureshi et al. in an extensive entry on Indian music and music tradition in *Grove Music Online* describes as "art music", which

13 A possible seventh tradition is South Indian classical music – also known as Carnatic music – which, associated with South India, does not figure into the characters' everyday lives. Seth sets his novel in the fictional village of Brahmpur, which is situated in North India. The Carnatic tradition can be considered the silent other to the North Indian Hindustani tradition in the novel.

needs to fulfil two criteria: an "[a]uthoritative theoretical doctrine and a disciplined oral tradition of performance extending back over several generations" (n. pag.). In terms of music theory and practice, melodic configurations in Indian classical music by definition need to adhere to the mode of a rāga. In musical lessons and performances alike, Ustad Majeed Khan always teaches and sings tunes based on rāgas, which marks him as a classical musician in the first sense of the definition above. Moreover, the Ustad is lauded throughout the novel for his outstanding skills as a musician, which earn him great respect amongst his students, who "immediately they saw it was him, got up respectfully to greet him" (313), amongst his audiences, and amongst his fellow musicians, who respect him so much that "no one presumed to sit near him" in the crowded canteen of All India Radio Brahmpur (320). The novel establishes Ustad Majeed Khan as "something better than even an A-grade artist" (320), and this confirms his standing as an artist, which according to Qureshi et al. is "determined by discipulary pedigree, by a reputation for devotion to the art, and by what the artist knows, as well as by his or her skill as a performer" (n. pag.). Through the Ustad's devotion to music he fulfils the second criterion mentioned by Qureshi et al. in their definition of art music: the "disciplined oral tradition" passed on in a teacher-student relationship.

The teacher-student relationship, or "master-disciple succession (*guru-śiṣya paramparā*)" (Qureshi et al.), authenticates the pure tradition of art music, which is oral and therefore needs to be passed down with every generation of musicians. The master-disciple tradition is the crucial foundational institution for the oral transmission of Indian classical music. Indian classical music goes back to the vedic scriptures, which comprise the four Vedas that form the foundation for Hinduism, composed probably between 1500 and 700 BCE. The Sama Veda contains a collection of liturgical chants and melodies specifically to be sung, and the Rig Veda, as the oldest and principal of the four Vedas, has been traditionally transmitted by oral recitation. As Kapila Vatsyayan, scholar of Indian classical music and dance, explains in *Guru-Shishya Parampara: The Master-Disciple Tradition*, the Vedas, though written down, are *śruti* (Sanskrit for "that which is heard", see *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of World Religions*), because they are believed not to be of human agency but instead direct revelation: "[t]he *Vedās* were primary, they were *śruti*" (Vatsyayan 1). "That which is heard" is therefore of a higher order than *smriti* ("that which is remembered"), which refers to other scriptures than the vedas, as well as to religious

teachings and commentaries. It is crucial to note that the oral tradition is here not a precursor to the written tradition to which it is subsequently subordinated. To the contrary, Vatsyayan emphasises that both traditions developed parallel to each other: "[t]he written and the oral traditions went hand in hand and the latter was not a pre-literate stage of civilization giving place to the literate and the recorded" (3).[14] The original purpose of the master-disciple tradition has therefore been the preservation of the scriptures through oral transmission. As Vatsyayan explains it, "[b]ehind it all lay the avowed faith that the articulated word transmitted from master to disciple was the sacred covenant which could be sustained through a chain system" (3). This requires a very deep personal and spiritual relationship between teacher and student; where possible, the student is to live in the teacher's house "and serve him devotedly, as though a member of the guru's household", to quote Qureshi et al. (n. pag.).[15]

In *A Suitable Boy* it is mentioned that one of the great regrets in the life of Ustad Majeed Khan is that he has never had a student, because "he had never found a disciple whom he considered worthy of his art", and that therefore, "his music would end with himself" (322-323). This is to change when Ishaq Khan, a sarangi player, comes to the Ustad requesting his help in finding employment. Ishaq has had problems with his hands while playing, and he fears that he will soon be out of work due to his illness. Also, Ishaq recently reproached the Ustad in public, because the latter had insulted the memory of Ishaq's father, a sarangi player like Ishaq, whose profession, according to the Ustad, is not as worthy as that of a soloist. Ishaq is enraged, also because he knows that Ustad Majeed Khan used to be a sarangi player himself, who managed with talent alone to defy the social hierarchy amongst musicians, according to which soloists enjoy a higher status than string players such as sarangi players. According to that same hierarchy it is, however, unforgivable to insult a senior musician, and Ishaq has had to bear the consequences of his outrage ever since. Most notably, All India Radio has not hired him once to perform since that day (392). The Ustad at first is impassive, and neither Ishaq's apologies nor his existential worries move him to empathy. But then

14 Vatsyayan's emphasis reads like a defence against Jean-Jacques Rousseau's essay "On the Origin of Language" from 1781, in which Rousseau establishes the binary and hierarchical opposition of speech and writing and argues that speech must always be secondary to writing, because it marks an earlier stage of human development. In a response to Rousseau, Jacques Derrida in his third chapter in *Of Grammatology* deconstructs this binary opposition by showing how speech and writing are supplementary and therefore complementary to each other.

15 For a detailed portrayal of hereditary music families, musical tradition and its pedagogy, see Regula Burckhardt Qureshi's ethnomusicological study *Master Musicians of India: Hereditary Sarangi Players Speak*, in which she presents interviews and profiles of renowned musicians in order to portray their contribution to Indian classical music and its tradition.

Ishaq recounts how he had been listening to a radio broadcast of the Ustad performing Raag Todi, how he was "entranced" and how he "felt that the great Tansen himself would have listened to that rendering of his raag" (393). The Ustad is not so much flattered by the compliment, but senses that he may have found a kindred spirit in Ishaq, who appreciates music for the same reasons that he does, for its devotional as well as artistic qualities, and mostly for its own sake as art. He asks Ishaq to accompany him home and join him in his practise of Raag Todi, and for Ishaq it is "as if heaven had fallen into his hands" (393). Listening to the Ustad, Ishaq forgets his surroundings, then himself, and when the Ustad tells him to strum the tanpura in accompaniment, Ishaq forgets the pain in his wrists. At the end of the rehearsal, Ustad Majeed Khan decides to take on Ishaq as his disciple and thus pass on his art, and towards the end of the novel it is mentioned that the Ustad treats Ishaq with respect and even "indulgence" and that "they performed with a sense of complementarity that was wonderful to see" (1463). What unites teacher and student is a total devotion to their art, and it strikes the Ustad that:

> he may have found in Ishaq that disciple whom he had looked for now for years - someone to whom he could pass on his art, someone who, unlike his own frog-voiced son, loved music with a passion, who had a grounding in performance, whose voice was not displeasing, whose sense of pitch and ornament was exceptional, and who had that additional element of indefinable expressivity. (396)

Crucially, both the Ustad and Ishaq manage to defy their social class circumstances because of their talent and dedication to music. Seth thereby suggests that music can transcend social boundaries, a view supported by Vatsyayan, who writes that "[t]he initiator [i.e. the master] and the initiated [i.e. the disciple] are in a human bond of communication which transcends all other considerations of caste, class, religion or sect" (3). Yet, in an article on the "Confronting the Social: Mode of Production and the Sublime for (Indian) Art Music", Qureshi describes how social inequalities based on a rigid class structure, particularly amongst musicians of Hindustani music, underlie the practise of art music and of many master-disciple relationships: "The endogamous, hereditary bearers of Hindustani music have occupied one of the lowest social and economic positions in that highly stratified society" (16). However, in writing about her teacher, Qureshi also states that, "[o]nce his teaching began, such dissonance was submerged in the discourse, both verbal and sonic, of music, always a shared musical experience. Inequality between us was now reversed. He commanded my deference as he inducted me into his orbit of the sublime, into the rules of

sonic beauty and order which he personified" (16). Here Qureshi suggests that the sublime in music can transcend and even reverse social hierarchies. However, the aesthetic realm cannot be separated from the social realm, as "art music is itself social [and] cannot be separated from processes of production" (17), meaning that whenever music is performed, the act of performance constitutes a web of relationships between creators, performers and listeners. Qureshi also argues that the discourse of art music – and she makes the very interesting and convincing equation between Western and Indian classical music in this particular regard, one that I will more fully analyse in 1.1.2 – has traditionally focused on the aesthetic properties of music, which implies "abstraction from functional contexts, and thus interiorization, hence portability across social boundaries on the basis of music's broadly shareable 'essence'" (17). However, art music is and remains for Qureshi "a musical practice with a distinct identity that is not only sonic but discursive and social" (15), and the sublime in art needs to be integrated into the social environment of cultural production, as the focus on the aesthetics of music masks social inequalities.[16] The fact remains, however, that Seth, although stressing the social hierarchies that are deeply entwined with the production of Hindustani music, suggests that music can ultimately transcend these circumstances, almost through sublime intervention.

The function of classical music in the novel is primarily aesthetic, and its intrinsic beauty has a very distinct effect on people: Ishaq Khan describes a feeling of being "entranced" when listening to the Ustad, and he talks of his playing as "glorious music: grand, stately, sad, full of a deep sense of calm" (320). This kind of music halts conversations, makes people listen and eventually lose themselves in the music: attending a concert by the Ustad, Lata, who is at the beginning preoccupied with thinking about Kabir, the boy she has fallen in love with, soon "sank into the music and lost herself in it" (158). The music de-contextualises the listener's response and makes it a purely aesthetic experience. Moreover, Ustad Majeed Khan disregards the social circumstances of music, and for him, Hindustani music is a pure art of universal value that requires full devotion. He does not allow for any distraction from his art, and even the rug in his teaching room is "a pale blue unpatterned cotton rug […] so that he would not be distracted in his music" (313). In a

16 As a case in point, Qureshi shows in her essay on "Mode of Production and Musical Production: Is Hindustani Music Feudal?" how until the beginning of the twentieth century the practise of classical music by hereditary musicians was deeply embedded in the context and structure of courtly patronage in a feudally based economy (81). She exemplifies the core dichotomy between "musical mastery and social inequality" (81) with case studies and personal accounts of musicians.

scene that depicts a music lesson between the Ustad, Malati, Veena, a boy, and an elderly Bengali lady, Ustad Majeed Khan reproves Veena for having too much on her mind, which distracts her from the music. Veena is clearly "distracted by her various worries about her husband and her son" (316), strums the tanpura without re-tuning it to the rāga she is to learn, and addresses her teacher as "Guruji", inadvertently using the Hindu title of respect rather than the Muslim one. The Ustad is to a certain extent sympathetic to her worries; after all, he shares them, since Veena is mainly concerned about her husband's involvement in the Zamindari Abolition Bill,[17] which aims at disowning landlords, which in turn endangers the livelihood of artists and musicians like the Ustad, who profit from the patronage of the wealthy. But rather than allow for these worries to distract her from the music she is supposed to be studying, he states that Veena has clearly too much on her mind to properly conclude the lesson, and he advises her to "leave such things with your shoes outside this room when you come in" (318). Veena is not the only one who is subject to the Ustad's censure for her neglect of dedication; he also reproves Malati, who has not come to her lessons for quite some time, but has given priority to her studies in medicine. The Ustad recognises Malati's musical talent, but at the same time he makes it very clear that music needs full devotion, and that she cannot be a true musician as long as she also trains to become a doctor: "With a voice like hers she will cause more heartache than even she will be able to cure, but if she wants to be a good musician she cannot give it second place in her life […] Music requires as much concentration as surgery. You can't disappear for a month in the middle of an operation and take it up at will" (314). Malati studies classical music because after her father's death, her mother was set on providing for the education that would allow her five daughters to be independent; next to regular schooling, this also included cultural education: "Malati's mother was remarkable in that she wished for her daughters to be independent. She wanted them, apart from their schooling at a Hindi medium school, to learn music and dancing and languages" (32). In her mother's eyes, music is thus a means for Malati to assert herself in the patriarchal society she grew up in and which was marked by "an atmosphere where men came to be seen as exploitative and threatening; many of the men

17 In her review "Land as Legislative Space in Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy* and Phanishwarnath Renu's *Mailå ånchal*", Angela Atkins explains the zamindari system thus: "Zamindars were landlords who had the right to collect land revenue on behalf of the government. The words zamindar and zamindari come from the Perso-Arabic word for land, *zamīn*. Zamindari refers not only to the system of agrarian relations but also to the area controlled by a zamindar. Zamindaris were sometimes very large, encompassing scores of villages, but often some of the power would be vested in smaller landlords, and zamindaris would exist which had more or less the same boundaries as an individual village" (2).

Malati came into contact with were precisely that" (30). For the unnamed Bengali woman, who also attends the music lesson, music is an escape from her demanding husband and her duties as wife and mother to three sons: "If the truth be told, music mattered more to the Bengali lady than her husband and her three well-brought-up sons, but it was impossible, given the constraints of her life, for her to give it priority" (316). It becomes clear that she, like the Ustad, practises music for its own sake and, as far as she can, against the odds of her circumstances. She shows dedication to the art, and thereby she, amongst all the Ustad's students, comes closest to his own understanding of music as first and foremost art.

North-Indian classical music is thus portrayed as an art that transcends circumstantial contexts and is thereby purely aesthetic. Such aesthetic universalism is, however, problematic because it ignores not only, as Qureshi argues, the social inequalities that underlie music production in India, but also the power politics that are behind this universalising discourse. Such a universalising discourse establishes a hierarchy in which all other musical traditions are automatically rendered inferior. By proclaiming purity for itself, Hindustani music creates impure others. In the novel, this is most obvious in the contempt that Ustad Majeed Khan feels towards other traditions of music and musical characters, such as the courtesan and ghazal singer Saeeda Bai. In her profession as a courtesan, she performs for paying clients, which in the eyes of the Ustad is a sacrilege (317). In this light, it also comes as no surprise that the Ustad disregards Tagore's music, and that the Ustad judges people who like Rabindrasangeet as being uncultured, such as the Bengali woman's husband:[18] "That the sickly-sweet so-called music of Rabindranath Tagore's songs should be more attractive to any man's ears than the beauty of classical khyaal clearly marked such a man as a buffoon" (315). This again exemplifies that the Ustad judges music purely on the grounds of aesthetic merit. It is of no importance to him whatsoever that the music of Rabindranath Tagore is meaningful to a vast number of people because of the cultural tradition it embodies. All that counts for Ustad Majeed Khan are the aesthetic properties and qualities of his art. For him, the opposition is a clear one between high and low art, between pure and programmatic art. This marks a very limited point of view, because the Ustad ignores the circumstantial elements of his own music as well as the transgressive elements of other musics.

18 "Sangeet" (Sanskrit origins), can loosely be translated as "music" or "music making": "the Music, i.e., the Sangeet, itself denotes a simple Trio of Singing, Rhythm and Dance", as Hiren Bose defines the term in *Philosophy in Indian Music* (9, capitalisation in the original). "Rabindrasangeet" (also Rabindra Sangeet) denotes the collected songs of Rabindranath Tagore or the form of songs composed by him.

This universalising discourse also relates Indian classical music to Western classical music. Although appearing merely as a side-note, Western classical music is brought into the context of the novel when Kakoli Chatterji and her German boyfriend Hans play Schubert songs together. Western classical music from the late classical and romantic period as exemplified by Schubert traditionally shares the claims that Hindustani music makes to an "absolute music" as a music that is "not bound to 'extramusical' functions or programs" (2), so defined by Carl Dahlhaus in his 1978 treatise, published in English as *The Idea of Absolute Music* in 1989. Dahlhaus firmly contextualises the concept of absolute music in the late classical and early romantic period of German-Austrian instrumental music. His argument is therefore very historically and culturally specific. Yet this specific context does not diminish the claim to universality that Western classical music of that time holds; within its own discourse, this claim is indeed valid, as it is not challenged by any other tradition throughout *The Idea of Absolute Music*. Also, Dahlhaus states clearly that, "it would hardly be an exaggeration to claim that the concept of absolute music was the leading idea of the classical and romantic era in music esthetics", and that despite its geographical restrictions, "it would be premature at the very least to call it a provincialism, given the esthetic significance of autonomous instrumental music in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries" (3).

Seth explores Dahlhaus's concept of absolute music in relation to Western classical music in *An Equal Music*, which is set in London, Vienna, and Venice, and centres around Michael, a violin player in a professional string quartet. The music they play is Western classical music predominantly of the classical and romantic period: Haydn, Brahms, Schubert, and Bach (albeit a Baroque composer, Bach's music in the novel epitomises the titular ideal of an equal music that transgresses extra-musical meaning). Places, characters, and crucially, the music featured in *An Equal Music*, are devoid of any postcolonial context, but Seth makes the same points about Western classical music as he does about Hindustani music. First, music needs dedication: Virginie, Michael's 21-year-old student and lover, does not practise enough and does not dedicate herself as much to the music as Michael thinks she should: "She is talented, yet she will not apply herself. Though she is supposedly a full-time student, music for her is only one of many things" (8). In that, Virginie mirrors Malati in *A Suitable Boy*, and Michael's discontent as her teacher is that of the Ustad. Second, the effects of classical music are the same for both traditions. The quartet starts each rehearsal with

playing scales. No matter what has been worrying the players, as soon as the music starts, it takes their minds away from everything that is not music, and it unites the musicians in harmony: "No matter how fraught our lives have been over the last couple of days, no matter how abrasive our disputes about people or politics, or how visceral our differences about what we are to play and how we are to play it, it reminds us that we are, when it comes to it, one" (12). The self becomes absorbed in music, an experience that the Ustad has when he practises Raag Bhairava at the end of the group rehearsal, and which Michael describes with regard to the quartet's scales practice: "When I play this I release myself into the spirit of the quartet. I become the music of the scale. I mute my will, I free my self" (12). Music for the quartet is defined as "something beyond ourselves that we imagine with our separate spirits but are compelled to embody together" (17). Therefore, music transgresses extramusical circumstances like quarrels between the musicians when they search for "an understanding of a work that seems to us both true and original, and an expression of it which displaces from our minds – and perhaps, at least for a while, from the minds of those who hear us – any versions, however true, however original, played by our hands" (17).

In *An Equal Music*, too, there is – and must be – an other that takes the part of the non-absolute, in this case every music that is not of the German-Austrian late classical and romantic tradition. Michael's teacher, Carl Käll, says: "Oh, you English! Finzi! Delius! It would be better to remain in a land without music than to have music like that" (69). Suddenly music takes on a national identity and is rendered specific, concrete, and thereby not absolute. Also, Billy, the quartet's cello player, is enthusiastic about formalist music, and his enthusiasm is repeatedly ridiculed and not taken seriously by his fellow quartet members. On this point, Stephen Benson writes that, "[t]he non-absolute music of the pre- or post-Classical period is allied, in the novel's discreet catalogue of inequality, with musical attitudes at odds with the values of absolutism. The formalism practised by Billy, and admitted on the grounds of usefulness, is […] resolutely tempered" (123).

While Western classical music others (Western) non-classical traditions in *An Equal Music*, Hindustani music others Western classical music on the same grounds of aesthetic universalism in *A Suitable Boy*. In the same music lesson mentioned above, the Ustad also teaches a small boy, whom, however, he treats "for some reason […] rather abruptly" (315). It becomes clear that the reason for his impatience with the boy is that the boy has earlier training in Western music, which according to the Ustad makes the voice unsuitable to sing

Indian music. Although the Ustad acknowledges that Western classical music is "a good tradition in its own way", he concludes that "[t]he voice vibrates in the wrong kind of way" (316). Clearly, then, there is a "right kind of way", and by implication it is Hindustani music. Also, to speak of Western classical music as "a good tradition in its own way" is to see it as one tradition amongst many, which negates the claims for absoluteness that according to Dahlhaus define the discourse about late classical and romantic music personified particularly by Beethoven, Schumann, and Schubert (see *The Idea of Absolute Music*). This negation is perpetuated at other points in the novel that depict Hans and Kakoli playing Schubert songs together and where Schubert's *Winterreise* is very concretely contextualised within the specific time and place it is set in: "Outside, the warm Calcutta rain came down in sheets. […] In an earlier incarnation it could well have been the soft German snow that had whirled around the memory-haunted traveller, and in a later one it might well become part of the icy brook into whose surface he had carved his initials and those of his faithless beloved" (489). Like Finzi and Delius in *An Equal Music*, Schubert's *Winterreise* is here nationalised, specified, and thereby rendered other to the absolute music that in *A Suitable Boy* is Hindustani music, "not bound to 'extramusical' functions or programs" (Dahlhaus, 2). The universalising discourse of Indian classical music negates the universalising claims of Western classical music, and thereby in an act of inverted postcolonial othering others the Western tradition.

1.1.2 Ghazals: A courtesan's art

Next to North-Indian classical and Western classical music, a third group of different musics featured in the novel comprises the Indian non-classical traditions, which are more programmatic and have an agenda that is not primarily aesthetic. This is not to say, however, that non-classical music is entirely circumstantial in its meaning; on the contrary, to transmit as well as transcend meaning defined by circumstances of its production is an essential characteristic of all the music traditions portrayed in the novel. Amongst the non-classical traditions, the most prominent is the music performed by professional courtesans, and in the novel this tradition is embodied by Saeeda Bai Firozabadi. As a courtesan and in order to subsidise her living, she relies on the patronage of wealthy clients with whom she engages in "relatively exclusive exchanges of artistic graces, elevated conversation, and sexual favours", which is how Bonnie Gordon and Martha Feldman define courtesanship in their

introduction to *The Courtesan's Arts: Cross-Cultural Perspectives* (5). While Gordon and Feldman, as well as Regula Burckhardt Qureshi in her article on twentieth-century Indian courtesans in the same volume, stress the central importance of courtesans' music performances, in the novel Saeeda Bai is seldom regarded as a musician in her own right. For Mrs. Rupa Mehra, and most other women of the parent generation, she is "that sort of person", where "that sort of person" "meant both a Muslim and a courtesan" (17), but not a musician. Mrs. Rupa Mehra first and foremost sees in Saeeda Bai a better-off prostitute of low social status, who will corrupt her son-in-law's brother Maan, who has fallen in love with Saeeda Bai and is utterly infatuated with her. Ustad Majeed Khan has his own reasons to despise Saeeda Bai, because he considers any use of music in the service of any kind of agenda a sacrilege and hence thinks of the ghazal singer, who has put her musical talents in the service of paying clients, as "that desecrater of the holy shrine of music" (317). Like Mrs. Rupa Mehra, the Ustad judges Saeeda Bai on her profession as a courtesan, and does not even think of her as a fellow musician worth the professional title.

However, to negate the interconnection between courtesanship and art by reducing the courtesan to the fact that she also sleeps with her clients, is to be ignorant of the tradition and cultural impact of courtesans. Qureshi in her article "Female Agency and Patrilineal Constraints: Situating Courtesans in Twentieth-Century India" uses the term *tawa'if*, which she translates as "courtesan singer-dancers" (312). This already implies the central importance of music in the courtesan tradition and profession. Feldman and Gordon, too, emphasise this point, writing that, "[f]or courtesans, art is never an extracurricular activity but one that permeates their lives" (8), and explaining that, "[t]he arts have invariably been central to the construction of courtesan cultures and the courtesan has traditionally been a bearer of artistic traditions. In this role courtesans have often been among the best-educated and freest women of their time" (8).[19] It is clearly the case that Saeeda Bai is highly skilled and educated in the arts, as the novel describes her as possessing "exceptional natural talent

19 According to a BBC Radio 3 feature broadcast in 2005, this notion of the courtesan as a highly accomplished artist is still crucial for the self-definition of the women. Presenter Luca Duran and musician and music expert Viram Jasani interviewed courtesans Kanchanji Misra and Madhuriji Singh, who both work in a brothel in Kolkata. In that interview Singh describes the music and singing and dancing of courtesans as "a dying art", and she uses the term "art" very consciously and in opposition to other forms of "crude entertainment" (~10mins). "It is actually a classical tradition", says Viram Jasani, "the kind of music they are singing is classically based. It is in raag, it's in folk music […] these are the people who have learned this for this particular application". The courtesans who are interviewed always put the musical profession first and speak of themselves as artists: when asked whether every woman in the brothel is a courtesan, Jasani answers, "everybody in this house is a really fine artist, they are all singers and artists, and they are all in this profession [of a courtesan]".

and musical training" and having "a knowledge of Urdu poetry, especially of the ghazal, that was by no means viewed as shallow even in an audience of cognoscenti" (88). Her musical talents are a precondition for gaining access to the higher social classes of her clients, and this – literally – intimate contact with high-class and high-caste clients such as the Raja of Marh blurs the social divisions of her own position in society. While a professional courtesan traditionally comes from lower social classes, she gains access to power via her clients, as Feldman and Gordon argue:

> Often indistinguishable from women born into higher classes, they tend to assume certain upper-class styles and privileges in a performance that crosses and blurs class lines and distinguishes them from other groups designated by cultural/linguistic equivalents (equally rough) to the English-language word "prostitutes." Moreover, though in some sense courtesans stand at the margins of power, theirs is generally a complex marginality in which their close consort with those at the centers of power allows them to slide in and out of agency, control, and influence. Courtesans can often take wealth and status away from their patrons as easily as they help generate it. (6)

Thus, Saeeda Bai's profession, and by implication the music she plays, can overcome social boundaries. Mrs. Rupa Mehra and Ustad Majeed Khan also fail to acknowledge the effect that Saeeda Bai's singing has on her audiences. Throughout the novel, her singing is described as enchanting everyone who listens to her, irrespective of social status: "Saeeda Bai was now so deep in the flow of music that those who remained, remained spellbound […] Her voice and the harmonium were all that were left, and they provided enchantment enough" (95). The ultimate goal of music as art, portrayed like this, is to transcend and transport singer and listener to a different place and time. Saeeda Bai is able to do that, although the Ustad regards courtesan music as purely circumstantial and associated with the lower-class job of the courtesan. Saeeda Bai is depicted in the novel as able to tap into that level of musicianship where music becomes an art form.

1.1.3 Music and religion

Saeeda Bai also performs at religious festivities, such as private gatherings during Muharram (spelled 'Moharram' in the novel) or the Holi concert held at the Kapoor's estate Prem Nivas. This links Saeeda Bai to the fourth musical tradition in the novel, namely devotional music in both Muslim and Hindu contexts, which is played and sung at religious processions, prayers, and festivities. As a Shia Muslim, Saeeda Bai obeys the strict behavioural rules during Muharram and does not perform in public. Instead, she holds small private gatherings

during which she sings musical lamentations known as soz, which describe the death of Husayn ibn Ali, grandson of the prophet Muhammad. As Firoz, also a Shia, explains to the Hindu Maan, soz is "a sort of musical wailing. […] I've only heard it a few times, and never at Saeeda Bai's. It grips the heart" (1128). Saeeda Bai's performance of soz portrays how music heightens the emotions of audience and performer alike in a religious context:

> At the lamentations Saeeda Bai's voice rose into the air in a strange sobbing wail, intensely musical, intensely beautiful. Firoz had heard soz before, but it was nothing compared to this. He turned to the spot where Tasneem had been sitting, and noticed the frivolous Bibbo there instead. Her hair was undone, and she was crying her eyes out, beating her breast and leaning forward as if she were about to faint with sorrow. So were many of the women around her […] Saeeda Bai's eyes were closed; even for this supremely controlled artist, her art had passed beyond her own restraint. Her body, like her voice, was shaking with grief and pain. And Firoz, though he did not realize it, was himself weeping uncontrollably. (1138-1139)

Once again, this quote shows that Saeeda Bai's music is not just for entertaining paying clients, not just job-related – but serious music meant to compel the listener to think and feel a certain way (in this context, expressing religious sorrow).

When Firoz tells his friend Maan about the event, Maan wishes to attend, but as a Hindu he cannot, seeing that according to Firoz, not even Sunni Muslims are welcome during these particular gatherings. This implies a strong sectarian divide between Hinduism and Islam, but also within Islam. However, as Firoz finds out to his surprise when attending the event, there are Sunnis amongst the audience. He asks Bibbo about this unusual breach of conduct, and she answers, "Why not? […] Saeeda Begum does not discriminate" (1136). This suggests that the divide between Shias and Sunnis is in practice at best conventional and that in order to attend musical performances, people are very willing to overlook what separates them in favour of what unites them, in this case an appreciation of the music and the effect it has, which is the same for all listeners. But when Firoz suggests that he then could have asked Maan to attend as well, Bibbo replies, startled, "No, no, […] Dagh Sahib is a Hindu; that would never do" (1136), which shows it is more acceptable to break the rules between different sects of Islam than to break the separation between Hindus and Muslims.

Yet, Saeeda Bai also performs at a Hindu event, a Holi concert at the Kapoor's family home, Prem Nivas. Holi is one of the most important festivals in the Hindu calendar, celebrating the coming of spring. The guests that gather at Prem Nivas are predominantly Hindu, and are predominantly very taken with Saeeda Bai's performance, despite the fact that she is a Muslim: "Only a few words had emerged from that lovely throat when the 'wah!

wahs!' and other appreciative comments of the audience elicited an acknowledging smile from Saeeda Bai" (88). Significantly, for her performance the different religious backgrounds between singer and audience do not matter: "It being Holi, she began her recital with a few Holi songs. Saeeda Bai Firozabadi was Muslim, but sang these happy descriptions of young Krishna playing Holi with the milkmaids of his foster-father's village with such charm and energy that one would have had to be convinced that she saw the scene before her own eyes" (88). This exemplifies the fact that music can, next to social circumstances, also overcome sectarian divides, within one religion as well as across different religions. For Ustad Majeed Khan music, too, transcends particular religious creeds. Although music for the Ustad can also be devotional – "Music too was prayer to him" (319) – he does not exclusively consider music within the referential frame of religious meaning. To the contrary: although a Muslim, he mostly practises and performs music dedicated to Hindu deities. He loses himself as he starts humming the words of Jaago Mohan Pyaare at the end of the music lesson he gives to Malati and Veena, completely disregarding the music's connotations to Hinduism: "It was very far from his mind that the words were addressed to the dark god Krishna, asking him to wake up with the arrival of the morning, or that 'Bhairava' – the name of the raag he was singing – was an epithet of the great god Shiva himself" (319). While being devotional, music at the same time transcends the religious meaning that is ascribed to it.

In a key scene towards the end of the novel, riots break out between Muslims and Hindus in the streets of Brahmpur. The catalyst for the riots is unfortunate timing, as both the Muslim tazia procession, which marks the height of the mourning period for the Shias, and the Hindu Bharat Milaap procession in celebration of the reunion between Rama and his brother Bharat, happen to fall on the same day. Although city officials tried to time both processions in a way that would prevent them meeting on the streets (1145), a delay in the proceedings leads to exactly that, and riots start between the two processions that leave many Hindus and Muslims wounded and dead. Drummers play a central role in both processions: "a couple of drummers" (1144) are amongst the Baitar House tazia procession, and the Bharat Milaap procession, too, "began to wind its way through the narrow lanes of Mirsi Mandi to the sound of drums and shehnais and a raucous popular band" (1148). The flat drummers are "the principal noisemongers" (1148) in that procession, and it is mentioned that "[t]hese were good days for the drummers: they were in demand both by those who

celebrated Dussehra and by those who observed Moharram" (1148). As it turns out, the majority of the drummers for the Hindu procession are Muslims, and some of the drummers are even hired for both processions. Incidentally, this is the reason why the tazia got delayed, because "their drummers had turned up late" (1151), and it is "the sound of other drums" (1151) that makes Rama's procession stop suddenly. Here, the drums also function as a narrative device, heightening the tension and foreshadowing the ensuing escalation. Crucially, as the riots reach their climax, which sees Maan and Firoz caught in the middle, "[t]he sound of drums had stopped on either side" (1153). The tragic fate of three drummers is also portrayed:

> Meanwhile in Misri Mandi, three of the Muslim drummers who had been hired for the Bharat Milaap, who were not even Shias, and who did not care much more for the tazias than they did for the divinity of Rama, lay murdered by the wall of the temple, their drums smashed in, their heads half hacked off, their bodies doused in kerosene and set alight – all, doubtless, to the greater glory of God. (1153)

The irony is that the drummers are being killed for religious reasons, while it seems they were not even playing music out of any particular religious devotion, but because music for them is a job (in contrast to Saeeda Bai, who performs music as a job and is looked down upon for it, but for whom music is about art and its transcendent power). The drummers' pointless death serves as a poignant reminder of the fact that music does not intrinsically possess any particular religious meaning. Rather, music gets appropriated by religious creeds but the same music transcends both Hindu and Islamic nationalism, in that the purpose and the effect of music and even the musicians themselves are the same for all described religions and sects.

1.1.4 Tagore's folk songs

Throughout the novel there are references to the poet and educationist Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941), who embodies a poetry and folk song tradition that is very much linked to the incipient nationalism of the early twentieth century, with which particularly the parent generation in the novel identifies. Tagore's songs are sung during school assemblies (1195), and Mrs. Chatterji vaguely but vehemently states that "[w]e in Bengal owe everything to him" (444); as Amit goes up to Dipankar's room to fetch him for the family dinner, he finds him "sitting on a prayer-mat at the harmonium, untunefully singing a song by Rabindranath Tagore" (418). Mrs. Chatterji judges people by whether they like Tagore or not, and says

about Dr Ila Chattopadhyay that, "if she doesn't appreciate Gurudeb[20] she must have a heart of stone" (446); and Senor Bernardo Lopez wonders: "What is all this about 'being' and birds and boats and the river of life – that we find in Indian poetry, the great Tagore unexcluded?" (449). In the collective cultural memory of the characters, Tagore thus holds a central position. He is portrayed as a symbol of cultural identity, and Seth suggests that Tagore's poems and songs are part of the cultural consciousness of the people. Tagore's art, his poetry but also his music, is thus part of the cultural heritage and history of India, and people identify as Indian via his music. Thus, his music shapes cultural identity for India separate from colonial legacies, and in turn allows people to express it. Tagore's biographer for the Nobel Prize in Literature, which the Indian received in 1913 as the first Asian laureate, lauds his importance for both the West and for India thus: "For the world he became the voice of India's spiritual heritage; and for India, especially for Bengal, he became a great living institution" (*Nobel Lectures, Literature 1901-1967*, online excerpt n. pag.). This suggests Tagore's role as a national icon of cultural identity: he embodies what it means to be Indian and thus serves as fixed point of cultural reference and identification for the people in their struggle to define themselves outside of a colonial context.

However, characters' opinions in *A Suitable Boy* about the value of Tagore's art differ: when Amit defends his own profession as a writer against his father's accusations that writing is "all right as an amusement […] But it's not a living" (444) he challenges his father's derogatory opinion and asks: "Is that what they said to Rabindranath Tagore?" (444). Ignoring the point of the argument between her husband and son, Mrs. Chatterji in a "mode of righteous reverence" (444), chides her son for daring to compare himself with Tagore, which leads to a heated discussion about Tagore's cultural standing and artistic worth – to Mrs. Chatterji, who idolises the Bengali poet to the point of worship, Tagore is "like a saint" (444), and "[h]is voice is like a cry in the wilderness" (445). Amit, on the other hand, critiques this blind idolisation, remarking that "[w]e idolize him more than the English do Shakespeare" (445). This view held by a younger generation is continued by Kakoli, "who has been force-fed, almost from birth, with Rabindrasangeet" (445), and who puns on Tagore lyrics to the utter outrage of her mother. What underlies this opposition in opinions becomes clear when Mrs. Chatterji scolds Kakoli as a "stupid, shameless, shallow girl" (445) and her daughter defends herself by saying that "reading him is like trying to swim breaststroke

20 Also "Gurudev", Bengali for "divine mentor" and Tagore's soubriquet.

through treacle" (445). This implies two different approaches to Tagore's art: while Kakoli's and Amit's opinions are based on aesthetic judgement, Mrs. Chatterji sees in his words and music the embodiment of the artist himself and all that he stands for, particularly Tagore's firm anti-imperialist stance.[21] For Mrs. Chatterji, Tagore is a symbol of national identity; for her children, he is an overrated poet. The quarrel between the Chatterjis thereby indicates a generational divide, where the parent generation regards the musical heritage of the likes of Rabindranath Tagore as culturally sacred because of the political agenda and the incipient nationalism that appropriated it, but the younger generation does not identify with that agenda to the same extent any longer. This shows how music can take on as well as shed meaning that lies beyond its aesthetic qualities.

To further explain Mrs. Chatterji's deep attachment to Tagore and his music as an expression of national identity, it is important to take into account that Tagore in 1911 wrote what in 1950 would be officially adopted as the Indian national anthem. In chapter 8, "Patriotism and Racism" of his *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson writes about music and national anthems in order to explain the "attachment that peoples feel for the inventions of their imaginations" (141), by which he means the nations of which they are citizens. Anderson argues that people are emotionally attached to their nation, and that cultural products such as music are proof and manifestation of that love: "nations inspire love […] The cultural products of nationalism – poetry, prose fiction, music, plastic arts – show this love very clearly in thousands of different forms and styles" (141). As a case in point, Anderson argues that to sing a national anthem creates a community amongst the singers, and he specifies this as "a special kind of contemporaneous community" (145). By this Anderson means "an experience of simultaneity" (145) created by the situation of people singing the same song at the same time. It is not the words or the music to which Anderson ascribes the community-building function, but the act of singing itself, which according to Anderson creates "unisonance": "At precisely such moments, people wholly unknown to each other utter the same verses to the same melody […] Singing the Marseillaise, Waltzing Matilda, and Indonesia Raya provide occasions for unisonality, for the echoed physical realization of the imagined community" (145). Crucially, this unisonance feels selfless (145),

21 As the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* writes in reference to Tagore's politics and nationalism, "the Great Sentinel (as Gandhi called him) of Indian nationalism, had already frequently occupied a public platform, adopting a strongly anti-imperialist stance that was later obscured by his emphasis on international harmony. In 1886 (aged twenty-five) he composed and sang the inaugural song at the second session of the Indian National Congress in Calcutta" (n. pag.).

because national anthems can instil a sense of community even if they are themselves "imagined sound", and even if "we have no idea who they [the other people singing] may be, or even where, out of earshot, they are singing" (145). It is a singing of the nation, and this chorus is, as Anderson argues, embedded in history. Moreover, from a postcolonial point of view, it is significant that Anderson places the power and the agency of singing the nation not in the words or the music, but in the people who do the singing, and who are thus given a voice to express their national identity in an act of communal cultural performance.[22]

Regarding the relationship between nationalism and music, Amit's criticism of his mother's veneration of Tagore can also be understood more generally as a criticism of the underlying nationalism that Tagore and his music represent. As Said argues throughout *Culture and Imperialism* (and particularly on pages 261-265), the idolisation of culture for the cause of national identification is inherently and essentially nationalist. An essentialist nationalism is always reductive and in the case of postcolonial nationalisms always dangerously close to a re-appropriation of a colonial discourse by relying on imperial power structures. Internal injustices like social or gender inequalities are ignored and subsumed to the larger cause of nationalism. Said writes that "successful anti-imperialist nationalism has a history of evasion and avoidance, and that nationalism can become a panacea for not dealing with economic disparities, social injustice, and the capture of the newly independent state by a nationalist élite" (262). This suggests that the nationalist appropriation of Tagore and his art in *A Suitable Boy* is a very reductive one, which fails to take into account that Tagore – although outspokenly anti-colonial – was not an essentialist nationalist. In a lecture titled "Rabindranath Tagore as Bilingual Writer: New Perspectives and Research", Tagore scholar Uma Das Gupta cited Tagore's Japan and USA lectures in 1916-17, which mark his clear stance against territorial nationalism. Her biographical and critical reading of Tagore's life and work show how Tagore chose a middle-path between "East and West, tradition and modernity, past and present", and how he was an anti-colonialist but at the same time "did not reject the West's humanism nor the West's spirit of enquiry" (Edinburgh Napier University, lecture, 12 May 2011).[23] Tagore believed in non-parochial and inclusive nationalism, and he founded schools and universities to foster learning of histories and cultures with the "common goal of learning and creating without national barriers" (ibid.).

22 I will go into more detail on the performative links between music and identity in Chapter Three.

23 See also Uma Das Gupta *Rabindranath Tagore: A Biography*, and *Rabindranath Tagore: My Life in My Words*, selected and edited with an introduction by Uma Das Gupta.

Seth acknowledges this "inclusive nationalism" in a scene where Pran reminisces about Tagore lyrics which in that particular moment are levelled against the reductive nationalism and cultural essentialism expressed by the Head of Brahmpur University's English Department (56-58):

> We have got nowhere, and we will get nowhere, he thought. A few well-known lines from Tagore came into his head in Tagore's own English translation:
> Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way into the / dreary desert sand of dead habit; / Where the mind is led forward by Thee into ever-widening / thought and action – / Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake. (59)

Taken from a poem in Tagore's 1912 poetry collection *Gitanjali*, for which Tagore was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature as the first non-European in 1913, these lines epitomise the strive for freedom and independence. Aptly, the poem was recited by Nehru when India gained its independence in 1947, 35 years after *Gitanjali* was published.

1.1.5 Bollywood tunes

References to songs from Bollywood films mark the sixth kind of music in *A Suitable Boy* and a more recent cultural tradition, but one that has become a very strong marker of cultural identity in twentieth-century India. In their introduction to *Global Bollywood*, editors Aswin Punathambekar and Anandam Kavoori describe the Bombay film as "the preeminent art form of modern India" (xx), and write about the 1950s (the decade the novel is set) and the 1960s as "the high period of Bombay Cinema" (xx). The importance of music in the films is stressed by Sangita Gopal and Sujata Morrti, who write in *Global Bollywood: Travels of Hindi Song and Dance,* "[t]o talk of Bollywood is inevitably to talk of the song and dance sequence […] song-dance occupies the constitutive limit of Bollywood cinema. It determines – perhaps unfairly but invariably – the form itself even as it frequently escapes the filmic context to inhabit other milieus" (1). Although, as Gopal and Moorti point out, "song-dance is hardly unique to Hindi film", it is "the single most enduring feature of popular Hindi cinema" (1). In *National Identity in Indian Popular Cinema 1947-1987*, Sumita S. Chakravarty analyses Indian popular film and song in regards to the portrayal of national identity, focusing on the trope of impersonation. Chakravarty understands "*imperso-nation*" metaphorically as evoking the dualities of "changeability and metamorphosis, tension and contradiction, recognition and alienation, surface and depth: dualities that have long plagued the Indian psyche and constitute the self-questionings of Indian nationhood" (4). Of

particular importance to understanding the significance of Bollywood tunes in *A Suitable Boy* is Chakravarty's argument that impersonation "also encompasses the contrary movement of accretion, the piling up of identities, the transgression of social codes and boundaries" (4-5). Where Chakravarty cites a character's change of clothes during a song as an example that signifies this transgression (5), Seth has Varun and Malati, who are of high social class and caste, sing the same song as a tonga driver (*A Suitable Boy* 25), who, if Hindu, would be of lower social caste and class.[24] The Bollywood film that gets mentioned repeatedly throughout the novel is *Deedar* (1951), starring Dilip Kumar (referred to as Daleep Kumar in *A Suitable Boy*), "one of the greatest stars of the Indian cinema" (Dawar 41):

> The sweepers were now discussing a movie that one of them had seen. It happened to be *Deedar*. 'But it was Daleep Kumar's role – oh – it brought tears to my eyes – he always has that quiet smile on his lips even when singing the saddest songs – such a good-natured man – blind himself, and yet giving pleasure to the whole world –' He began humming one of the hit songs from the movie – 'Do not forget the days of childhood...' The second one, who had not seen the movie yet, joined in the song – which, ever since the film had been released, was on almost everyone's lips. (*A Suitable Boy* 276-277)

Again, it is not only the low-caste sweepers that are mentioned in relation to the film, but also Dr Kishen Chand Seth and the Rajkumar of Marh; moreover, the effects of film and songs are the same, because all men are moved to tears: "*Deedar* was an immensely popular movie. Its songs were on everyone's lips, and it appealed to old and young alike; it may well have happened that on some evening Dr Kishen Chand Seth and the Rajkumar of Marh sobbed their hearts out to it simultaneously" (887).

Irrespective of class, caste, age, or gender, people are united by the highly emotive function of the music. As Natalie Sarrazin states in her article "Songs From the Heart: Musical Coding, Emotional Sentiment, and Transnational Sonic Identity in India's Popular Film Music", this emotional quality comes from "a strong cultural background that intertwines sound and emotion" (206). In Bollywood films, music is used as a medium "to convey this primary emotional expression, where the vehicle of the song and the singing of the song converge to amplify the emotional experience for the audience. It is a form of identity that carries cachet, can be negotiated, and can contain transformative powers for the listener" (206). According to Sarrazin, the emotional power of music lies primarily in the

24 Although the song is not specified in *A Suitable Boy*, Gopal Gandhi's Hindi translation of the novel (re-translated into English by Vedita Cowaloosur) provides the following addition and information that the song is indeed from a Bollywood film: "The tonga-wallah was singing this song from the film "Pyar Ki Jeet" with great relish. These lyrics by Kamar Jalalabadi rode onto Varun who was riding on the tonga. Neither the tonga-wallah nor Varun were Mohammad Rafi" (Cowaloosur, n. pag.).

voice of the singer, given the centrality of vocal performance in Indian music: "Musically, principally in Indian classical music, voice is privileged as its sound is associated with the most fundamental human expressive characteristics. Cinematically, the embodied voice is one of the most powerful forces to transmit and elicit emotion" (205). The emotive function of the songs, as stressed by Sarrazin, thereby creates empathy amongst the audience; it expresses a communal kitsch caused by "a textual capacity to elicit a wide variety of responses from the audience [which] remain linked to a thoroughly nativist aesthetics of *rasa*" (Mishra, 13-14). Rasa (Sanskrit, literally "flavour, juice [of food]") denotes the collective, "impersonal and universalized" aesthetic experience and impression caused by a work of art, which explains the collective emotive response of the diverse *Deedar* audience in the novel (*Oxford Dictionary of Hinduism*). Being by definition "impersonal and universalized", rasa denotes an essentially egalitarian experience, which does not only account for the transgression of social class and caste that Bollywood films – and songs – such as *Deedar* accomplish, but also allows for an imagined community on a national scale. As Gopal and Moorti explain, "Bollywood cinema survives for its viewer as a song or the fragments of a song, so we hear of the guide at the Great Wall who hums a tune from *Disco Dancer* (Babbar Subash, 1982) or the taxi-cab driver in Athens who connects with an Indian passenger over the title song of *Awaara* (The innocent, Raj Kapoor, 1951)" (3); or, indeed, the tonga-wallah and Varun singing the same song. In either case, across national borders as well as boundaries of class and caste, "[t]he song fragment in these instances forges an affective relationship between strangers while serving as a metonymy for India" (3).

Gopal and Moorti stress the importance of film in general and film music in particular in the project of building the nation, writing that "[t]he film industry in India from its very inception was intimately implicated in the nationalist project" (10). Crucially, in the years following independence, Hindi film created a democratic and national consciousness across the nation: "Hindi film performed the crucial political task of bringing into being a national public comprising spectator-citizens. In this role, the industry became indispensable to a state not yet fully capable of entrusting political citizenship" (13). Vijay Mishra, too, makes this argument: drawing on postcolonial and film theory, Mishra sees Indian cinema as an effort to cut across the country's numerous communities, thereby achieving a pan-Indian culture. As Mishra argues, film served as a vehicle of the independence movement because of its "intrinsically democratic form of […] reception – the screen is collectively gazed

upon" (13). Mishra refers to Walter Benjamin's *Illuminations* when he argues that this renders film an anti-autocratic and intrinsically political art form: "In political terms, cinema is seen as being as intrinsically antifascist as its technology of reproduction and its mass reception […] releases art from precisely those bonds of authority that underpin fascist thinking" (13). As an example, Mishra analyses the filmic trope of the mother as a metaphor for the state: "the all-pervasive trope of the Mother is handled in the seminal text of this genre, *Mother India*, where Nehru's ideal of '*Bhārat Mātā*, Mother India' is offered as a composite, secular India" (Mishra, xx). Thus, through the medium of film, the nation is imagined:[25] "Hindi films such as *Mother India* (Mehboob Khan, 1957) thematized the concept of a unified national identity and aspired to imagine the nation. They did so, as suggested earlier, by subsuming regional talent and by perfecting forms of narration and address – most specifically, the song and dance sequence – that could transcend linguistic and cultural differences" (Gopal and Moorti 13). This highlights the central role of the Bollywood tunes as a lingua franca in the pan-Indian art form of Hindi film, where "the use of musical numbers as a crucial ingredient of film sound no doubt enabled the creation of a common culture in a linguistically fragmented nation" (14). Although Seth in his novel focuses on North India, the references to Bollywood introduce a pan-Indian and nationalist element. Hindi film songs acquire the capacity of a national currency with transnational validity: "This ability of the song situation to overcome linguistic and cultural differences and suture the fragments of the nation underscores the centrality of song to Bollywood grammar and prefigures its subsequent transnational legibility" (14).

Bollywood songs reference different musical traditions, which in themselves act as cultural codes in relation to rāgas, ghazals and folk traditions: "Musical and cultural signifiers make film songs and sound powerful indicators of Indian identity by including indigenous musical aesthetics such as vocal timbres, *talas* and *ragas*, instruments, forms such as ghazal, bhangra, etc., familiar to its audiences" (Sarrazin 206). Gopal and Moorti write that Hindi film songs have always "incorporated influences from various global musics" (6), which marks them as "hybrid, samples musics" that are "in sharp contrast to world music that asserts its ethnic purity" (9). Considering the politicisation of ostensibly

25 While Punathambekar and Kavoori agree on the significance of Bollywood film for the formation of a national Indian identity, they also stress the point that the second half of the twentieth century saw the global spread and success of Bollywood cinema, which has challenged a national reading of the art form: "the emergence of Bollywood as a space of cultural production and expression that is now decidedly global spells trouble for categories such as 'Indian cinema,' 'nation,' 'public,' 'culture,' 'modernity,' 'identity,' and 'politics,' and our assumptions and understandings of relationships among these categories" (1).

authentic world music, this distinction is crucial: the commercialised genre of world music conflates "different forms of music from around the world into a single non-Western musical genre" and thereby "partakes in a subtle brand of neo-Orientalism […] reproducing the politics it eschews" (9).[26] Bollywood, however, has "historically served to negotiate questions of tradition and modernity and continues to inform identity formation even as these societies [of the 'global South'] are being transformed by current geopolitical conjunctures" (9). While the differences in classes, races, and religions are not dissolved, Bollywood films and their music permeate through all societal differences as a unifying factor in establishing Indian national identity. To rephrase Nehru, Bollywood songs therefore portray the newly independent nation in *A Suitable Boy* as being united in diversity.

1.1.6 Conclusion and transition

In *A Suitable Boy*, Seth provides a rich and varied portrayal of musical culture in India, and shows how music touches upon religion, politics, and social class as an intrinsic part of his characters' lives. Seth thus mirrors Nehru's definition of India as "unity in diversity", acknowledging the "tremendous" diversity of India, which "concerns itself with physical appearances as well as with certain mental habits and traits" (*The Discovery of India* 61). He argues that there is "little in common, to outward seeming, between the Pathan of the North-West and the Tamil in the far South" (61), yet what unites these people is a national identity that bears "the distinguishing mark of India" (61). The six different music traditions featured in *A Suitable Boy* are all distinct in their own traditions and appropriations by different religious creeds, political agendas, and social classes. Yet, as music can transcend these particular meanings and circumstances, it brings people together.

Moreover, through music, Seth writes the nation as "irretrievably heterogeneous", to borrow Spivak's term from "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (284). For a postcolonial agenda, this is crucial, as it allows for a self-determined narrative of national identity and defies Western narratives of the homogenised and appropriated other. As a case in point, it is informative to look at the way in which E.M. Forster depicts his characters' experience of Indian sounds and music from the coloniser's viewpoint in his 1924 novel *A Passage to India*. As the main musical event in the novel, Professor Godbole's musical performance is described as a bafflement to the ears of Western listeners (72), who try to understand the

26 In Chapter Four, I will discuss the issue of world music as a cultural trope from the West in more detail.

Indian music in terms of Western music paradigms, comparing it to familiar elements. However, the overall effect remains that of noise, not of music: “noises, none harsh or unpleasant”, but also, significantly, “none intelligible” (72). This signifies that Forster does not acknowledge that Indian music is a musical tradition different from, but equally worthy to the Western tradition. Because the listeners fail to place Godbole's song in the context of standard Western music, Godbole's performance is instead designated to be mere noise. For Forster's characters, who fail to comprehend India and its culture due to their own limitations of understanding and perception, Indian music embodies chaos that threatens Western rationality.

The episode in the Marabar Caves is another case in point here. As Mi Zhou argues in her dissertation “Sublime Noise: Reading E.M. Forster Musically”, the English character Adela Quested yearns but ultimately fails to experience India, because as a country it is too vast to be comprehended visually: “Adela’s desire to ‘see the *real* India’ hence was always doomed. The act of looking will always exclude her from what she looks at; she will always remain the viewer of the spectacle of Indian life before her” (150-151). Instead, the characters' experience of India is mainly aural and not visual: “In *A Passage to India*, the central event of the novel is sonic: the echo in the Marabar Caves” (151). Crucially, this episode marks an utter disorientation for Adela, who afterwards wrongly accuses Dr Aziz of sexually assaulting her, and for Mrs. Moore, who in Zhou's words suffers “from aural horror” (181). The caves do not only look alike, but the echo distorts any means of orientation by collapsing any acoustics into one indistinguishable noise. In the caves, sound is disembodied, and the echo, as Zhou puts it, “is a sound with no semantic content, an unstable signifier (boum, bou-oum, or ou-boum) that seems to have no relationship to a signified” (184). For the characters, this experience is highly disorienting, and marks a break-down of imperial procedure and logic, as sound cannot be contained, which in turn means a loss of control. India is thus rendered incomprehensible.

In the conclusion to *Indian Music and the West*, Gerry Farrell remarks that Indian music, particularly during the times of the British Raj, remained essentially inaccessible to the West: “In the views of the West, Indian music did not conform to the 'rationality' of time signatures, staff notation, and tempered tuning. It was the province of mystics, holy men, and dancing-girls” (119/120). Crucially, Farrell argues that Indian music was used by the

colonisers as a canvas onto which to project their fears and desires of the forever sexualised other:

> Indian music […] was also the marker of a sensual wonderland, a place of dangerous but irresistible transgressions, conjured up merely by a few oriental-sounding scales. In other words, Indian music was the incidental music to the colonial re-creation of India. This was a mysterious, unpredictable, unknowable place, composed of opposites which were defined by the foreign rulers; not a geographical location, but a place in the Western imagination. (220)

This is an important argument insofar as it depicts music not as a means to express a self-determined cultural identity and thereby establish an independent national identity, as Seth does in *A Suitable Boy*, but putting the power of denotation in the hand of the West, which sees music as part of an orientalist identity that is imposed by the imperial power.

Not surprisingly, then, the opposition that Forster draws is of Europe versus India, where Europe stands for order, rationality, form, and harmony versus the "muddle" that is India, which, as Pankaj Mishra points out in her introduction to the Penguin Classics edition of *A Passage to India*, was Forster's "preferred word" to describe the country (x). In *The Hill of Devi and Other Indian Writings*, Forster describes his experiences of an eight-day celebration of Krishna's birthday, the Gokul Ashtami, and particularly the singers and dancers at the festival, thus: "I cannot see the point of this, or rather in what it differs from ordinary mundane intoxication […] Yet I am very much muddled in my own mind about it all […] There is no dignity, no taste, no form [but] one can see from the faces of the people that it touches something very deep inside their heart" (64). The crucial difference then between the two novelists is that of perspective: while Forster looks from the outside in, Seth presents Indian music from an insider's perspective. It marks the colonial versus the postcolonial viewpoint. Yet, as much as Forster's account homogenises Indian music and thus India as a nation, it also implies that Indian music and sounds resist imperial control, because neither of the British characters can make sense of it and of India as a country. Ultimately, India therefore remains incomprehensible and unrepresentable. Music defies and deflects attempts to be understood, although such attempts have been made from the very beginning of the British involvement on the Indian subcontinent, because in order to control another culture, you need to understand it first, as, amongst others, Said argues throughout *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), and as I will explain in more detail below. How particularly North Indian classical music has resisted attempts to be understood and appropriated will be the main focus of the following section.

1.2 Hindustani music: aesthetic universality, cultural authenticity, and imperial resistance

In her study on the significance of Hindustani music to the incipient nationalism at the turn of the twentieth century, *Two Men and Music: Nationalism in the Making of an Indian Classical Tradition*, Janaki Bakhle writes:

> [c]ompared to other Asian countries such as Korea, China, or Japan, where Western classical music planted deep roots, very few such roots were set down in India […] Instead, what emerged as classical music in the twentieth century was native to the subcontinent. This music has stayed at the center of the classical arts in India, never challenged in any significant way by music from the outside. The fundamental form of the music – both its grammar and its aesthetic logic – did not so much actively resist colonial influence as stay indifferently impervious to it. (14)

This goes a long way in explaining why Ustad Majeed Khan does not seem too concerned with Western classical music as a possible contester for Hindustani music's universalising claims – it is not, and has not been, a significant influence for his own tradition. In *The Life of Music in North India*, Daniel M. Neuman supports this view stating that "[t]he music culture of India is the only major system, outside the West, that has succeeded in maintaining its traditions largely unmarked by the West and a colonial past" (17). This also suggests the possibility that Indian classical music served as a site of cultural resistance during the colonial era, which denotes a politicisation of the aesthetic. As Said argues in *Culture and Imperialism*, to control a people's culture is to control the people: "When it came to what lay beyond metropolitan Europe, the arts and the disciplines of representation depended on the power of Europe to bring the non-European world into representation, the better to be able to see it, to master it and, above all, to hold it" (119). Moreover, to control culture, it needs to be understood in order to then be appropriated by the coloniser. As a case in point, Farrell writes about exhibitions such as Hagenbeck's 1886 Ceylon Exhibition that, "[b]y the mid-nineteenth century the outcome of such exhibitions and the overarching venture of classification that had brought them into existence was to reinvent the non-Western world for Western understanding" (46). Crucially, the imperial project is not about an authentic representation of indigenous culture, as Said points out in *Orientalism*: "My whole point about this system is not that it is a misrepresentation of some Oriental essence – in which I do not for a moment believe – but that it operates as representations usually do, for a purpose, according to a tendency, in a specific historical, intellectual, and even economic setting" (273). Instead, cultural imperialism is always political in that it subordinates the

other's culture by denying it its own narrative. Orientalism, as a particular form of cultural imperialism, is therefore, in Said's definition, a "Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" (3).

Throughout *Indian Music and the West* Farrell outlines how the British tried to understand, catalogue, and thereby control and appropriate Indian music, particularly under the British Raj: "Indian music was examined and researched as part of the scientific description of India, through both the mapping of traditional Indian culture for political and bureaucratic purposes and the continuing scholarly investigation of Indian music by Western musicologists" (47).[27] However, as Farrell argues, Indian music resisted both outside influences and attempts to be appropriated, the reasons for which he sees in the music itself, that is in the incompatibility between Indian and Western classical music, including differences concerning notation, intonation and tuning (8). As an oral tradition, which is predominantly melodic and uses microtonal scales, Indian classical music defies Western staff notation and literally escapes Western control. Farrell presents a succinct summary of the problems the West faced with notation of Indian music as documentation, and as a result, how this problem is of aesthetic nature, while also intrinsically political:

> Whereas Sanskrit documents and, to a large extent, spoken languages could be apprehended and rendered as text, music posed unique problems of documentation. It was for this reason that Western scholars and musicians from the eighteenth century through to the twentieth were continually grappling with problems of notation, intonation, and tuning. The structure of Indian music and the sonic world it inhabited defied precise depiction in staff notation and tempered tuning. […] The meeting of Indian music and the West, on occasion, throws into sharp relief the ways in which a colonial power encountered and tried to represent one facet of another culture. That Western forms were inadequate to the task of representing Indian music accurately, although there was a cultural imperative to do so, meant that the seemingly abstract world of music became embroiled in power struggles at the cultural heart of India, an issue of both nationalism and Westernization. (8-9)

It is the nationalism that I want to focus on next in order to show that for the same reasons music resisted imperial control – its narratives about cultural autonomy as well as its incompatibility with Western classical music – it was appropriated by the incipient Hindu nationalism "as a symbol of Indian culture", as Farrell puts it (47) towards the end of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century. Bakhle exemplifies this nationalist politicisation of Indian classical music by tracing the lives and works of Vishnu Narayan

27 See in particular chapter 2, in which Farrell shows that the 19th century imperial project is crucial to understand the relationships between Indian music and the West, as it marks the growing intellectual involvement of the British with Indian music.

Bhatkhande (1860-1936), "a renowned musicologist and scholar" (96), and Vishnu Digambar Paluskar (1872-1931), musical educationalist and Hindu nationalist. She opens her book with the claim that "[t]he one (and perhaps only) art form said to have successfully resisted colonial influence during the nineteenth century was Indian classical music, both North Indian (Hindustani) and South Indian (Carnatic)" (3). The main focus of her work is to show how Bhakthande and Paluskar politicised music in order for it to not only passively resist colonial influences, but to actively constitute an independent nationalism. Bakhle argues that Bhakthande and Paluskar "stepped into the fray in the late nineteenth century to give Indian classical music, as we understand and recognize it today, its distinct shape, form and identity" (5). Until then, music had not yet been "identified with a particular ideology, religious group, or ethnic identity [… and] was yet to be fully classicized" (5). Crucially, Bhakthande and Paluskar turn towards a cultural tradition that is perceived to be – also due to their own accounts of it – ancient and deeply rooted in Indian culture and history. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Frantz Fanon explains this turn to a pre-colonial national culture with the urge to mark its distinct differences from the West: "it has been remarked several times that this passionate search for a national culture which existed before the colonial era finds its legitimate reason in the anxiety shared by native intellectuals to shrink away from that Western culture in which they all risk being swamped" (209).

In this context, music's double function to take on meaning and to transcend it at the same time is crucial, because music resisted colonial narratives of cultural imperialism, but could become a self-determined narrative that served as the basis for a unified nationalism. Similarly, Neuman states that,

> [t]oward the end of the first quarter of the present century [here the twentieth century], the social basis of music making began to be redefined by the tastes and economic power of the rising middle class and by the search for a national identity. In theory and in practice, music was celebrated as an artistic heritage transcending caste, religious, ethnic, and linguistic boundaries, an especially salient cultural phenomenon at a time when few other expressions, aside from the shared desire to rid India of the British, could claim to be of national relevance. (18-19)

Hindustani music is thus rendered an ideal site of cultural purity and authenticity that is allegedly unaffected by politics, religion, and social structure, because music can, as has been argued throughout this chapter, transcend these circumstances. Seth writes the Ustad into this narrative of the cultural authenticity of music and its resistance against

appropriation from the inside and the outside, which makes classical music an ideal marker of postcolonial identity.

When it comes to cultural resistance against imperial dominance, there are two different yet interlinked narratives concerning music and identity at play in the way that Seth describes Indian classical music in the novel: one is explicit, the other one implicit. The explicit narrative depicts Indian classical music as absolute art, while the implicit one considers the music a product of the culture in which it is rooted. The understanding that Ustad Majeed Khan has of Indian classical music is a purely aesthetic one that renders music the ideal art, universal in meaning, absolute in validity, and something that should only be performed as art for art's sake. Although this discourse ignores the political dimension of music, it is crucial to see that the Ustad's understanding of music still bears validity within the novel and – to extend the frame of reference here – within the general argument about cultural identity that bears important consequences for any attempt to dominate this music. Because Indian classical music is portrayed as being so pure, nothing can taint it. Nothing can threaten its cultural dominance, not from the inside in the form of non-classical music, but in a postcolonial reading of the novel, not from the outside in the form of Western musical traditions either. As for the implicit discourse, this sees Indian classical music as a cultural tradition that has strongly shaped Indian cultural identity over centuries. Crucially, it long pre-dates and has since out-lived the British Raj (1858-1947), which speaks of its autonomy and perceived authenticity, and which strengthens the musical tradition in its resistance against cultural imperialism. Because of its long history and tradition, Hindustani music is therefore particularly apt for affirming cultural independence from the legacies of imperialism. Sources trace the roots of Indian classical music back to the Sama Veda, which dates back millennia.[28] The Sama Veda particularly, with its hymns and melodies, establishes a strong link between music and the realm of the spiritual-devotional; moreover, the classical music tradition embodied in *A Suitable Boy* by the Muslim guru Ustad Majeed Khan dates back to the Mughal Empire (1526-1857) and to courtly patronage of the arts, which flourished particularly from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century. Referring to a musical tradition that goes back centuries in musical practice and millennia in scriptural foundation,

28 See, for example: Daniel M. Neuman, *The Life of Music in North India: The Organization of an Artistic Tradition*; Deepak Raja: *Hindustani Music: A Tradition in Transition*; George E. Ruckert, *Music in North India: Experiencing Music, Expressing Culture*; Madura R. Gautam, *The Musical Heritage of India*; Najma Ahmad, *Hindustani Music: A Study of Its Developments in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*.

Seth employs a system of cultural references that allows the newly-found nation depicted in his novel to legitimise and identify itself in reference to an implied cultural authenticity.

When Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities* writes that "[i]f nation-states are widely considered to be 'new' and 'historical', the nations to which they give political expression always loom out of an immemorial past" (19), he argues that reaching back to the past is crucial to form a sense of national identity and communal belonging. In this light, it is interesting to read how Nehru describes the origins of his country in *The Discovery of India* (1946): "We are an old race, or rather an odd mixture of many races, and our racial memories go back to the dawn of history" (55). Nehru – in rather vague terms – discusses the importance of history and the country's past as a time that people relate back to in "an attempt to understand and adapt the new and harmonize it with the old, or at any rate with parts of the old which were considered worth preserving" (54).[29] He suggests that it is the synthesis between the new and the old that forms an idea of national identity:

> Every people and every nation has some such belief or myth of national destiny and perhaps it is partly true in each case. Being an Indian I am myself influenced by this reality or myth about India, and I feel that anything that had the power to mould hundreds of generations, without a break, must have drawn its enduring vitality from some deep well of strength, and have had the capacity to renew that vitality from age to age. (55)

Two things are crucial here: the importance of the past for the creation of a present national identity, and the fact that Nehru does not differentiate between "reality or myth", but instead suggests that it does not matter whether this past is based on fact or fiction, as long as it is passed down through the generations "without a break". This stresses the fact that national identity is a narrative and not a pre-existing fact. Where Nehru remains vague as to what has made this "myth" – he writes at another point about India as possessing "some depth of soul which I could not fathom" (59) – Anderson explicitly understands the political concept of the nation state as being built on culture: "What I am proposing is that Nationalism has to be understood, by aligning it not with self-consciously held political ideologies, but with large cultural systems that preceded it, out of which – as well as against which – it came into being" (19). The nation thus comes into being as "a system of cultural signification", as Homi K. Bhabha puts it in his introduction to *Nation and Narration* (1).

29 Although sources like the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* indicate that Nehru completed – rather than wrote from scratch – *The Discovery of India* in 1944, Nehru in his preface states: "This book was written by me in Ahmadnagar Fort prison during the five months, April to September, 1944" (n. pag.). Either way, *The Discovery of India* was not published until 1946.

In the context of postcolonial nation building, Anderson's concept is contested, however, as it is deeply rooted in the ideas and ideals of European enlightenment. Re-applying it to postcolonised nations bears the intrinsic danger of creating a neo-colonial discourse by taking European values, models, and thoughts of supremacy as the basis for, say, Indian independence. In an article responding to Anderson, Partha Chatterjee therefore asks "Whose Imagined Community?", and attacks this European implicitness of explanatory authority. Chatterjee's central objection to Anderson's model of nationalism lies in the fact that Anderson bases his generalisations on the concrete examples of Europe, the Americas and Russia. Chatterjee contests this model, because it denies countries in the rest of the world the right to self-determined nationalism:

> History, it would seem, has decreed that we in the postcolonial world shall only be perpetual consumers of modernity. Europe and the Americas, the only true subjects of history, have thought out on our behalf not only the script of colonial enlightenment and exploitation, but also that of our anti-colonial resistance and postcolonial misery. Even our imagination must remain forever colonized. (216)

Again, national identities in the former colonies are not self-determined, but reactions in response to Western identities: talking about the history of Indian nationalism in the nineteenth century, Chatterjee argues that, "when submitted to a sophisticated sociological analysis, [this history] cannot but converge with Anderson's formulations. In fact, since it seeks to replicate in its own history the history of the modern state in Europe, nationalism's self-representation will inevitably corroborate Anderson's decoding of the nationalist myth" (217). It seems as if postcolonial nationalism is thereby trapped in a self-fulfilling prophecy of neo-colonial nationalism.

However, Chatterjee sees a resistance against this perpetuating colonisation in an anti-colonial nationalism that is based on culture traced back to the times of imperial dominance. He argues that, "anti-colonial nationalism creates its own domain of sovereignty within colonial society well before it begins its political battle with the imperial power" (217). As Chatterjee explains, this happens by a division of social institutions and practices into the two domains of the material and the spiritual, where he defines the world of the material as "the domain of the 'outside', of the economy and of statecraft, of science and technology" (217), while the spiritual marks the 'inner' domain and encompasses culture and cultural identity. Crucially, the outside domain is where the superiority of the West has to not only be acknowledged, but also "carefully studied and replicated", because in this domain the West

"had proved its superiority and the East had succumbed" (217). In *The Discovery of India*, Nehru, too, traces the reasons of India's fall under British control to Britain's supremacy in terms of developments and inventions in science and technology. Nehru views India's past critically and faults his country's backwardness in technical progress as compared to Europe for making India an easy target for colonisation, and admits that "one senses a progressive deterioration during centuries" (54). Nehru elaborates:

> [a] rational spirit of inquiry, so evident in earlier times, which might well have led to the further growth of science, is replaced by irrationalism and a blind idolatory [*sic*] of the past. Indian life becomes a sluggish stream, living in the past, moving slowly through the accumulations of dead centuries. The heavy burden of the past crushes it and a kind of coma seizes it. It is not surprising that in this condition of mental stupor and physical weariness India should have deteriorated and remained rigid and immobile, while other parts of the world marched ahead. (54)

In *Culture and Imperialism*, Said extends this argument of Western supremacy and reapplies it within the frame of postcolonial independence when he argues that the Western narratives of European enlightenment and emancipation, which paved the way for imperialism in the first place, also enabled "people in the colonial world to rise up and throw off imperial subjection" (xiii). Said understands narrative, and particularly the great narratives of Western enlightenment and modernity, to be at the centre of imperial history, a history crucially written by the West. Yet, he also acknowledges that narratives "become the method colonized people use to assert their own identity and the existence of their own history" (xiii).

The place where stories are told and histories are written is culture, and this brings my line of argument back to Chatterjee and his concept of the "spiritual domain", which in his definition is the "inner" domain that bears "the 'essential' marks of cultural identity" (217). Importantly, where the 'outside' domain strives to imitate the West in order to reach its level of technological progress, the 'inside' domain is to be kept pure and untainted from outside influences: "[t]he greater one's success in imitating Western skills in the material domain […] the greater the need to preserve the distinctness of one's spiritual culture" (217). Chatterjee sees this cultural distinctness as "a fundamental feature of anti-colonial nationalisms in Asia and Africa" (217). The implications of the nationalising of the 'inner' domain, according to Chatterjee, are that it does not allow for intervention from the colonial power, as the spiritual is declared sovereign territory. Given its cultural distinctness as well as its resistance against Western influences, Hindustani music can be firmly located within

the 'inner' or 'spiritual domain' as defined by Chatterjee. Furthermore, Chatterjee also accounts for the political dimension of the spiritual when he argues that an independent and self-determined culture is already political insofar as it precedes, foreshadows, and eventually enables the sovereign postcolonial state to come into being:

> The colonial state, in other words, is kept out of the 'inner' domain of national culture; but it is not as though this so-called spiritual domain is left unchanged. In fact, here nationalism launches its most powerful, creative, and historically significant project: to fashion a 'modern' national culture that is nevertheless not Western. If the nation is an imagined community, then this is where it is brought into being. In this, its true and essential domain, the nation is already sovereign, even when the state is in the hands of the colonial power. (217)

To reiterate Chatterjee's main contention with Anderson, the crucial difference between Western and postcolonial nationalisms is that the postcolonial nation-states needed to come into being against the states that suppressed them, and Chatterjee considers the emerging anti-colonial cultural realm as a precursor for a national identity independent of the colonising power. On the same idea, Said writes that "[t]he slow and often bitterly disputed recovery of geographical territory which is at the heart of decolonization is preceded – as empire had been – by the charting of cultural territory" (*Culture and Imperialism* 252). Therefore, if culture, with music at the centre, is the platform of imperialism, it is also the platform of resistance.

This shows that national identity is first and foremost imagined in the realms of culture, and it shows how music can function as a signifier of that culture in the terms implied by Nehru, outlined by Anderson, and specified by Chatterjee – a narrative and heritage from a distant past that marks what the *Cambridge Encyclopedia of India* describes as a "[c]ontinuity with the past in South Asia [which] remains a central idea and a foundation for contemporary musical practice" (445), and which thereby accesses and expresses a self-determined identity, independent of the colonial discourse. Music works as such a system of cultural signification, and the different musics featured in *A Suitable Boy* sound the Nehruvian nationalist ideal of a postcolonial India that finds unity in diversity.

Chapter 2

(Dis)locating Identity: Music and Place in Amit Chaudhuri's *Afternoon Raag* and Suhayl Saadi's *Psychoraag*

> While it may take root in national formations, impact national audiences, and impact the creation of national ideas and politics, music is always from somewhere else and is always en route to somewhere else.
>
> ~Josh Kun, *Audiotopia* (20)

This chapter looks at the interconnections between music, place, and identity, and at the question of how the first two influence and shape the latter in Amit Chaudhuri's novel *Afternoon Raag* and Suhayl Saadi's novel *Psychoraag*. Both texts are set in the contemporary postcolonial diaspora of 1990s England (*Afternoon Raag*) and Scotland at the beginning of the twenty-first century (*Psychoraag*). They feature protagonists who find themselves in a postcolonial situation of being in between cultures: the unnamed Indian protagonist in Chaudhuri's novel has just moved to England to read for a degree at Oxford University, while Zaf, Saadi's main character, is a second-generation immigrant from Pakistan, who works as a DJ at an Asian community radio station in Glasgow. Music is at the heart of both texts, as already indicated by their titles that reference the musical mode of rāga. For Chaudhuri's character, who is trained in Indian classical music, Hindustani music bears the characteristics of a home that he has left behind and to which he returns in memories of his childhood and youth, which are shown as flashbacks throughout the novel. These memories show how important music is for the protagonist, how it has shaped his cultural identity, and how closely it is tied to India as its place of cultural production. In his state of cultural hybridity and in-between-ness, following Homi K. Bhabha, music is the protagonist's anchor to his imaginary homeland, to use Salman Rushdie's term.[30] While this establishes a strong

30 See Salman Rushdie's essay collection *Imaginary Homelands*, and particular his titular essay (9-21).

connection between music and place that enables the protagonist to locate his identity, Chaudhuri also suggests that music escapes its place of origin, thereby dislocating identities. The protagonist, while away in England, plays Hindustani music, which he learned from his music teacher, who moved to Bombay from Rajasthan, a place that is "gone now" (*Afternoon Raag* 257) but that still rings true in the music the guru teaches his disciple. As in Kun's quote above, music in *Afternoon Raag* "is always from somewhere else and is always en route to somewhere else" (*Audiotopia* 20). Its "spirit-like mobility in covering distances" (*Afternoon Raag* 258) enables Chaudhuri's characters to reconnect with places that are otherwise lost to them. Focusing on Bhabha's concepts of cultural hybridity and 'in-between' spaces as productive sites for articulating cultural differences and on Simon Frith's notion of music as an expression of a "self-in-progress", the first part of this chapter will show how music in *Afternoon Raag* eases cultural transition for characters who find themselves in a situation of postcolonial dislocation.

In Saadi's novel *Psychoraag*, to be discussed in part two of this chapter, music provides the model for an alternative, postcolonial writing of history by disrupting the linear narrative of the text, which is traditionally associated with imperial history. The cyclical structure of rāga, explained in detail by Martin Clayton, troubles and undermines linearity and thereby opens up a framework for the Empire, as it were, to write back. On the level of content, the music featured in *Psychoraag* is very diverse: in his late night broadcast, Zaf plays tracks that range from the first recorded rāga performance from the beginning of the twentieth century to songs by the contemporary Scottish-Asian band Asian Dub Foundation. He plays Indian and Western classical as well as popular music, from Stravinsky to the Beatles and Bollywood singers such as Mohammad Rafi. This eclectic mix of musical styles and genres that spans space and time is an expression of Zaf's identity. The text states that "music defined him" (210), and that he feels complete when the music envelops him:

> The music radiated all around him – it seemed to fall on him from above and to rise up through the floorboards and to seam into the lines of his bones, his flesh. Good music wis like that. It filled your world, it completed you. It replicated your soul and turned you to gold. (239)[31]

The playlist that Zaf compiles for his broadcast is a sample of the different cultural influences that have shaped him, most prominently Scottish and South-Asian culture. At one

31 In his novel Saadi uses both Urdu and Glaswegian demotic, such as the dropping of the final "g" or "wis" instead of "was". Direct quotes from the novel are transcribed using the spelling and grammar as published.

point the novel suggests that the combination of different musical pieces creates a third piece that is new:

> Durin the ninety nights of his sojourn with Radio Chaandni, deep in the aureate darkness, through the walls and the floor, at times Zaf would hear two completely different pieces of music, just muted enough not to be able to make out the melodies or words. In places, the notes would merge and, from somewhere, there would arise a third tune, one that nobody had ever written but which sounded better than either of its component parts. (239)

For Zaf, the two "component parts" are his Pakistani heritage and the Scottish culture he was born into, and the "third tune" marks his unique position between these incompatible locales. This "third tune" thus exemplifies how cultural hybridity can constitute a productive site of cultural enunciation and emancipation for the postcolonial character in-between cultures.

2.1 *Afternoon Raag* and the postcolonial character in-between places

As I have shown in the last chapter, music, and particularly Hindustani music, is deeply rooted in Indian culture and has thus strong connections to India as a place. This way, music serves as a maker and marker of identity, and in the case of *A Suitable Boy*, of a newly independent national identity. Moving on, this chapter changes the parameters of analysis and interpretation from India to the United Kingdom – from the post-colonised to the post-coloniser – and to the space and characters in between these cultures. Such a discussion shows how music can shape individual identity as well as collective national identity. While the former is of course formed and informed by the latter, individual identity nevertheless requires a closer focus. Amit Chaudhuri's fiction provides this focus by looking at his characters through the close-up lens of their everyday lives and immediate surroundings. Chaudhuri tells their stories and histories through the very personalised medium of thoughts, memories, and habits, and he characterises them by their interactions, conversations and relations to others, as demonstrated in the opening scene of his novel *A Strange and Sublime Address*:

> The morning passed in a wave of words. Sandeep's mother talked about Bombay, about Sandeep's father's responsibilities in 'the company', about how he worked too hard, and how he never had time to go anywhere. Chhotomama, whose problems were more ordinary and more difficult to solve, loved listening to the remote complaints of his sister's life, objecting to or agreeing with, now and then, a phrase. (6-7)

Sound plays a crucial role in all of Chaudhuri's novels, as his characters perceive their surroundings to a large extent aurally: fans hum in the background, cars honk and "create an anxious music, discordant but not indifferent" (*The Immortals* 1), trams screech, people wake up to household noises, bells chime, phones ring, birds sing, characters sing as well, pigeons do not sing but hoot constantly and obsessively, mothers shout, babies scream, crowds roar, and the muezzin at the beginning of *Freedom Song* calls Muslims to prayer and the reader to attention. Descriptions of situations and objects are loaded with aural sensations and musical metaphors, such as the kick-starting of a car in *A Strange and Sublime Address*: "[t]hen there was a sudden throbbing in the distance, culminating in a long drawn-out roar, an affirmative crescendo at the end of a tiresome musical. The engine had come to life" (30). Rooms have their own sound and music, such as the bathroom in *A Strange and Sublime Address*, which "echoed with a strange rhythm" (9), and from where "[o]ne could hear mynahs and shaliks singing outside, though one could hear their fragmentary chorus more clearly from the toilet, which was next to the bath. An obsessive, busy music repeated itself behind the frosted glass. Sometimes, one heard the shrill cries of their young, and felt surrounded and safe" (8).

Sound is so pervasive that its absence is conspicuous, so that the narrator in *A Strange and Sublime Address* remarks about a scene in which nothing much remarkable happens – as is often the case in Chaudhuri – "[i]t was a strange scene because, in spite of the number of people who had congregated together, there was scarcely any noise" (49). Where sound makes the characters feel "surrounded and safe", silence, as its opposite, is loaded with a whole array of signification. Silence is not only unusual but unnatural in that it denotes the natural surroundings of the characters coming to a standstill, for example in the early afternoon heat – the "[t]wo hours of golden stillness" (*A Strange and Sublime Address* 81) when there is "not a movement in the corridors, no noise" (79) – or during a curfew: "[a]ny sign of abnormality made her worry and wonder, and this new silence outside and proximity within brought to her awareness what she probably hadn't noticed before" (*Freedom Song* 374-375). Silence is disconcerting and marks situations that are out of the ordinary. Moreover, where life resounds, death is silent, like the "dead calm of the sea" that surrounds the Thacker Towers in *The Immortals* (90).

Through this interplay of sound, noise, and silence Chaudhuri creates a soundscape of his characters' everyday lives and of the city – where the city is usually either Bombay or

Calcutta – in which they live.[32] Chaudhuri writes the space of the city in sound: "The day after the explosions [in Bombay, exact date not specified in the novel] no one wanted to go out but found themselves at work anyway, the usual noises surrounding them" (*Freedom Song* 414). Also, earlier in the novel: "[t]he sound of the radio came from outside; and from a side-table Mini picked up her spectacles; it was morning and the moment of waking; the consciousness which meant a return to these sounds of the building and further away the noises of Chitpur Road" (379). The characters use this soundscape for orientation and identification; it is part of their lives and thus part of themselves. Changes in sounds indicate changes in place and vice versa, which often also indicates the characters' dislocation and alienation. The narrator in *Afternoon Raag* observes about his lover's room that "Mandira lived in a college among undergraduates. The rhythms and inflections, the sounds, were different here from those of graduate life" (230). Soundscapes thus suggest a strong link between a place, its sounds, and the identity of the people inhabiting this place.

2.1.1 The rāga in *Afternoon Raag*

A dominant part in that soundscape is played by music, particularly in *Afternoon Raag* and *The Immortals*, which both centre around families of musicians. In *Afternoon Raag*, both music and place as well as the connections between them play a crucial role. The novel's title already references the rāga, which is the central concept of Hindustani music, and which is defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as, "each of a number of melodic types used as tonal frameworks for composition and improvisation, based on a particular scale type and differentiated further by the relative frequency, strength, order, etc., of the notes used within this scale"; rāga also denotes a "piece of music based on such a framework" (n. pag.). Qureshi et al. clarify that rāga is neither a tune nor the equivalent to a Western scale, "but rather a continuum with scale and tune as its extremes".[33] Essentially, it can be understood as

32 I limit my discussion of the concept of soundscape here to argue and exemplify the strong interconnections between place and sound, which will then allow me to treat music as part of that soundscape and analyse music's significance for the construction of postcolonial places. For more research on soundscape, see R. Murray Schafer's founding text *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World* and Emily Ann Thompson's *The Soundscape of Modernity: Architectural Acoustics and the Culture of Listening*; for a discussion of soundscape in literature, see Brigitte Cazelles's *Soundscape in Early French Literature* as well as John M. Picker's *Victorian Soundscapes*.

33 For the purpose of this chapter I will only go into the details of rāga that are relevant in relation to the texts I am discussing. For more information on Hindustani classical music in general and the rāga system in particular, see, for example, Baburao Joshi, *Understanding Indian Music*, and Daniel M. Neuman's *The Life of Music in North India: The Organization of an Artistic Tradition*.

a melody type or mode that determines the notes that can be used. It also lays down the rules according to which these can be arranged to correctly create a specific rāga. Therefore, rāga is the name given to a musical tradition, a particular piece of music, and to the performance of such a piece of music. As Richard Widdess in his entry on rāga in the *Grove Music Online* specifies,

> [e]ach rāga is characterized by a variety of melodic features, including a basic scale (perhaps with additional or omitted notes), grammatical rules governing the relative emphasis of different scale degrees and the sequence of notes in ascending and descending contexts, distinctive ways of ornamenting or pitching particular notes, and motifs or formulae from which complete melodies or improvisations can be constructed. (n. pag.)

According to Baburao Joshi, the most important rule of the rāga is: "'[t]hat which delights or charms is *Raga*'. This means that a *Raga* scale must have essentially aesthetic potentialities, or must be capable of giving artistic experience" (21). *Grove Music Online* specifies this aesthetic dimension and states that next to the technical elements that make a rāga, there are extra-musical elements that mark the music: "[a]esthetic and extra-musical aspects of rāga have been, and remain, profoundly important in Indian culture. They have included supernatural powers over the physical universe and associations with particular divinities, human characters, seasons and times of day" (n. pag.). In answering the question of what the rāga means for the protagonists in the novels by Chaudhuri and Saadi, I will focus primarily on the connection of music to place and time. Both organise a rāga and instil it with meaning; also, place and time serve as the underlying structures to the novel, and inform the text's content. The meaning that the music derives from its cultural context and the time and place of its production allows the protagonists, whose identities are caught in between India and England (*Afternoon Raag*) and Pakistan and Scotland (*Psychoraag*), to relate back to their cultural origins and thus access parts of their cultural identities.

2.1.2 Music and the postcolonial character in-between places

Place and the longing to belong to a particular place plays a crucial role in *Afternoon Raag*. Born and raised in India, the unnamed first-person narrator in *Afternoon Raag* comes to England to read for a postgraduate degree in English Literature at the University of Oxford. The novel's structure mirrors the different cultural influences that act on the character – his training in Indian classical music on the one hand and his studies on the English author D.H.

Lawrence on the other – in a dual construction of place: out of the 27 chapters, 16 are set in Oxford and depict the protagonist's recent past as a university student, while the remaining eleven chapters are set in Calcutta and Bombay. All the Indian episodes are set in the past and focus on the protagonist's memories of his family, his music teacher, and his friends, depicting his childhood and youth in India, with the exception of one chapter that shows the protagonist shortly after he has returned from England at the end of his studies. Most of these episodes recount intimate and personal everyday situations, as exemplified by the beginning of the first Indian chapter: "Early mornings, my mother is about, drifting in her pale nightie, making herself a cup of tea in the kitchen" (192).

The protagonist's desire to locate himself and to map the places he inhabits marks the postcolonial need for a reclamation of places and thereby a redefinition of identity on – literally and metaphorically – one's own grounds. Ashcroft et al. write of place in a postcolonial context as "the 'place' of the 'subject'", which states a strong interconnection between place and identity, as already suggested by Chaudhuri's soundscapes. This is supported when they continue to argue that place thus defined

> throws light upon subjectivity itself, because whereas we might conceive subjectivity as a process, as Lacan has done, so the discourse of place is a process of a continual dialectic between subject and object. Thus a major feature of post-colonial literatures is the concern with either developing or recovering an appropriate identifying relationship between self and place because it is precisely within the parameters of place and its separateness that the process of subjectivity can be conducted. (*Post-Colonial Studies 2* 346)

Notably, Ashcroft et al. define place in a more abstract and non-territorial way than is evident in *Afternoon Raag* and *Psychoraag*, where place denotes concrete locality. Ashcroft et al., on the other hand, link place to language and argue that "in some sense place *is* language, something in constant flux, a discourse in process" (345). Ashcroft et al. thereby understand place in the same way that Sara Upstone defines space in *Spatial Politics in the Postcolonial Novel*:

> Most notably, it is Michel Foucault's comment, only translated into English and published posthumously in 1986, that 'the present epoch will perhaps be above all else the epoch of space' ('Of Other Spaces' 22), that appears to have opened the way for greater consideration of space as an important context for considering issues such as power relationships and negotiations of identity. (2)[34]

34 I will discuss Foucault's concept of space in more detail in Chapter Four.

Preceding Foucault, John Berger in 1974 predicted what would become the spatial turn in critical theory. In *The Look of Things*, Berger stresses the significance of space as an analytic category alongside and over time: "Prophesy now involves a geographical rather than historical projection; it is space not time that hides consequences from us. To prophesy today it is only necessary to know men as they are throughout the whole world in their inequality. Any contemporary narrative which ignores the urgency of this dimension is incomplete" (40). To understand the postcolonial condition, it is therefore essential to grasp the underlying politics of postcolonial places that mark "men as they are throughout the whole world in their inequality".

The concepts of space and place are intrinsically interlinked, and Upstone in her study presents place as one part of the more broadly defined concept of space. Place is "one manifestation of space: its representation in intensely physical forms which create sites of identification" (3). These sites of identification are crucial for postcolonial identity, because they are reclaimed places, since colonialism thrived on the underlying power structures, hierarchies, and possibilities of oppression that territorial occupation offered. As Upstone writes:

> [t]here is no greater example of spatial upheaval than the imperial projects that ushered in the twentieth century. As the zenith of several hundred years of military seizures of territory by economic trading groups, and appropriations of land and culture by religious missions under the approving gaze of their governments and sovereigns, these projects have been defined as 'geographical violence' (Said, *Culture* 225). As a result of this, colonial analysis has seen the spatial as inherent to the questions of identity, power and resistance it often raises, seen in the highlighting of geography in seminal texts such as Edward Said's *Orientalism*, in the considerable attention given to issues of space in major anthologies such as *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* (1994), and in the growing awareness of the significance of colonialism within the academic discipline of geography. (4)

Place is therefore a very important marker of postcolonial identity. However, in *Afternoon Raag*, it is also a very unreliable one. I mentioned that the Indian episodes are predominantly memories of the protagonist's youth and childhood. While memories like this are crucial for the formation of identity, by definition they are based on incidents that lie in the past. In the novel, India as a place therefore exists mainly in the protagonist's mind, a fact he acknowledges when he muses that "even my compulsive nostalgia for home was half-imaginary" (274). The protagonist thus personifies the literary postcolonial character that Susheila Nasta in *Home Truths: Fictions of the South Asian Diaspora in Britain* describes as

being able to "revert […] whenever necessary to the memories of a lost past, the invented refuge, however fragmentary, of an 'imaginary homeland'" (175). The India that defines the main character's "Indian-ness" is a remembered place in the past and not a physical location. When he returns to Calcutta, it is clear that this is a different place from the one we have read about throughout the novel, particularly since the protagonist grew up in Bombay and his parents only moved to Calcutta when he was already in Oxford. As Nasta puts it, "'home' is not necessarily a real place but a mythical construct built on the discontinuous fragments of memory and reconceived in the imagination" (9). Similarly, Salman Rushdie in his essay "Imaginary Homelands" very succinctly describes the identity of the postcolonial migrant character who is dislocated in place as well as time, when he writes about his own hometown Bombay as a place in time: "the past is home, albeit a lost home in a lost city in the mists of lost time" (9). Rushdie realizes that he cannot return to his homeland, because it has become a place in the past and an imaginary place in his mind. He writes "that our physical alienation from India almost inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost; that we will, in short, create fiction, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind" (10).[35] Similarly, as Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin argue, this "sense of origin, however imagined, however monolithic, is actively constructed as an identifying and affiliative marker" (426), meaning that even though the homeland is imaginary, it is used as a referential place for self-identification, because to know where you come from is to know who you are.

Against the background of the memories marking the protagonist's Indian identity in *Afternoon Raag*, he tries to negotiate the parameters of his experiences in England. He goes into great detail describing Oxford as a place that can be mapped, providing street names, architectural descriptions, and directions across the city: "Cowley Road was on the other side, East Oxford. Long ago I had accompanied Sharma in hope of seeing an erotic Japanese film, *The Realm of the Senses*, to the Penultimate Picture Palace. After the roundabout, three roads ran parallel to each other – St Clement's, Cowley Road, and Iffley Road" (207). Whereas India is described as a place in the protagonist's past, Oxford is rendered a very

35 Postcolonial displacement is a major topic in Rushdie's essays as well as in his fiction. The main character in *Shame* states that "I am comparing gravity with belonging. Both phenomena observably exist: my feet stay on the ground, and I have never been angrier than I was on the day my father told me he had sold my childhood home in Bombay. But neither is understood. We know the force of gravity, but not its origins; and to explain why we become attached to our birthplaces we pretend that we are trees and speak of roots. Look under your feet. You will not find gnarled growths sprouting through the soles. Roots, I sometimes think, are a conservative myth, designed to keep us in our places." (86)

concrete locality marking a seemingly perpetual present. This sense of a particular place, however, soon falls apart, because despite his realistic descriptions, the protagonist experiences Oxford as a place he cannot entirely fathom, no matter how hard he tries to map it out: "There is no centre in Oxford, only different points of reference, from each of which the conception of the city is altered slightly. Thus one never feels completely rooted" (233). Oxford is literally de-centered, and so is the protagonist's identity. He is estranged from Oxford and experiences it not as a real place, but as an illusionary one, of which the postcards seem "more real than the place one has lived in" (236). Moreover, as with India, the protagonist experiences Oxford as a place in time rather than space when he states that "Oxford itself is a temporal and enchanted territory that has no permanence in one's life" (230). This shows that place is an inherently unstable concept: although the protagonist aims to map his identity to places, these places fall apart as markers for identification throughout the novel. His experience of England is influenced by what he "read about it in its literature and history" (274), while India is half-imaginary. This deconstruction of places leads to a dislocation of the protagonist's cultural identity. The dual structure of the novel thus mirrors the identity of its protagonist as someone who finds himself in-between places and cultures.

In the novel, music helps the protagonist to come to terms with this predicament by embedding his identity in Hindustani music, which is in turn firmly connected to India. The titular rāga and Hindustani music have a long and strong cultural tradition, which links the music to India as its cultural crèche and place of production. In an interview for the BBC's *World Service*, Chaudhuri stresses the connection of the rāga to Indian culture and tradition, stating that "Indian music is deeply inscribed into the culture" (n. pag.). Joshi, too, describes Hindustani music as "the very hallmark of Indian culture" (6), while Bigamudre Chaitanya Deva asserts that "the music of India is perhaps one of the oldest in the world", and that it "has retained [its] character to this day" (1). The spatial connection imbues the rāga with meaning of India as a particular place and culture, and enables the novel's protagonist to relate back to his homeland while being away: "When I hear the raag Maand, I think of my guru and his brother and Sohanlal, for it bears the characteristics, the stamp, and the life of their region" (*Afternoon Raag* 106-107). Music helps the protagonist to locate his identity and map it onto his homeland India, because the music itself is like a map of the country, its people, and its culture:

> The raags, woven together, are a history, a map, a calendar, of Northern India, they are territorial and temporal, they live and die with men, even though they seem to be

> timeless and exist outside them; they are evidence of the palimpsest-like texture of Northern India, with its many dyes and hues, its absence of written texts and its peculiar memory, so that no record of people like Sohanlal, or my guru and my guru's father, exists unequivocally, or without rhythm and music. (258-259)

Crucially, the music featured in *Afternoon Raag* is the music of another time and place, namely of the past and the homeland, as it often is in Chaudhuri. Mallika Sengupta, one of the main characters and a gifted singer in *The Immortals*, is praised for her voice that evokes earlier times: "Mrs Sengupta's voice evoked a 'golden age'. When people heard it in this drawing room, when they closed their eyes they couldn't believe it, they felt they'd been transported, somehow, to an earlier, to a better time. Secretly, one or two of them might think the voice 'old fashioned'; but it wasn't at all; it was simply out of place in the zeitgeist" (13). Hers is a voice out of place and time; it not only evokes the past, but also displaces herself and the audience in time and place. Although she now lives in Bombay, Mallika is originally from North Bengal, and therefore her musical metier "was the Bengali song, the Tagore-song – naturally" (12). As a singer in Bombay, she is "unmoored" and has to "explore avenues she'd once never thought of exploring" (12).

Afternoon Raag, too, describes music in relation to characters other than the protagonist that are dislocated, such as the guru and his brother Sohanlal, who was born in Rajasthan. It is a world that "is gone now" (*Afternoon Raag* 257), but it is also a world they can return to via music, as the protagonist attests: "Maand was a raag which, when sung by my guru or Sohanlal, revealed its unnameable, magical beginnings, and its spirit-like mobility in covering distances, in traversing scorched mountainsides, deserts, horizons, water, following back on the route of migrations that had led away from that country" (258). The main character's father was born in East Bengal which, after the Bangladesh Liberation War in 1971, became independent and was thus lost as a homeland: "India took on a new shape, and another story began, with homelands becoming fantasies, never to be returned to or remembered" (244). Yet, in this family of "refugee people", the protagonist "would hear of singers and painters in every branch of the family" (246), and it is music that defines him: "For the first time I could see where my own private joys came from – the love of songs, of music, of pride and delight in creation. That delight is my family's gift" (247). Music is able to provide the link back to the characters' homeland, even though they are not physically there. Mark Slobin explains this by discussing music's ability to link "homeland and here-land with an intricate network of sound. Whether through the burnished memory of

childhood songs, the packaged passions of recordings, or the steady traffic of live bands, people identify themselves strongly, even principally, through their music" (243). Music is easily transportable, be it in the form of memorised tunes and "childhood songs" or the "packaged passions of recordings". To quote Slobin at length:

> Music is both highly portable and multilayered. It is literal 'cultural baggage' in terms of the electronically coded packages people find it impossible to live without as they move from place to place, assembling and reassembling past and present identities. But even before the microchip, music has always been wired into the mobile body, forming earliest memories and later evoking deep-set emotions. Perhaps only the aroma of familiar foods has the same visceral power as the hearing of tender tunes. Beyond food's more general evocation of linkage, music makes specific connections with family members, politics, and significant moments for which melodies are the milestone. So at this rock-bottom level of diasporic consciousness, music makes a strong claim for attention on the plane of study and analysis. (244)

Similarly, ethnomusicologist Martin Stokes argues in his introduction to *Ethnicity, Identity and Music: The Musical Construction of Place* that music is central to the act of the location and relocation of identities:

> Amongst the countless ways in which we 'relocate' ourselves, music undoubtedly has a vital role to play […] People can usually use music to locate themselves in quite idiosyncratic and plural ways. A private collection of records, tapes or CDs, for example, articulates a number of highly idiosyncratic sets of places and boundaries. A moment's reflection on our own musical practices brings home to us the sheer profusion of identities and selves that we possess. (3-4)

Slobin, Stokes, and Said in *Musical Elaborations* all centre their discussions around the idea that music can easily cross borders and travel great distances, and thereby relocate identities. Despite its "transgression" of places (to use Said's term), however, music still retains the characteristics of its culture of origin, which allows the protagonist in *Afternoon Raag* to reconnect with the India of his childhood as a place that would otherwise be lost to him.

In the practical sense, he does so by still practising the music he once learned in India while being away in Oxford to complete his programme of study, which is on D.H. Lawrence. This exemplifies the cultural influences and differences that act on the main character, and which mark him as a postcolonial character who finds himself in between cultures. For him, cultural identity is determined by cultural differences. The gap between different cultures is un-mappable and therefore more abstract than concrete localities such as India and England. In *The Location of Culture*, Homi K. Bhabha describes this gap as an "in-between" space, which allows for the individual to define their identity in an act of cultural

performance: Bhabha writes of the theoretical and political need to "think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences. These 'in-between' spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity" (2). Bhabha adds that "[t]erms of cultural engagement, whether antagonistic or affiliative, are produced performatively" (2). His understanding of performative cultural production and identity can be linked to Stokes's argument that music does not merely reflect but creates cultural meaning within the context of social performance: "Social performance, following writers such as Bourdieu (1977) and De Certeau (1984), is instead seen as a practice in which meanings are generated, manipulated, even ironised, within certain limitations. Music and dance […] do not simply 'reflect'. Rather, they provide the means by which the hierarchies of place are negotiated and transformed" (*Ethnicity, Identity and Music* 4). Music, thereby, "does not then simply provide a marker in a prestructured social space, but the means by which this space can be transformed" (4).

This is crucial for postcolonial characters, because, as Bhabha emphasises, the representation and the social articulation of difference, "from the minority perspective, is a complex, on-going negotiation that seeks to authorize cultural hybridities that emerge in moments of historical transformation" (3). Music provides artistic means that are very apt for such a negotiation of differences, because, as Stoke writes, musical images of other places – or of places of the other – "do not just reflect knowledge of 'other places' but perform them in significant ways" (5). For Bhabha this hybrid state of identity is intrinsically positive, because it becomes a space of cultural production and allows for "hybrid forms of life and art that do not have a prior existence within the discrete world of any single culture or language" (xiii). Sharing Bhabha's positive understanding of hybridity as a productive site of culture, Ankie Hoogvelt states that the position of the hybrid character in-between is "privileged as a kind of superior cultural intelligence owing to the advantage of in-betweeness, the straddling of two cultures and the consequent ability to negotiate the difference" (158). Although Bhabha views this "in-between" as beneficial to the creation of life and art, not all agree. As Robert J.C. Young argues in *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race*, the conception of hybridity is not intrinsically or even necessarily positive. Young traces the term "hybridity" back to its use in colonial discourse and its roots in nineteenth-century racist eugenics. Werbner and Modood, too, consider the employment

of the concept of hybridity to be offensive, given its racist implications. Papastergiadis, on the other hand, argues against an indexing of words and concepts and proposes instead to "challenge essentialist models of identity by taking on and then subverting their own vocabulary" (258). Culture that is produced in a situation of displaced identities is thereby an act of translation that can happen in between times and places. This "in-between" state acts as a goal because it opens up the possibilities of postcolonial culture, music, art, life; it still carries a negative connotation, though, simply by being born out of an inherently negative displacement, away from the familiar, the home. However, the "in-between" state can bridge different cultural traditions and allow for people to define themselves as being in-between; to tell their stories, as it were, from that liminal perspective, which Bhabha defines as the most productive in terms of cultural meaning: "it is the 'inter' – the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the in-between space – that carries the burden of the meaning of culture" (56). The cultural identity of the postcolonial migrant character is thereby most productively performed in this in-between space of "borderline engagements of cultural difference" (3), as exemplified by Chaudhuri's protagonist.

To perform identity implies that identity is not a pre-given fact, something that is fixed and resistant to change and influences. Quite to the contrary, the cultural identity of the postcolonial migrant character "in the diasporas of the West", which is how Stuart Hall terms "the new post-colonial subjects", needs to be understood as "a 'production', which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation" ("Cultural Identity and Diaspora" 222). Cultural identity is thereby to be regarded as heterogeneous and evolving, as something that is in a perpetually mobile state of becoming, and which acquires its meaning within the parameters of its performance and representation:

> Cultural identity […] is a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power. Far from being grounded in a mere 'recovery' of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which, when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past. (225)

Where Bhabha and Hall write about performative production and representation of a cultural identity that is "hybrid" and "in process", Simon Frith analyses how music allows

for the exploration of what he calls the "self-in-progress". While Frith writes specifically about the postmodern rather than the postcolonial self, his argument transfers to the postcolonial case quite well. Kwame Anthony Appiah points towards a crucial common denominator between the postmodern and the postcolonial when he argues that "the *post*- in postcolonial, like the *post*- in postmodern, is the *post*- of the space-clearing gesture" (348), which Bhabha described as the "in-between". Appiah offers the following explanation – explicitly not a "definition" – of postmodernism:

> there is now a rough consensus about the structure of the modern/postmodern dichotomy in the many domains – from architecture to poetry to philosophy to rock music to the movies – in which it has been invoked. In each of these domains there is an antecedent practice that laid claim to a certain exclusivity of insight, and in each of them 'postmodernism' is a name for the rejection of that claim to exclusivity, a rejection that is almost always more playful, though not necessarily less serious, than the practice it aims to replace. (341-342)

This rejection of exclusivity and the refusal to be pinned down and defined constitutes the space-clearing gesture Appiah describes, and characterises both postmodernism and postcolonialism in their tendency to dismantle a dominant centre and challenge its power, history-writing, and prejudices towards the centre's marginalised other. As Linda Hutcheon puts it: "In granting value to (what the centre calls) the margin or the Other, the postmodern challenges any hegemonic force that presumes centrality, even as it acknowledges that it cannot privilege the margin without acknowledging the power of the centre" (153). Thereby, as Appiah concludes, "its [postcolonialism's] *post*-, like that of postmodernism, is also a *post*- that challenges earlier legitimating narratives" (353). Moreover, both discourses acknowledge the existence of the other without devaluing it: "Neither postmodernism nor post-colonialism can go backwards; both by definition contest the imperialist devaluing of the 'other' and the 'different'" (Hutcheon, 161). Simon During argues that the process of identity formation which fulfils the postcolonial need for a self-determined cultural identity is only made possible by the postmodern deconstruction of meta-narratives and the denial of totalitarian truths, which "refuses to turn the Other into the Same" (33). In that, postmodern thought goes directly against European enlightenment and deconstructs "the centralised, logocentric master narratives of European culture", as Bill Ashcroft et al. write (*Post-Colonial Studies 2* 117). Thomas Docherty, too, describes the postmodern as a reaction against the "bipolar structural opposition" of "centre" against "periphery" which was set up

in the eighteenth century and enabled the power relations that underlie imperialism and colonialism:

> When the north-western tip of Europe designated itself as the centre of 'Enlightenment' in the eighteenth century, it did so in the secure knowledge that an 'unenlightened periphery' was thereby constructed; and the imperialist expansion that went hand in hand with the development of Enlightenment philosophy was not just a mercantile affair, for it also had a series of conceptual components. To be 'enlightened', by definition, is implicitly to construct an idea of oneself as a Subject-in-time; one has a present, characterised by light, which is distinguished from something dark *which is necessarily prior* to the moment of enlightenment. (445, italics original)

This "historical narrative", which is constructed by the discourse of the Enlightenment, therefore serves as a self-justifying foundation for imperialism and colonialism. Moreover, this narrative is specifically geographical, temporal, and singular in that it only accounts for the version of events as told by the ones in power, in this case the colonisers. Postmodernism, in its suspicion towards any universal writing of history, instead guides attention towards the previously marginalised, or, as Docherty phrases it, "[i]t alerts the erstwhile centre to the possibility that there is not one world, but rather many worlds" (445). Consequently, postmodernism disqualifies and devalues enlightenment thought as the moral philosophical foundation of imperialism and colonialism, and acknowledges the existence of other frames of reference through which people perceive the world, depending on different contexts and experiences. In short, in its denial of enlightenment meta-narratives, postmodernism deconstructs the myth of European dominance and clears a space – to rephrase Appiah – for the postcolonial self to explore identities that lie in-between cultures and places.

While this might indeed allow for the formation of a postcolonial identity, the problem arises that in its deconstructive urge, postmodernism also challenges the spatial parameters that tend to underlie constructs of postcolonial identity, such as discussed in relation to Chaudhuri's protagonist. The East/West binary is essentially geographic, and to deconstruct it is to dislocate the postcolonial. Simon During affirms this point when he states that "the concept postmodernity has been constructed in terms which more or less intentionally wipe out the possibility of post-colonial identity" (33). Intentionally or not, postmodernism challenges what postcolonialism seeks to assert: a concept of identity that allows for a "coherent, autonomous subject", as Hutcheon phrases it:

> The current post-structuralist/postmodern challenges to the coherent, autonomous subject have to be put on hold in feminist and post-colonial discourses, for both must

> work first to assert and affirm a denied or alienated subjectivity: those radical postmodern challenges are in many ways the luxury of the dominant order which can afford to challenge that which it securely possesses. (151)

In his understanding of the postmodern self, Simon Frith, however, does not promote a negation but an affirmation of identity as a "*self-in-progress*". For Frith – as for Bhabha and Hall – identities are not fixed and not necessarily coherent either, as Hutcheon would have them. Instead, identities are mobile and determined by becoming rather than by being: identities are "what we would like to be, not what we are" ("Music and Identity" 123). Moreover, identities are based on narratives and social circumstances: "the self is always an imagined self but can only be imagined as a particular organization of social, physical and material forces" (109-110). Again, Bhabha rings through, and so does Rushdie. The self, therefore, is always performed, and according to Frith it is best performed in music, which is "an experience of this *self-in-progress*" (109). Frith links music and identity via his understanding of both being based on narrative and performance: "identity is *mobile*, a process not a thing, a becoming not a being", and, "[m]usic, like identity, is both performance and story, describes the social in the individual and the individual in the social" (109). Therefore, "[i]dentity is […] an experiential process which is most vividly grasped *as music*" (110), because "[m]usic constructs our sense of identity through the direct experiences it offers of the body, time and sociability, experiences which enable us to place ourselves in imaginative cultural narratives" (124).

Following this logic, Chaudhuri's protagonist in *Afternoon Raag* uses Hindustani music to reconstruct his cultural narrative. He thereby links his present in-between state of cultural hybridity with the sense of a secure past identity firmly rooted in India. At the same time, the dislocating function of that music, as discussed above with reference to other characters in the novel, allows him to accept his perpetual state of cultural transition and uprooting and instead rely on the long tradition of family musicians to become the defining element of his identity. In the novel, music is used in its dual function of accessing places that are physically lost to the character and have become imaginary constructs in time, and of expressing and exploring a cultural identity that, according to Bhabha, lies beyond space and time and cannot be ultimately located. This way, music "defines a space without boundaries" ("Music and Identity" 125) and allows the protagonist to map his cultural identity in-between cultures.

2.2 Music and identity "beyond the beyond" in *Psychoraag*

2.2.1 The rāga in *Psychoraag*

Like Chaudhuri in *Afternoon Raag*, Suhayl Saadi references the rāga in the title of his novel *Psychoraag*, and likewise, the music in Saadi's novel functions both on the structural and on the contextual level. Music imbues the text of *Psychoraag* with added significance drawn from cultural context, extra-musical qualities, and references to time, place, and identity that music conveys. While *Afternoon Raag* is structured around the connection music holds in relation to place, in *Psychoraag* the structuring agent is time, both time on the clock and musical time. On the structural level of the chapters, time is linear and chronological, seeing that the six chapters of the novel are titled according to the time of day: Zaf, the novel's protagonist, works as a radio DJ, and the novel spans the six hours of his show that lasts from midnight to 6am. The chapters are consequently headed "MIDNIGHT", "1AM", "2AM", etcetera, until "5AM". While this suggests a very linear narrative structure, the narrative within each chapter is, as time and chapters progress, increasingly characterised by the protagonist's internal monologues and streams-of-consciousness, which are devoid of any linearity. Moreover, the text includes focalised narratives by other characters that take the action out of the main narrative's time-line, such as Zaf's father's memories of his clandestine love affair with the woman who would become Zaf's mother (51-55). This narrative within the narrative (or, the "inner diegesis", after Genette) starts in Zaf's mind as a chain of free associations: thinking about newspaper articles and the fact that the news are a mere simulacrum of reality ("Real stories about real people in the dead of night. Hyperreal." [51]), Zaf's following thought is that his college degree had taught him "to sort out the rubbish, from the rubbish" (51). But then he muses that instead of his college education it was his father who taught him the important lessons about life, and at this point in the text, his father's focalised narrative takes over and transports the reader back to "Lahore in the early spring" (51). What follows is the story of how Zaf's father, Jamil Ayaan, meets his boss's wife Rashida and falls in love with her: "Oh, how he longed to drown in those eyes! The poets were right. Those old songs. A man might give anything" (53-54). This interspersion of different narrative techniques as well as the interweaving of episodes that are set in the past and the present (and, towards the end of the novel, the near future) creates a non-linear narrative within each chronologically set chapter. This non-linearity is also emphasised by

the recurrence and repetition of themes and motifs throughout the novel: Zaf's parents emigrated from Pakistan to Scotland before Zaf was born, and the theme of leaving one's home country and the related theme of belonging to another place feature strongly and repeatedly in the text. In *Psychoraag*, music is the main theme and motif and thereby the unifying element in the novel's subject matter.

On the structural level, the way Saadi works and reworks literary themes and motifs is reminiscent of the cyclical structure of a rāga. Martin Clayton, in his study *Time in Indian Music: Rhythm, Metre, and Form in North Indian Rag Performance*, analyses time in relation to rāga. His main focus is on how time organises both the musical performance – when a rāga is to be played – and the musical piece itself, in terms of rhythm, metre, and their modulations. Also, time refers to the performance of music as an event in time. Music happens *in time*, and Clayton stresses that music "needs to be understood as an ongoing process of performance, interpretation, and interaction, in which listeners play an active role in interpreting structure and meaning" (4). Although the time in which music happens is linear and progressive, out of the interplay between rhythm and metre derives a cyclicity (Clayton's term), or a cyclic structure of the music. To explain this in more detail: every rāga is structured according to a model of rhythmic organisation named tāl, which Clayton defines as "a cyclically repeating temporal structure" (16) that underlies the "continuous process of *rāg* development" (16). While metre in music measures time linearly – "an event can be located in time relative to another event (two beat later, one bar before) thanks to metre" – metre at the same time organises musical time based on repetition and "the *recurrence* of temporal patterns (the first beat of any measure is equivalent to the first beats of all other measures). Music therefore appears both to go from A to B in a measured manner, and to keep coming back to the same 'place' in time" (19). Hence, musical time in rāga is cyclical, while the music at the same time progresses in linear time. Or, as Clayton puts it: "musical time exhibits two complementary aspects. One is periodicity, regularity, and recurrence, corresponds to the domain of metre, and gives rise to the concept of cyclicity. The other is gestural, figural, and (in principle) unpredictable and relates to the domain of rhythm" (23). This cyclicity as a "reconciliation between linear progression and recurrence" (21) also describes the structure of Saadi's novel: the chapter "MIDNIGHT" happens before "1AM" and "5AM" follows "4AM", which marks the linear progression in time. The narrative within the chapters is dissociated from linear time, and, following Clayton, acquires

a cyclical nature derived from the repetition of motifs and the "*recurrence* of temporal patterns" when the chiming of the clock returns the narrative to its point of departure every hour like the first beat of a bar: the news and the weather which precede Zaf's broadcast.

2.2.2 Music and postcolonial time

To understand the postcolonial implications of this non-linear narrative – and thereby to understand the significance of the music from which the novel's cyclical structure is derived – is to consider Saadi's novel within the context of the postcolonial agenda of "writing back". Rewriting the past, or "writing back", is a way to go against imperial time and colonial history writing, because this writing of history requires a predominantly linear narrative. In the link between time and history, chronological, linear time is the dominant agent of writing the story of empire and colonialism: as Ashcroft et al. put it, "the myth of the story of history as a simple representation of the continuity of events, authorized nothing less than the construction of world reality" (*Post-Colonial Studies 2* 317). Ashcroft et al. explain the link between history, time, and narrative thus: "the myth of historical objectivity is embedded in a particular view of the sequential nature of narrative, and its capacity to reflect, isomorphically, the pattern of events it records" (318). The writing of this world reality, in itself a myth, requires a linear narrative for the chronological representation of events that displays the empire's success. Thus, linear narrative becomes the modus operandi of imperial history writing. In order for the postcolonial to write back, then, the agenda must include a re-appropriation of narrative means: "[t]he post-colonial task, therefore, is not simply to contest the message of history, which has so often relegated individual post-colonial societies to footnotes to the march of progress, but also to engage the medium of narrativity itself, to reinscribe the 'rhetoric', the heterogeneity of historical representation" (318). Joshua Esty, in *A Shrinking Island: Modernism and National Culture in England*, demonstrates this when he writes about "the hollow time of secular history" (116) in the context of the modernists' writing against the empire:

> Broadly speaking, we might say that the modernists took themselves to be waging an aesthetic and philosophical battle against a regime of dehumanizing, mechanical time. When the high modernists came of age, history seemed to be moving forward in pure, linear time as bourgeois triumphalism and European expansion reinforced the basic narrative of progress. (116)

Writing against the linear, imperialistic historical narrative, the modernists embraced an approach to time, and to narrative time as its expression and representation, that rejected a one-track historical narrative, and instead offered one that "integrates past, present, and future", as Esty argues in reference to "the alternative temporalities implied by Joyce's Viconian cycles, Yeats's occult repetitions, or Lawrence's apocalyptic endings. These counternarratives to secular, linear time were self-consciously marginal positions taken against the mainstream bourgeois view of history" (116). Although Esty's case is one about the modernists' opposition to the British Empire, the modernists' aversion to "mere successiveness" and the refusal of linear time ties into the postcolonial agenda of rewriting imperial history.

Writing about time, narrative, and the nation, Bhabha, too, aims to "displace the historicism that has dominated discussions of the nation as a cultural force" ("DissemiNation" 292). In its stead, Bhabha outlines a temporal dimension that "resists the transparent linear equivalence of event and idea that historicism proposes", and instead "provides a perspective on the disjunctive forms of representation that signify a people, a nation, or a national culture" (292). Bhabha stresses, too, the "ambivalence of the nation as a narrative strategy" (292), which requires "a kind of 'doubleness' in writing; a temporality of representation that moves between cultural formations and social processes without a 'centred' causal logic" (293) in order to represent itself (i.e. the nation) as the metaphor of an imagined community. In reference to Derrida's *Dissemination*, Bhabha continues that "such cultural movements disperse the homogeneous, visual time of the horizontal society because 'the present is no longer a mother-form [read mother-tongue or mother-land] around which are gathered and differentiated the future (present) and the past (present) … [as] a present of which the past and the future would be but modifications'" (293).[36] What Bhabha contests here is Benedict Anderson's concept of "homogeneous, empty time", which Anderson introduces in *Imagined Communities* as one of the bases upon which the nation can be imagined.[37] According to Anderson, homogeneous, empty time is characterised by "temporal coincidence, and measured by clock and calendar", and as such, "[t]he idea of a sociological organism moving calendrically through homogeneous, empty time is a precise analogue of

36 Bhabha quotes Jacques Derrida's *Dissemination* (210). The square brackets and comments are Bhabha's.

37 Anderson borrows the concept of "eine[r] homogene[n] und leere[n] Zeit" from Walter Benjamin. In "Theses on the Philosophy in History" (also referred to as "On the Concept of History", from the German "Über den Begriff der Geschichte"), Benjamin writes that the progress of humankind throughout history is predicated on the concept of homogeneous, empty time (*Thesis XIII* 136).

the idea of the nation, which also is conceived as a solid community moving steadily down (or up) history" (26). In other words: Anderson proposes that the nation is imagined along chronological linear time. Quoting from Benjamin's "The storyteller" (cf. *Illuminations*), Bhabha argues that Anderson misunderstands Benjamin's concept of homogeneous, empty time, because Anderson "fails to read that profound ambivalence that Benjamin places deep within the utterance of the narrative of modernity" (311). In Bhabha's view, the project of imagining (Anderson's term) or writing (Bhabha's) the nation is very complex, because the nation is marked by cultural differences and therefore located at "the margins of modernity, at the insurmountable extremes of storytelling" (311). The narrative of the nation is therefore "disjunctive" (Bhabha), and homogeneous, empty time – as Anderson understands it – cannot write such a narrative and hence cannot imagine such a nation.

The agenda of postcolonial writing, as a writing that is located at "the insurmountable extremes of storytelling", is to undermine imperial narratives. To quote Bhabha again: "I have heard this narrative movement of the post-colonial people, in their attempts to create a national culture. Its implicit critique of the fixed and stable forms of the nationalist narrative makes it imperative to question those western theories of the horizontal, homogeneous empty time of the nation's narrative" ("DissemiNation" 303). Bhabha provides an example for how postcolonial writing disrupts imperial narratives, and particularly the narrative of the British Empire, by referring to Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*. The history of imperialism, Bhabha argues, did not happen at the Empire's centre, but at its margins, and from this liminal perspective it is now being rewritten:

> He [Gibreel in *The Satanic Verses*] is the history that happened elsewhere, overseas; his postcolonial, migrant presence does not evoke a harmonious patchwork of cultures, but articulates the narrative of cultural difference which can never let the national history look at [*sic*] itself narcissistically in the eye. For the liminality of the western nation is the shadow of its own finitude: the colonial space played out in the imaginative geography of the metropolitan space; the repetition or return of the margin of the postcolonial migrant to alienate the holism of history. (318)

This is where the significance of music in *Psychoraag* comes full circle: the cyclical structure of a rāga informs the non-linear narrative of the chapters, indicating a postcolonial reading. This "writing back" disrupts the linear narrative of imperial history writing, and thus imagines the nation as a "narrative of cultural difference" (318).

2.2.3 Music, identity, and the beyond

Thus far, I have argued how the protagonists in *Afternoon Raag* and *Psychoraag* try, but fail, to use place and time as concrete markers of identification, and how that renders them postcolonial characters "in-between"; and how music simultaneously locates and dislocates people, as it is both rooted within a culture but remains elusive and essentially unmappable, defying parameters of spatial and temporal definition. The music of a place is not ultimately bound to that place, and thus music can transport the characters back through time and space. Given the performative links between music and identity, music is a very suitable form for the dislocated character to assess and express his identity in between cultures. In *Psychoraag*, music becomes not only the link to a place-bound identity, but its substitute: the protagonist finds his identity *in* music, rather than *through* music. Where music in Chaudhuri's novel mirrors the dislocation of the protagonist and thus helps him to come to terms with his cultural identity in-between India and England, Saadi in *Psychoraag* takes the interconnections between place, identity, and music one step further. The novel suggests that identity can be found in music as such, without either identity or music being linked to any place at all. As Zaf acknowledges, "music defined him. His identity lay not in a flag or in a particular concretisation of a transcendent Supreme Being but in a chord, a bar, a vocal reaching beyond itself. A harmony wheelin out there, beyond the beyond" (210-211). Zaf's identity transcends nations ("not in a flag") as well as ideologies ("a particular concretisation of a transcendent Supreme Being"), and is located in music, which itself, however, defies localisation, as it reaches "beyond itself".

Before examining the implications of this "beyond" for both music and identity, it is imperative to analyse Zaf's situation as a second-generation immigrant. Zaf is between two nations and cultures, his Pakistani parents on the one hand and his Scottish girlfriend Babs on the other. Zaf tries to orientate his own identity in accordance to these – often opposing – geographical poles. This process of identification via place, however, fails for him as it does for Chaudhuri's protagonist, because Zaf eventually has to realise that his concept of both places is merely imaginary. Pakistan and Scotland are merely constructed landmarks that fall apart upon closer scrutiny: Zaf's father suffers from dementia (Pakistani identity), and Babs has just broken up with him (Scottish identity). Thus, both places of identification are lost to him, and music remains his only means to reconcile the different cultural influences that have shaped his identity. However, the role of music as a means to create identity is not

unproblematic, as music in the novel is also associated with madness and with an increasing loss of control over the self, which essentially threatens to disintegrate any sense of identity.

Zaf's choice to dissociate from places as identity markers is a very deliberate step, albeit reluctantly taken, as Zaf's instinct is to map his identity onto very concrete locations (the same instinct as Chaudhuri's protagonist). For Zaf, the places to map out are Pakistan, where his parents come from, and Scotland, the country of his birth. As an immigrant of the second generation, however, Zaf finds it very hard to orient his identity in relation to either of these geographical locales. Eventually, he has to concede that he belongs neither to Pakistan nor to Scotland, which he acknowledges when looking through a stack of photos of Pakistan: "In reality, he knew nuthin about the boy in the gao in Pakistan-before-it-wis-Pakistan – before the land had become suddenly pure, before it had been purged of somethin impure. He knew nuthin of the Scotland before. It wis a complete mystery to him and would remain so always" (198-199). Zaf is estranged from his parent's country of birth, and he is discriminated against on grounds of racial differences in his own country of birth. He tries to reclaim those places of potential belonging through the people he knows: stories of his parents' past life in Pakistan and of their journey to Scotland are interwoven with more recent memories of himself and his Scottish girlfriend Babs. Both places of identification are thereby personified by people close to him, which is his way of trying to map his identity on the places he longs to call home. However, as a second-generation immigrant, the homeland of his parents remains inaccessible to Zaf:

> When Zaf had gone to Pakistan, things had seemed unutterably vague as though the pollution and the clouds of dust and the bastard heat had jumbled all the reference points. Whenever he had been there, Zaf had felt himself fill with guilt. He'd always had the feelin that he had done somethin not quite right but what that somethin might have been he had never been able to grasp. Pakistan wis a bad dream. (57)

Being born in Scotland, "he had seldom been (back) to Pakistan" (207), and although "[t]he myths of his forefathers stretched back more than three millennia" (58), these myths are those of his father, and not his own. Zaf lacks what Ashcroft et al. describe as "sense of origin, [which] however imagined, however monolithic, is actively constructed as an identifying and affiliative marker" (426). Such a sense of origin would be established by immigrants of the first generation, who relocated to the UK during their lifetimes and who hold on to the culture, the memories, and the traditions of their homeland. In his article "Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return", William Safran uses case

studies to outline the crucial importance that the notion of a homeland holds for the identity of people living in a diaspora away from their country of origin: "they retain a collective memory, vision, or myth about their original homeland – its physical location, history, and achievements; […] they regard their ancestral homeland as their true, ideal home and as the place to which they or their descendants would (or should) eventually return" (83). In other words, the wish to return persists, but the homeland, to most people, is lost, because an actual return is often not possible as a result of the political, economic, or religious pressure that led to migration in the first place. As Safran argues: "[s]ome diasporas persist – and their members do not go 'home' – because there is no homeland to which to return; because, although a homeland may exist, it is not a welcoming place with which they can identify politically, ideologically, or socially; or because it would be too inconvenient and disruptive, if not traumatic, to leave the diaspora" (91). This is the case for Zaf's parents, who had to leave Pakistan because of their secret and illegitimate affair and its consequences had it become public.

The wish to return therefore becomes what Safran terms a "myth of return" (86). This myth of return and of a lost homeland acts as a defining myth, meaning that it is used to create a communal identity within the diaspora: "[i]n the meantime, the myth of return serves to solidify ethnic consciousness and solidarity when religion can no longer do so, when the cohesiveness of the local community is loosened, and when the family is threatened with disintegration" (91). Similarly, Dennis Walder in *Postcolonial Nostalgias* describes the yearning for an imagined home that is lost due to migration in terms of the postcolonial and political implications of nostalgia, and the identity of the exiled postcolonial migrant subject as "not so much an identity found, as an *identification* made, based on nostalgia" (20). Walder argues that

> [f]or diasporic subjects, remembering not just 'home' but 'the homeland' has opened up the scope for multiple forms of identity within and beyond the nation-state. Yet this also implies an increasing lack of certainty or finality about home as a place of origin, undermining nostalgia as a phenomenon of positive identifications and affiliations, even while it is more widely and profoundly felt. (20)

However, Safran's studies also show that "the myth of return becomes attenuated with the second generation" (90), and this is where the experience of immigration is essentially and crucially different between the first generation and second-generation immigrants. Although the homeland is lost, it is still a place of identification for first-generation immigrants;

second-generation immigrants never had that homeland and therefore lack that spatial reference to make sense of part of their identity. As Susheila Nasta succinctly summarises it: "Diaspora is therefore as much about settlement as displacement and exists on a shifting axes [*sic*] of differently articulated positionalities, which may be linked to specific histories of recent migration but can also, in later generations, depart from them" (8).

This explains the strong alienation that Zaf feels towards Pakistan. He tries to reconnect to the country and its culture through his parents, but his family "is threatened with disintegration", to use Safran's words (91), due to the estranged relationship he has with his mother, and the fact that his father suffers from dementia. This illness is very significant in terms of identity, both for his father and for Zaf himself, because the loss of memory means a loss of the father's past and with it a loss of his personal history and his life in Pakistan. His father's dementia causes Zaf to lose access to this country and its cultural traditions. An identification with Pakistan as a place becomes complicated for the protagonist. The other place of geographical identification is Glasgow, the city where Zaf was born and which he has known all his life. However, he does not feel like he belongs to the city of his birth:

> Zaf had wandered through this city his whole life. He had given his spirit to the buildins, the parks, the broken neonsigns and the people. The soul of Glasgow had penetrated the core of his being. He had allowed it to enter him and, like some dissolute whore, he had welcomed it, had allowed it to fester within him and he had held back nuthin. And so, now, when he needed some of that spirit back, just for a while, just for tonight, the city wis not forthcomin. It turned its hard Presbyterian face away from its own children, it averted its thin lips. So why on earth should it bother to acknowledge a changeling like Zaf? He no longer recognised himself in this place. The city had changed. Or mibbee he had changed. (199)

If being born in Britain is what hinders Zaf to identify with Pakistan, in contrast, his Pakistani heritage, his culture, and particularly his racial background do not allow for him to define himself as entirely British either. He faces racial prejudices directed against Pakistani immigrants in particular:

> He wis convinced that, when the vast majority of people in these slim-waisted islands heard the word 'P-A-K-I-S-T-A-N', they thought of three things. Firstly, the land of his mothers wis perceived as bein a repository of the dirty, the oppressed, the smelly, the cunning and the inscrutable. An mibbee it wis but it wis hardly alone in that. Secondly, the place of purity rang the fear bells of perpetual immigration, of a movement of population that had no beginnin, no startin point, no real homeland. People were always seen as immigrants and never as emigrants or expatriates. They were pictured as nameless, liquid hordes that would pour in – even though, at no time in the half-century or more Pakistan had been in existence, had they ever poured in […] In many ways, they

> were seen as incorporatin everythin that wis bad, dysfunctional and regressive about South Asia. (73-74)

Zaf finds it very difficult to come to terms with his non-belonging, which for him is all the more difficult as he is, in his own account, brown and therefore in-between skin colours:

> The thing wis, if you were white, then you were that bit closer to a state of bliss and, if you were very black, then it didn't matter to you – there was nuthin to be gained from tryin to pretend that you were a little less black. But, if you were in between, now that was the real locus of purgatory. You would do almost anythin to seem a degree or two lighter than you were. (134)

The closest Zaf gets to seeming "a degree or two lighter" is Babs, his long-term Scottish girlfriend, who has, however, just broken up with him. To Zaf, Babs embodies everything that is Scottish and by extension white and Western: she is blond and pale, speaks with a strong Galloway accent, she is independent and "bone fide Scottish, blue and white down to the marrow" (30). Babs belongs to the country of her birth in a way that Zaf will never be able to, and his relationship to Babs marks an attempt to claim Scotland as a place of belonging for himself. Moreover, by a process of mutual othering, Zaf and Babs define each other in opposition to the respective other: his brown against her white: "She needed his brown-ness – just as he needed her white. They were both conquerin territories" (25-26). With the end of their relationship, Zaf therefore not only loses the woman he loves, but also an opposite against which he defines himself in an act of inverted postcolonial othering: "withoot her, he hud been jist a big black hole – weel, no literally but figuratively" (200). Hence, the process of identification via place fails for Zaf as it fails for the protagonist in *Afternoon Raag*, because Zaf eventually has to realize that, for him, Pakistan and Scotland are both merely imaginary places and constructed landmarks, constructs that are brought down throughout the course of the novel.

With no place left to call home, Zaf turns to music and his profession as a DJ, because, "[o]n the radio, everythin he did felt real. It wis the only place where he felt human – when he wis alone with just his voice" (200). He works as a disk jockey at *Radio Chaandni*, an Asian community radio station in Glasgow, and both his announcements on air and his focalised narrative are rendered in a demotic mixture of Urdu and Glaswegian. Zaf's broadcast and with it the novel opens with "*Salaam alaikum, sat sri akaal, namaste ji*, good evenin oan this hoat, hoat summer's night" (1).[38] Linguistically, this very clearly identifies

38 *chaandni*: Urdu for "moonlight" ("Glossary" to *Psychoraag*, provided by the author, 422).

Zaf as a member of his intended audience, namely the South-Asian diaspora in Glasgow, or more broadly Scotland; "after all", as Zaf acknowledges, "it is an Asian station" (22). But the text does not centre around the community of the Scottish-Asian diaspora, but instead around Zaf's personal identity. Zaf has been moderating *The Junnune Show*,[39] which lasts from midnight to 6am, for the last three months. Usually, he would take listeners' requests for songs, but as this is the last night the radio station will broadcast, Zaf decides to play only the music he likes and not take any phone calls: "this night is special. Mibbee you'll nivir hear ma voice again. Who knows?", and so he orders his listeners to "gie yer fingers an yer voices a wee rest. Tonight's fur listenin. Dreamin. Madness. *Junnune*" (2-3). Although Zaf seems to have a rough idea of the tracks he wants to play at the beginning of the show, he leaves the ultimate choice to "chance or whim or need. Tonight, he wis in the dark just as much as his listeners" (3).

The music Zaf finally chooses are pieces that are closely linked to his own personal history and cultural identity, ranging from songs that he connects to his parent's journey from Pakistan to Scotland to songs that remind him of Babs. The resulting playlist is an eclectic and multicultural mix that ranges from the British-Asian combos Asian Dub Foundation (ADF) and Cornershop to Indian film soundtracks, the Scottish band The Colour of Memory (whose music is rooted in Gaelic music traditions) to Beatles classics, and Stravinsky. Artists, songs, and lyrics – interspersed with the narrative – mirror and comment on the equally eclectic cultural background and influences that have shaped Zaf's life. The playlist is therefore a structuring agent that organises plot advancement in the novel, and it becomes the soundtrack to Zaf's life. Crucially, exactly half the titles on Zaf's playlist are pieces by British bands, while the other half are by South-Asian/Indian artists.[40] This suggests a very deliberate choice and in extension a very deliberate identification with music from particular places, and music thereby provides a substitute connection to the places he longs to call home. As cases in point, the first four songs Zaf plays on the night are two songs each in alteration by the Scottish band The Colour of Memory and the Indian-British band Asian

39 *junnune*: Urdu for "madness, a trance-like state" (ibid 425).

40 According to my count: playlist distribution according to nationality of artists/bands: 12 Indian, 12 British (5 Scottish, 7 English), 7 Mixed (Indian/British), 6 American, 6 Other, which equals a total number of 43 different artists and bands played during Zaf's show. It is significant that the number of Asian and British artists/bands is exactly the same, which suggests a musical reclamation of places to which Zaf wants to belong. This significance is heightened by my count of the songs (83 altogether) according to nationality of artists/bands, which also shows an equal distribution into 24 Asian and 24 British songs (13 of which by Scottish artists, 11 English), while I classified 16 songs as mixed in terms of style and artists' nationality (9 American, 8 Other, and 2 where I was not sure). As with the number of artists/bands, the number of songs classified Asian and British taken together accounts for more than half of all the songs played.

Dub Foundation. From the outset of the novel, these two bands thereby mark the geographical locales between which Zaf's identity oscillates. As he tells his listeners, "ye'll huv noticed that the music's swung aroon fae hard Asian dub – city music, ye might say – tae airy-fairy Scoa'ish stuff. Weel, Ah don't know aboot you but that's whit maist ae us are livin, folks […] This is today music – it knows nae boundaries an we know nae boundaries" (30). As he plays "Changed Days" by The Colour of Memory, Zaf "let his eyes close and let the music flow into him. Celtic rock. Holy stones. Good music – ancient and modern, sad and happy. Songs from the lighthouse, from beyond the rocks of this land" (20-21). Here again is the idea of a music that is from a specific place – "Asian dub", "Celtic rock" – but that at the same time transcends this place: being "from beyond the rocks of this land", music "knows nae boundaries" (30).

Music has this ability because it can and does travel borders; music is a cultural product and an art form that happens in time rather than being bound to place, and as such, music is constantly in flux, is constantly created and recreated, and therefore always dependant on its respective context of performance, of coming-into-being. In the novel, this process is a very literal one, as the music that sounds is what Zaf puts onto the stereo to be broadcast on airwaves that potentially reach any place. Musical pieces as diverse in their cultural background as the first recording of an Indian classical rāga, "Why" by the US-American country and folk-rock band The Byrds, and Igor Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring* are thus uprooted from their cultural contexts, their places of origin, and are recontextualised, reinterpreted, reappropriated. Essentially, they are at the same time dis- and re-placed, very much like Zaf himself. Moreover, a number of the pieces that at first glance seem to be specifically placed in terms of their cultural origins, such as the Indian playback singer Talat Mahmood's song "Chal Diya Caravan" ("The Caravan Is Leaving"), from the soundtrack to *Laila Majnu* (1953), deal with themes such as leaving one's home and looking in vain for a new place to call home.[41] Also, there is an intrinsic logic to Zaf's playlist that links Indian classical music to contemporary bands such as Asian Dub Foundation through crosscultural references that span boundaries of time and space. Music from varied time periods and national origins are linked together by similarities in musical style, theme and topic, or represent fusions of different cultures and genres. One example would be the Beatles's use of elements of Indian classical music in some of their pieces, most prominently in "Within You

41 *Psychoraag*, "Discography" 436.

Without You" on the album *Sgt Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, which also features on Zaf's playlist.

As in *Afternoon Raag*, music thereby becomes the link to places, while at the same time transcending them. But the text, and the music in the text, also goes beyond that, because Saadi suggests that identities should be divorced from places and particularly from nations. Zaf deeply deplores the idea of a collective identity labelled "Asian". As he puts on ADF's "Black and White", he almost apologetically justifies his selection with reference to the radio station's agenda: "Well, after all, it is an Asian station, he thought. All the bits, past and future, that daily jostled and sang the state of Asianness into being, that reconstructed somethin that wasn't real from somethin that wis." (22) Crucially, Zaf considers music to be real, whereas the national identity of "Asianness" is not, although it can be reconstructed from music. Zaf deplores any kind of radical collective identities, nationalistic and religious, "[a]ll that flag-wavin and bible-bashin" (24), because he believes them to be simplifying, dogmatic, and an easy excuse for people to deny responsibility for their actions:

> Of course, it wis all rubbish, this stuff, this ascribin of characteristics to a whole group of people based on their tribe or their religion or the *mulk* from which they had journeyed. Aye, it wis impossible to get it out of your system … Nonetheless, Zaf would try. If you gave up, if at every point of dialectics, you simply threw up your hands into whatever shape happened to signify your deity's quantum line, if you cast off the mantle of responsibility for your own actions by takin the easy option of tearin the individual sinews off other people, then you were really numbin the instrument of your soul, you were makin ready for genocide. (23)

Denying ready-made corsets of collective identity, Zaf uses music to define himself, asserting a pluralistic individual identity: "even if Zaf's mind wasn't totally balanced, his music sure would be. It wasn't so much an agenda – it wis more a feelin, a desire" (24). Music becomes Zaf's instrument to overcome concepts of collective national and/or religious identity that is based on restrictive binaries of self and other. This ties in with what Robert Lee writes about culture and how it serves to overcome restricted and monolithic thinking of identity: "Culture, it will surely bear repeating, whether national or local, communal or individual, was ever so: ongoing, enactive, full of exception to any imagined rule" (2).

Even more importantly, music offers Zaf an alternative to identification via concrete places by allowing for a dislocated and multicultural identity, because the music that Zaf plays on the show represents a map of multicultural influences and heritages, a world that cannot be divided by means of geopolitical binaries:

> Ye're listenin tae *The Junnune Show* an thenight – Ah'm soarry, this mornin – we're playin a real mix ae auld an new, of Eastern an Western an aw points in between. An beyond. Or, tae be mair accurate, the soangs that let us hear the truth ae the fact that the waruld is aw wan. That thur's nae 'East' and nae 'West' – that's jist a great big lie cooked up by those who, even if they wantit tae, could nivir hear the real music. Mibbee some ae ye huv nivir even thought that such a thing wis possible – mibbee ye've nivir heard a loat ae these soangs afore. But this is the music that Ah've been listenin tae fur years. It's the *mausaki* [music] ae ma life. It's made me whit Ah am. (132)

Music has the power to abrogate the geopolitical binaries of East and West, and only people like Zaf, who experience cultural hybridity as a positive and constructive space, can hear "the real music". Thereby, music re-creates the world, drawing new maps: "Jimmy Page an Robert Plant redrawin the map ae Kashmir. Dangerous work, that. Aye, that's whit we'll do. We'll redraw aw the maps an, whun we come oot ae here in the mornin, we willnae recognise the waruld, we willnae know oorsels […] But we'll be expressin it aw through music an soang cause that's whit we're aboot. That's whit Ah'm aboot" (208-209). For Zaf, music becomes a means to express his identity, which does not and cannot depend on binaries of East and West, of self and other, but encompasses all kinds of different cultural influences. Essentially, the music Zaf plays on the show, his eclectic playlist of British, Asian, British-Asian, American and other bands and artists spanning a time period of almost a century of music recording, mirrors his own identity as a sample of different cultures and of belonging neither here nor there, being foreign in Pakistan as well as in Scotland, but having reconciled himself via music with this dislocated identity: "He liked samples, felt comfortable with them. He was a sample of Pakistan, thrown at random into Scotland, into its myths. And, in Lahore, he had felt like a sample of Glasgow in the ancient City of the Conquerors" (227).

Zaf thus inhabits a cultural space that Bhabha in *The Location of Culture* describes as "the realm of the beyond" (1), and which he defines as transcending space and time:

> [W]e find ourselves in the moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion. For there is a sense of disorientation, a disturbance of direction, in the 'beyond': an exploratory, restless movement caught so well in the French rendition of the words *au-delà* - here and there, on all sides, *fort/da*, hither and thither, back and forth (2).

Zaf embodies one of those "complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion" (*The Location of Culture* 2), and music becomes the means to access this "beyond" by "wheelin out there, beyond the beyond" (*Psychoraag* 210-211). Thereby, identity is ultimately dissociated from places in the form of concrete

locations, and it is dissociated, too, from the implied hierarchies and power-relations that determine postcolonial spatial binaries of East/West, centre/periphery, here and there. In this context, Edward Said in *Musical Elaborations* celebrates the "pleasures and discoveries [that] are premised upon letting go, upon not asserting a central authorizing identity", which are opened up by music as an art that is not primarily "about authorial power and social authority, but a mode for thinking through or thinking with the integral variety of human cultural practices, generously, non-coercively, in a utopian cast, if by utopian we mean worldly, possible, attainable, knowable" (105).

While music thereby opens up new possibilities for a self-determined identity, the space of the "beyond" also bears an essential threat to the concept of identity as such. In an interview with Jacqueline Rose, Said confesses:

> I've become very, very impatient with the idea and the whole project of identity […] What's much more interesting is to try to reach out beyond identity to something else, whatever that is. It may be death. It may be an altered sense of consciousness that puts you in touch with others more than one normally is. It may be just a state of forgetfulness which, at some point, I think we all need – to forget. (25)

Where the idea of forgetfulness as an alternative to identity bears positive connotations for Said, in *Psychoraag* the implications for the characters are negative. Zaf's father's dementia, which emulates Said's imperative "to forget", is a threat to the identity of both Jamil and Zaf, because Zaf's father literally forgets who he is. Also, as music has the potential of taking Zaf "beyond the beyond" (*Psychoraag* 210), it is not made clear what awaits him there, and Zaf fears this: "'Always With Me' wis fadin away. There was nuthin better to galvanise Zaf into action than the prospect of silence. He had to keep the music playin. Six hours of non-stop *junnune*. It wis his only hope of stayin sane. The tracks might be unpredictable but what lay behind them wis far, far worse" (36). The novel links music to madness, which is the ultimate threat to identity, as it leads to a dissolution of personality. This suggests a darker side to the web of multicultural cross-references that Zaf creates for himself through music: impeding chaos and the prospect of a loss of meaning, either in silence or in an abundance of meaning when the playlist gets out of hand, when Zaf cannot read his own handwriting any longer, when songs keep on playing on repeat and he does not notice, when the resulting chaos of the broadcast mirrors his own descent into temporary drug-induced madness. This is symbolised by the playlist, the piece of paper onto which Zaf writes the titles he wants to play during the show, and which slowly disintegrates as the novel progresses: the playlist

becomes illegible, the paper crumbles, Zaf spills his drink over it, and eventually he loses it altogether. If the playlist – the songs he plays – is the soundtrack to his life and mind, then the playlist – the actual piece of paper – symbolises his state of mind at that night: slowly succumbing to the chaos that he has feared from the beginning and eventually drifting on the verge of the madness that lends his show its title: *Junnune – Madness*.

2.3 Conclusion

As the analysis of music in *Afternoon Raag* and *Psychoraag* shows, music at the same time locates and dislocates cultural identity. Moreover, it creates a space for characters to define and express their identities beyond spatial markers of identification. Music in literature is an art form within another art form, and as such, it is at the same time present in the text and absent from it. On the level of narrative, that is as an immediate experience for the characters, music is present: Zaf plays and listens to music throughout *Psychoraag*, and he experiences music as music. On the level of the text, however, music is absent, as the words on the page cannot play back the music they contain, and the reader therefore experiences music as mediated by the text. On the extratextual level, it is the reader's knowledge of the intermedial references that is crucial: for an informed reader, who knows the musical pieces, the music in the novel sounds as music, whereas for an uninformed reader, the music remains absent on the extratextual level. Consequently, what music means is different on each level of reading. On the level of narrative, the significance of music is clear: for Zaf, the meaning he derives from the music is immediate and personal, informed by his knowledge of the music and the music's significance to his life. A reader who is unfamiliar with the background stories of the many artists and bands that Saadi references throughout *Psychoraag* will still grasp the significance of the iconoclastic and multicultural mixture of musical genres and styles, because Zaf clearly states that it is music that defines him. Therefore, the meaning of music on the level of the text is also made clear. An informed reading of the intermedial references contained in the texts opens up additional layers of meaning, as connections can be made that are not necessarily obvious on the textual level. This dislocation of music and meaning allows for the novels' characters to find meaning in music and beyond the constraints of particular places. Music mirrors the characters'

experience of displacement, and reaching beyond the novels it allows postcolonial characters to make sense of their identities as being, with Bhabha, beyond.

And as a postscript: *Beyond the Beyond* is the name of an album by the Glaswegian band goldenhour, and as Zaf plays it on *Radio Chaandni*, turning "life intae music", he urges his listeners to "[r]un wi the soang, then, an dream ae the beyond that lies beyond the beyond. Got that? Beyond the end, thur is no end" (210).

Chapter 3

Singing the Nation II: Music and 'Englishness' in Hanif Kureishi's *The Black Album* and *The Buddha of Suburbia*

See, it's not about races
Just places
Faces
Where your blood
Comes from
Is where your space is
I've seen the bright get duller
I'm not gonna spend my life being a colour

~Michael Jackson, "Black or White" (1991)

Whether fiction or nonfiction, music in Hanif Kureishi's writing is a sign of the times from which it emerges. As Bart Moore-Gilbert writes in his comprehensive critical study on the author, appropriately titled *Hanif Kureishi*, "[m]uch of Kureishi's work – notably *The Buddha* [*of Suburbia*] – maps itself in relation to the pop music of the time" (8). As such, music – and aside from the occasional references to Vaughan Williams or Bach, it is always popular music – mirrors and comments on the circumstances that Kureishi's characters, or respectively their author, find themselves in. In an article for *The Guardian*, titled "Hanif Kureishi on his musical tastes" from 16 March 2001, Kureishi states that "[m]usic was our common culture in the 1960s and 1970s […] The only thing we talked about was pop and in those days it was exciting and new – there was Hendrix and the Rolling Stones and so on, and a whole culture went with it: the drugs, the parties, the clothes, the sexuality, even politics" (n. pag.). The culture that popular music went with in the 1960s and into the 1970s was youth culture, and the politics were those of the cultural revolution. In *The Faber Book of Pop*, which Kureishi edited together with Jon Savage, he accordingly states:

> The unprecedented expansion of the youth and music industries encouraged a new, generational politics which was broadly libertarian (sex, drugs), oppositional (on a wide variety of issues, most obviously the Vietnam War), Utopian. This naïve but electrifying conflation of purchasing with political power was concentrated in America but coincided with the social liberalization then occurring in the UK, where in 1967/8 the laws on divorce, abortion and homosexuality were relaxed. This was the period of pop's greatest outreach. (267)

For Kureishi, pop music serves as a critical standpoint from which to tell "the alternative history of our time", and is "as good a position as any to look from, since pop, intersecting with issues of class, race and particularly gender, has been at the centre of post-war culture" (xix). In its intersections with class, race, and particularly gender, pop music takes centre stage in Kureishi's two earliest novels, *The Buddha of Suburbia* and *The Black Album*. Both novels are imbued with references and allusions to pop music, with *The Black Album* borrowing its title from a Prince album, and the first part of *The Buddha of Suburbia*, which very much reads like a soundtrack of the late 1960s, referencing Bob Dylan's "Positively 4th Street" (1965), the Beatles' *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* (1967), and The Who's *Live at Leeds* (1970), all of which are mentioned within the first twenty pages of the novel. As Moore-Gilbert testifies: "*The Buddha of Suburbia* provides a compendium of references to pop's evolution through the 1960s and 1970s, from the Beatles and the Rolling Stones to hippy music, psychedelia, glam rock and punk; and *The Black Album* performs a similar role *vis-à-vis* the music of the following decade" (115). As much as pop music tells the story of its time, Kureishi's novels tell the story of pop music, looking at the revolutionary potential of punk in particular.

Pop music also tells the story of Kureishi's protagonists (Shahid Hasan in *The Black Album*, Karim Amir and Charlie Kay in *The Buddha of Suburbia*). In the same *Guardian* article as previously mentioned, Kureishi describes pop music as his "escape route" (n. pag.) out of suburban life, and for his protagonists, pop music becomes a way out of the suburbs they have come to detest: for Shahid, born in Kent, an essay about Prince ensures him admission to a London college, and for Charlie, his musical career takes him as far away from suburban South London as New York. As Karim in *The Buddha of Suburbia* says about Charlie: "For him too, it was obviously true that our suburbs were a leaving place, the start of a life. After that you ratted or rotted" (117). A line from the Beatles, quoted in *The Buddha of Suburbia*, becomes the mantra for a whole youth generation: "Outside, Helen had the Rover roaring and the radio on. I heard my favourite lines from *Abbey Road*: 'Soon we'll be

away from here, step on the gas and wipe that tear away'" (85). Of Kureishi's three protagonists, only Charlie is a musician, for whom punk music is a means to reinvent himself and to renounce his white lower middle-class upbringing. Karim uses music mostly to identify himself with the youth culture of the time; early on in *The Buddha of Suburbia* he, the eldest of two boys, very much feels like an outsider struggling to keep up with current trends. He muses reluctantly that "[t]o have an elder brother who lived in London and worked in fashion, music or advertising was an inestimable advantage at school. I had to study the *Melody Maker* and *New Musical Express* to keep up" (*The Buddha of Suburbia* 8). Hence, listening to bands like Pink Floyd is a rite of passage for Karim, and he is initiated to the world of youth and pop by the older Charlie, who sings in a band and plays the drums and guitar, and whose room has "piles of records and the four Beatles in their *Sergeant Pepper* period were on the wall like gods" (14). Music for Karim is both a status symbol of the youth culture he yearns to belong to, and (by listening to records all night) a means to escape, to enter "another world" (62) as he does:

> I favoured the tuneless: King Crimson, Soft Machine, Captain Beefheart, Frank Zappa and Wild Man Fisher [*sic*]. It was easy to get most of the music you wanted from the shops in the High Street. During these nights, as all around me was silent – most of the neighbourhood went to bed at ten-thirty – I entered another world. (62)

For Shahid, who at the beginning of *The Black Album* has just moved to London to start his college degree in cultural studies, music means on a much more personal and individual level than the general connotations with pop music and youth culture would imply. Shahid's role model is the US-American singer and artist Prince (full name Prince Rogers Nelson), whom Kureishi and Savage in *The Faber Book of Pop* describe as "too prolific, too wilful to be the figurehead of any corporate campaign except his own" (782). In his chapter on Prince in *Rip It Up: The Black Experience in Rock 'n' Roll*, Barry Walters strikes a similar note when he writes that "unlike his peers, Prince, despite his versatility, truly and singlehandedly authored an aesthetic [...] This Midwest crossover funk-pop became so omnipresent that it didn't even need a name, and no one did it better than its originator. It was simply Princemusic" (118). Prince, as Walters concludes, "was like that: He didn't need to be macho. He didn't need to be street. He certainly didn't, as the expression goes, 'represent.' When he tried years later to close the gap between himself and hip-hop, he simply and emphatically represented himself: The title of his most notable rap track is 'My Name Is Prince'" (118). Despite this radical artistic individuality, Walters also heralds Prince as a

figurehead of black music and thus makes him 'represent' race: he writes that "[t]ogether with Tina Turner, Lionel Richie, Quincy Jones, and Michael Jackson, Prince created the mid-1980s sound of black pop" (118). As the son of a half-Italian father and a mixed-race mother, Prince, however, is not black (although his mixed-race identity hardly stands out in a list as racially diverse as Walter's list). Instead of conforming to an easy categorisation of black and white that a genre like "black pop" suggests, Prince's racial hybridity defies and undermines these racial binaries. Moreover, Prince very consciously toys with representations of both race and gender in his music, lyrics, and – most prominently – his album covers.[42] Critics have repeatedly commented on Prince's androgyny,[43] and in a book review on Perone's *The Words and Music of Prince*, Matt Thomas wonders why academic interest in Prince and his work is not more prominent, seeing that "Prince seems oddly tailor-made for academic inquiry, not only because of his genre-defying music, multi-instrument virtuosity, and astonishing productivity, but because his public persona lies at the interstices of both male and female and black and white" (124). In a *Times* article from 27 June 2009, which reviews the new stage production of Kureishi's *The Black Album*, Kureishi states that this renders Prince "a fascinating prism through which you can view sexual and racial politics" (n. pag.). In sum, Prince embodies a very pronounced individualism in his art and personality, and his self-representation, which stresses hybridity and androgyny, constantly undermines identity categories of race and gender.

Kureishi's use of music in his novels is also an expression of individual postcolonial identity that defies easy categorisation along the binary fault lines of race and gender. Because of this, Prince is the perfect role model for Shahid. Shahid finds his loyalties torn between the Islamic fundamentalist views of his friends and the liberal humanism championed by his lecturer and married lover Deedee Osgood. Prince becomes the novel's catalyst for Shahid's decision to, by the end of the novel, understand that "[t]here was no fixed self; surely our several selves melted and mutated daily" (274). Along with concepts of race and gender, postcolonial identity is best understood as a performance rather than pre-established fact. Judith Butler's concept of performative identity within the context of gender and race along with Simon Frith's case that identity is best performed in music, combine to show how identity and music are linked via the common element of performance. Both can

42 The cover of Prince's 1988 album *Lovesexy* shows Prince in the nude, striking a feminine pose in front of a pastel floral background.

43 See Stan Hawkins, "Perspectives in Popular Musicology: Music, Lennox, and Meaning in 1990s Pop", or Robert Walser's article on "Prince as Queer Poststructuralist".

be understood in performative terms and *as* performance. This is not only true for the second-generation immigrant characters Shahid and Karim, who perform racially hybrid identities, but also for Charlie, who tries to use punk music to escape the confinements of his own white lower middle-class suburban upbringing, but ends up becoming a cultural symbol of the very Englishness he despises. All three characters are thereby part of what Avtar Brah describes in *Cartographies of Diaspora* as "diaspora space", and which includes not only those characters of originally non-British ethnicity, but also, to use Brah's description, those subjects "who are constructed and represented as 'indigenous'" (16). In this context, punk music plays a crucial role, because punk, as it emerged in the mid-1970s, radically attacked the status-quo of British society after the Second World War. Punk was an anarchic movement characterised by nihilism as well as social protest, and albums like the Sex Pistols' *God Save the Queen* (issued in the year of the Queen's Silver Jubilee in 1977 and immediately banned on all British radio stations) fundamentally shook the national self-image and confidence. As Jon Savage argues in *England's Dreaming*, punk dismantled the Churchillian myth – and one of England's dreams – that pitted England as the winner of the war. Punk instead demanded the recognition that England lost the Empire, which led to a crisis in national consciousness and identity. Paul Gilroy, in an article written for *The Guardian* in 2005, writes of England as "a post-colonial country that has never dealt with the consequences of its loss of empire" (n. pag.). In this context, Kureishi's novels question what it means to be English not only for immigrant characters, but also for those who are 'indigenous' and commonly perceived to embody Englishness. In Kureishi, however, Englishness itself is treated as just another ethnicity, which is as much scrutinised and in need of redefinition in the context of the multicultural reality of the postcolonial diaspora as are mixed racial and ethnic identities.

3.1 Prince and the politics of music in *The Black Album*

In 1987, the American singer and artist Prince finished his tenth studio album *The Black Album*, only to pull it from release shortly before its distribution. Only a few hundred copies already pressed made it onto the black market, where pirated copies of the album widely circulated until Warner Bros. officially released it in 1994.[44] *Rolling Stones* journalist Neal

44 As Ahmir Thompson writes for the *Rolling Stone*, which rates Prince as the number 27 amongst the greatest 100 artists of all time, "Prince must be one of the most bootlegged artists of the rock era" (n. pag.).

Karlen, in a 1990 interview with Prince, writes: "[t]he reason the album was pulled from release had nothing to do with record-company pressure, he [Prince] insists, or with the quality of the songs. Rather, Prince says, he aborted the project because of one particular dark night of the soul 'when a lot of things happened all in a few hours'. He won't get specific, saying only that he saw the word *God*" (n. pag.). Marie A. Plasse describes *The Black Album* as "a down and dirty, satirical, and often nasty collection of dance music" (59), and following the official release on 22 November 1994, then staff correspondent at *Time* Magazine David E. Thigpen wrote: "Densely rhythmic and riddled with violent imagery, obscenities and the sound of gunshots, the Black Album is a bleak tour through an American ghetto of fractured homes and misogynistic, rootless young men – a Clockwork Orange-style landscape ruled by drug dealers and petty hoods" (n.p.). Faced with the angry and dark material that characterises the album, Karlen writes that it was time for Prince "to stop acting like such an angry soul". In the interview, Prince stated, "'I was very angry a lot of the time back then,' […] 'and that was reflected in that album. I suddenly realized that we can die at any moment, and we'd be judged by the last thing we left behind. I didn't want that angry, bitter thing to be the last thing. I learned from that album, but I don't want to go back" (Karlen n. pag.). What characterises *The Black Album* in terms of music and subject-matter is a mixture of bass- and rhythm-heavy dance tracks that centre around violence, drugs, sex, race, and music itself. As music critic for the *New York Times*, Jon Pareles writes, "[a]long with Prince's usual polymorphous sexuality, the real message is in the bottom-heavy beat, pushing dance tunes called "The Grind" ('up and down on the beat y'all') and 'Superfunkacalafragasexy'" (n.p.).[45]

Kureishi's novel *The Black Album* does not only take its title from Prince's record, but also mirrors the album in terms of subject-matter: racial violence mixed in with the proverbial "sex, drugs, and rock'n'roll". Shahid's coming-of-age narrative is set against the backdrop of political unrest. The year is 1989, the Berlin wall has just fallen, the fatwā against Salman Rushdie has been issued, and racist assaults are common in a city that has yet to learn how to accept its multi-cultural, multi-racial past and present. In retrospect, Kureishi says about 1989 that the year "seems much more significant now than it did at the time – the end of communism, the Rushdie affair, the rise of Islamic fundamentalism, all of it

45 In the same article, Pareles writes how he got hold of a pirated copy of *The Black Album*: "[a]lbums that had been pressed in Great Britain were scrapped, but not before bootlegs of 'The Black Album' had begun to circulate. (A cassette copy was slipped into my back pocket one night at an ill-lit belly-dance club)" (n. pag.).

sandwiched by the whole explosion of acid house" (Lewis n. pag.). Moreover, throughout the novel, music is linked to sex and drugs. During a discussion about Prince between Shahid and his lecturer/lover Deedee, she suddenly crosses her legs, causing Shahid's focus to shift from the discussion of Prince to erotic thoughts of Deedee: "Off he went, being exemplary, until, that is, she crossed her legs and tugged her skirt down. He had, so far, successfully kept his eyes averted from her breasts and legs. But the whole eloquent movement – what amounted in that room to an erotic landslide of rustling and hissing – was so sensational and almost provided the total effect of a Prince concert" (26). Later in the novel, Shahid woos Deedee with mixed tapes (152), and while he guards the flat of a Pakistani family under threat of a racist attack, his mind returns to Deedee: "Thinking of her was like listening to his favourite music; she was a tune he liked to play. He wanted to consider the way she nudged his head to one side so she could kiss his ear, as if, for then, only that part of him appealed to her" (130). Shahid also recalls "slamming vodka with her; he thought of how her hands played on him, with a knowing life of their own, and how sex was like dancing, all of her alive and responding" (140). On their first night out together, Deedee offers Shahid drugs. At first he feels uncomfortable, caught between his fascination for Deedee and his trepidation for her reckless behaviour, and not knowing whether to approve of the drug-taking. When they stop at a set of traffic lights, he briefly considers jumping out of the car, but thinks better of it for the sake of his own safety. Deedee assists him in opening the window, and it is at this moment he hears music drifting in with the air. The effect the music has on him is immediate:

> Suddenly Shahid was hearing something that made his knees bob. Was is the Doors? No, crazy, it was something new, the Stone Roses or Inspiral Carpets, one of those Manchester guitar groups. Whoever it was lifted him. Music could act like an adrenalin injection on him, and he wanted to go woo-woo-whoa for being here with his lecturer who was taking him out. (58)

Music, in its combination with drugs and the sexual allure of Deedee, has a liberating effect on Shahid. Music acts as a stimulus that allows him to shed his uncertainties and makes his confusion disappear: "When he stopped trying to hold himself together, he realized he was liking this. He was certain now that he wanted to be here" (58). Furthermore, the music he hears from the car is also significant: the Stone Roses and Inspiral Carpets are both bands of the "Madchester" music scene that evolved in Manchester at the end of the 1980s. Mixing indie and psychedelic rock with dance music, both bands very much play

what is the music of the time the novel is set.[46] In an interview with Inspiral Carpets, published in the music, culture, and fashion magazine "notion" in 2008, Dave Dryden describes the band in the following way: "The Inspiral Carpets are one of music's great forgotten love affairs. Like a wild three-day fling; a whirl-wind romance with uppers, downers and all-arounders. Necking this, necking that and necking she in the process" (n. pag.). Dryden clearly emphasises the connotations of the Inspiral Carpet's music with the music culture of the time, involving drugs and sex.

The parallels between Prince's album and Kureishi's novel, however, go deeper than these topical similarities. Prince's presence pervades the whole novel from its title on the cover page to the final scene of Shahid and Deedee driving to a Prince concert. During the novel, Shahid listens to *Sign o' the Times* (134) while patrolling outside a flat he helps to guard against racist attacks, and a secretary dances in a pub after having put "Kiss" on the jukebox (166). Most importantly, Prince becomes the novel's implied second protagonist. Shahid finds a role model in Prince that helps him come to terms with his own identity and individuality. Born in Kent, Shahid has just moved to London to start a college degree in cultural studies. After his father's death and the ensuing disintegration of his family, Shahid yearns for "a new start with new people in a new place. The city would feel like his; he wouldn't be excluded; there had to be ways in which he could belong" (16). But instead, living in London he feels "invisible" and "searching for something", although he is not even sure what that would be (5). Like Zaf in Saadi's novel *Psychoraag*, Shahid is a second-generation immigrant born in England to Pakistani parents; and like Zaf, Shahid longs to belong and to find an identity that suits him: "These days everyone was insisting on their identity, coming out as a man, woman, gay, black, Jew – brandishing whichever features they could claim, as if without a tag they wouldn't be human. Shahid, too, wanted to belong to his people" (92). Yet, the question of who exactly "his people" are, is never fully answered throughout the book; Shahid, again like Zaf, is estranged from his family, and his college friendships are soon overshadowed by the religious conflicts at the heart of the novel.

Within the first two pages, Shahid meets his college dormitory neighbour Riaz, an older student and part-time legal advisor to immigrants, who emigrated from Pakistan to the UK aged fourteen. Riaz asserts that Shahid is his "fellow countryman", which he deduced by having "observed" Shahid, but Shahid can only answer: "Well … not quite" (2). The son of

46 Inspiral Carpets were founded in 1986, and "Madchester" as a term was coined in 1989, the year the novel is set.

Pakistani immigrants, Shahid does not call England home, but he does admit to feeling quite comfortable there, despite racist attacks and insults. Riaz is a devout Muslim and the leader of a Muslim group which turns toward religious fundamentalism as the novel progresses. Through Riaz, Shahid is introduced to Chad, a member of Riaz's group, and Shahid and Chad become friends. Soon, Shahid is faced with a dilemma: while he values Riaz and Chad as friends and embraces the feeling of having found a community to belong to, he does not support their fundamentalist beliefs and politics. Shahid starts to question the blind devotion with which the group follows Riaz, their charismatic leader, and with which Riaz in turn follows Allah. Shahid is religious himself and values religion for its egalitarianism, and the comfort and solidarity that a religious community offers. Nevertheless, he also has the urge to learn, to know, to understand life in its complexities and not reduce it to the easy answers that Riaz and the group offer him. He says to Riaz: "there are so many questions I have", but only gets the advice to "[d]ismiss them" (175).

During a discussion on literature in general and Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* in particular, Shahid tries to defend the novel with the argument that literature makes people think. Riaz, however, says: "Must we prefer this indulgence to the profound and satisfying comforts of religion?" (184). The essentialist beliefs of Riaz and his group find their climactic manifestation in the public burning of a copy of *The Satanic Verses*, at which point Shahid decides to leave the group:

> This destruction of a book – a book which was a question – had embodied an attitude to life which he had to consider […] He had left the posse. He hadn't made a decision: the alliance terminated the moment Hat soaked the book in petrol. He had been taught much about what he didn't like; now he would embrace uncertainty. Maybe wisdom would come from what one didn't know, rather than from confidence. That's what he hoped. (227)

In the ensuing events, Chad and a few others invade Deedee's house, where they know Shahid to be, wanting to avenge what they see as a betrayal against the group and Riaz in particular on the part of Shahid. In the aftermath of this incident, Hat comes back to Deedee's house to talk to Shahid. Feeling sorry for the violence that he was part of, Hat apologises to Shahid, saying that it would be God's place, not his, to condemn what Shahid has done. Shahid replies that he is "sick of being bossed around, whether by Riaz or Chad or God himself. I can't be limited when there is everything to learn and read and discover" (272). He asks Hat to understand that "[s]urely, brother, there must be more to living than swallowing one old book? What men and women do, and the things they make, must be more interesting

than anything that God is supposed to do?" Thus, towards the end of the novel, Shahid embraces an understanding of his own identity that defies religious or other certainties in favour of a deeply personal sense of his individual, multifaceted identity:

> He had to find some sense in his recent experiences; he wanted to know and understand. How could anyone confine themselves to one system or creed? Why should they feel they had to? There was no fixed self; surely our several selves melted and mutated daily? There had to be innumerable ways of being in the world. He would spread himself out, in his work and in love, following his curiosity. (274)

Riaz's group cannot accommodate the individualised self, because it is, as Moore-Gilbert argues, "unable to tolerate difference" and "dismayed by the difference represented by British-born, secularised Asians like Shahid, who are comfortable in Britain" (136). Instead of essentialist collective doctrines, Shahid learns to embrace a liberal and humanist individualism fostered by his lecturer and lover Deedee Osgood, and for which Prince, praised for his individualism, is the role model.

Deedee and the values of liberal humanism and liberal democracy that she stands for in the novel are in stark contrast to Riaz and his religious convictions. She is an outspoken feminist and a disillusioned socialist, who heavily condemns the book-burning and instead urges her students (amongst them many of Riaz's group) to discuss the novel instead. Her office walls are adorned with "pictures of Prince, Madonna and Oscar Wilde, with a quote beneath it, 'All limitations are prisons'" (25). She opens a lecture on the civil rights movement in the USA with playing Jimi Hendrix's "Star Spangled Banner". When asking what the music stands for, Shahid answers "America", thus emphasising the strong link between music and national identity (27). Continuing, Deedee contextualises her discussion with the music of the time, Elvis Presley and Marvin Gaye's "What's Going on?", and she highlights the political potential of popular music, and how popular culture can function as a politically loaded sign of the times. Deedee is the "mouthpiece" of the "ideology of liberal humanist individualism", as Moore-Gilbert terms it ("The Black Album" 153). However, Moore-Gilbert also suggests that Deedee's position does not solve all intercultural, religious, and racial problems the novels presents, because its focus on the individual comes at the prize of prejudice against difference:

> The conflict which Shahid experiences between the values espoused by Deedee and Riaz involves this contest between the rights of the individual and the rights of minorities *as communities*. As Tahira objects about Deedee: 'She believes in equality, all right, but only if we forget that we are different' (BA, 191). Tahira's comments suggest Kureishi's troubled recognition that the question of intercultural conflict in the

> contemporary West cannot be resolved within a legal and cultural framework which is exclusively concerned with the right of the individual. At the same time, however, *The Black Album* clearly endorses the right of the individual, especially the artist, to liberty of thought and expression. (Moore-Gilbert, *Hanif Kureishi* 147)

In a radio interview with Suman Bhuchar, Kureishi expresses his belief that the artist's "liberty of thought and expression" is the safeguard for liberalism and democracy. Although being "very pessimistic about … freedom and democracy and liberalism and so on", because it is "under huge attack from all sides all the time", Kureishi stresses that it is nevertheless possible to maintain the values of democracy and liberal humanism by creative expression: "creativity is a constant of liberalism, the ability to think and to speak freely" (Kureishi and Verma in an interview with Suman Bhuchar, n. pag.).

In this context, it makes perfect sense that already very early on in the novel, Prince becomes the catalyst for Shahid's oscillating attractions – both his first meeting with Chad and his first conversation with Deedee are centred around Prince, but with very different implications and results, indicative of the conflicting values between the essentialist religious beliefs of Riaz's group and Deedee's liberal humanism. In one of the first scenes of the novel, Shahid and Chad, whom Shahid has just met, have a brief and seemingly innocuous discussion about pop music and Prince, because Shahid has got "a bunch of Prince records" in his room at which Chad wants to "have a look", stating he should "better check them out" (18). Upon entering Shahid's college dorm, Chad is clearly fascinated with the record collection, being "riveted" while "rooting through a cardboard box on the floor which contained Shahid's Prince collection" (19). When asked by Shahid whether he has "a thing about Prince", however, Chad emphatically shakes his head, closes the box, and proclaims with conviction that "[p]op music is not good for me. Not for anyone" (19). Despite this conviction, Chad peers "interestedly into the box again" to see whether Shahid owns a copy of *The Black Album*, knowing that "[n]ot many people have it" (19). This was indeed true at the time the novel is set, as shortly after the record was completed in 1987, Prince stopped the release and only a few hundred copies of *The Black Album* were pressed. Chad's comment is therefore insofar revealing, as it displays an insider knowledge, interest, and approval (Camden market is "good for bootlegs") on Chad's part that belies his vehement "Never!" to Shahid's question whether he would like to listen to the album (19). Having thus concluded their discussion, Chad has to tear "himself away from Prince" (19), but in a later scene, entering Shahid's room, he turns off the music that is playing, implying that it is "too

… noisy" and stating that "[s]ometimes silence makes the most beautiful music" (78). When Shahid turns the music back on, Chad covers his ears, while, however, "simultaneously, Shahid observed, bouncing his foot" (78). Chad confesses to Shahid that he used to be a great music fan himself. He describes music in terms and metaphors of drugs and addition, calling himself a "music addict": "I was like you, I listened to it day and night! It was overtaking my soul" (78). Chad now wants to save Shahid from what in his eyes is a condemnable addiction, because he himself is "stronger without those drugs" (79). He implores Shahid to "[g]et clean!", and to give him his Prince records (80). Moreover, for Chad, music and drugs are part of the same culture of "the music and fashion industries", which "tell us what to wear, where to go, what to listen to", and he asks Shahid:

> Ain't we their slaves? I was doing everything else too. To get the day begun I'd do any coke I had left. When that stressed me I'd have a spliff and a bottle of cider. To swing I'd pop two Es, or drop acid. Into the night, when I got dazed and thought the police were watching me through the television, I'd shoot gear […] I went to the coolest clubs […] I rejected whole shoals of people because of their clothes or their music! (79)

This again exemplifies the connections between music and drugs. However, the main reason for Chad to condemn music is that he sees it as incompatible with religion. In Chad's eyes, music is a drug that distracts the mind from its higher purpose, the veneration of Allah. Religion, not art, allows a person to "swim in a clean sea" and "see by a clear light" (79). Shahid objects to Chad's essentialist beliefs, and asks him, "[i]sn't that what art helps us do? Life would be a desert otherwise. Wouldn't it, Chad?" (79). In response, Chad merely imitates breaststroke motions, revelling in the religious imagery of "the warm water holding you up" (79). His religious certainty needs no discussion. Chad says that "[w]e are not dancing monkeys. We have minds and sense. Why do we want to reduce ourselves to the level of animals? I am not descended from an ape but from something noble!" (80). Using the same addiction-related figures of speech as he used for music, Chad tells Shahid that "[w]e are all slaves to Allah […] He is the only one we must submit to" (80). Giving in to the temptations of music to Chad means that one cannot completely surrender oneself to Allah: "We think we cool [sic] but we break our trust with Allah" (80).[47] In the end, Chad takes religion to the same extremes to which he took drugs (Shahid's observation that he is "no

47 A similar contrast between music and religion is drawn in Kureishi's short story "My Son the Fanatic". Ali, in turning towards fundamentalist Islam, denounces music together with all his possessions typical of a teenager, throwing out and giving away "clothes, books, cricket bats, video games" (119). His father's question why he does not play his guitar any more "elicited the mysterious but conclusive reply, 'There are more important things to be done.'" (119) As becomes clear in the course of the story, those "more important things" for Ali are prayer and religious worship in general.

junkie" (79) compared to Chad's former self is accurate). Shahid observes that "reality was clearly a lost kingdom" (80) to Chad, and his blind veneration of Allah becomes self-destructive – in a petrol attack on a local bookshop, Chad badly burns his face and hands. As Bart Moore-Gilbert argues, "[Riaz's group's] purist conception of identity is sustained only by severe – and, for Kureishi, unnecessary – (self-)repression. Thus Chad's self-mutilation during the arson attack is prefigured in his struggle against the temptations of Shahid's music collection" (136).

Chad's rejection of music in the face of religion ties in with a general debate about the compatibility of music and religion, and particularly of music and Islam. As Ali Akinci outlines in "Islam und Musik: Unvereinbar?", this debate dates back to the beginnings of Islam in the seventh century CE, and even today there is no consensus amongst theologians and Islamic scholars. Critics oppose music on the grounds that it fosters debauchery and hinders religious devotion, because the emotional state of excitement caused by music is seen as a distraction. It is moreover debatable whether loud recitations of the Koran should be allowed, seeing that the potential aesthetic beauty of the rendition might distract the listener from truly considering the meaning of the sacred text itself. Appreciating music for its own sake, therefore, borders on the sacrilegious, because as soon as music is considered as art, the aesthetic appreciation of music takes precedence over its devotional purpose. Nothing apart from god should be regarded for its own sake. Critics who argue that music and Islam are not compatible, therefore do not recognise that music can serve devotional purposes. In *Music in the World of Islam: A Socio-Cultural Study,* Amnon Shiloah writes about this debate:

> legalists, theologians, spiritual leaders, custodians of morality in the cities, the literati and Sufi leaders all participated. The debate elicited views that varied from complete negation to full admittance of all musical forms and means, even dance. Between these two extremes we can find all possible nuances – some, for instance, tolerate a rudimentary form of cantillation and functional song, but ban all instruments; others permit cantillation and add the frame-drum, but without discs, of course forbidding all other instruments and all form of dance, and so on. (31)

This implies that music as song can be allowed when serving the purpose of religious worship and praise. Also, a muezzin's call for prayer is occasionally referred to as a song. Chaudhuri, in *Freedom Song*, calls the muezzin a "singer, if one could call him such" (281). For the Muslim Ustad Majeed Khan, too, music is like prayer in Seth's *A Suitable Boy*. As I have shown in Chapter One, music can indeed transgress the sectarian divide between the

Hindu culture that it derives from and the predominantly Muslim musicians that have traditionally practised it. For Chad and his group of Muslim fundamentalists, however, any kind of music is considered *haraam*, meaning a sin in the eyes of god. Chad's strong rejection of music is not only a rejection of a lifestyle he associates with addiction and debauchery, but a rejection of the ambiguity and multiplicity of meaning that music contains and that Prince embodies.

In her first conversation with Shahid, Deedee succinctly summarises Prince's playful undermining of identity: "He is half black and half white, half man, half woman, half size, feminine but macho too. His work contains and extends the history of black American music, Little Richard, James Brown, Sly Stone, Hendrix", to which Shahid answers: "He's a river of talent. He can play soul and funk and rock and rap" (25). As a music genre, funk itself is best characterised as defying characterisation. Funk is a conglomeration and interpretation of different styles and music cultures, including African and African American music such as Jazz, R&B, and soul music.[48] Asked in an interview to define funk, Prince points towards the ineffable nature of the style: "If you can describe it, it ain't funky, you know. […] It's something you just have to experience" (*Musicology* n. pag.). Moreover, the ambiguity and multiplicity of meaning is already implied in the title of the record (and hence of the novel), because *The Black Album* is a record that defies any frame of reference: both the cover and the record in their 1994 version are uniformly black without any identifying features, lacking both a title and the artist's name. Instead, the cover only features a serial number of the limited 1994 edition. Also, Prince is not the only artist who released an album under the title *The Black Album*, which renders the album's title – and in extension the title of the novel – intrinsically ambiguous.[49] As Jon Pareles argues about Prince's record in *The New York Times*:

> "The Black Album" makes its title a multiple entendre. It answers the Beatles' eclectic "White Album" with Prince's own tour of black music styles (from a skeletal, synthesized blues to a rap, with extended stops at James Brown, Sly and the Family Stone and Parliament-Funkadelic); it has black humor and nasty fantasies. Some of its songs sound like deliberately raunchy updates on Prince's 1980 "Dirty Mind" – one tune asks "girls," "boys," and "others" to shout along in turn – but the lyrics are just the topping on an album obsessed with rhythm and funk. (n. pag.)

48 On the significance of funk for the civil rights movement and the Black Power Movement in the USA, see for example LeRoi Jones's and Imamu Amiri Baraka's *Black Music*, and F. Kofsky's *Black Nationalism and the Revolution in Music*.

49 Other bands and artists that have released an album called *The Black Album* include The Damned (album released 1980), Jay-Z (2003), and L.S.G. (2003). Metallica's 1991 album *Metallica* is also known as *The Black Album*, given its black cover.

The black cover of Prince's album does indeed evoke The Beatles' 1968 record *The Beatles*, which is also known as *The White Album*, nicknamed in accordance with its all-white cover that only has the band name embossed crosswise and a serial number in the bottom right corner. Although *The White Album* is not directly mentioned in the novel, it is reasonable to argue, as Bart Moore-Gilbert does, that The Beatles serve as an unspoken musical influence in the novel: "Insofar as Prince's LP gestures critically towards the Beatles' seminal *White Album* (1969), the performer does not simply rewrite the histories of black music but draws on 'white' pop, too" (118). Thus, *The White Album* becomes the "silenced Other", as Sara Upstone argues in an article on the politics in Kureishi's *The Black Album*:

> Dialectically involving the Beatles through Prince's association, Kureishi sets up two alternative frames of reference: one black, one white. The former is entwined with the latter and exists in reference to it, but is at the same time a subversion of its purposes. And by privileging the Black, with the White as an unspoken and silenced Other, Kureishi offers us a particular model of identity that interrogates English culture. (7)

To reason that there is an inherent colour symbolism in the opposition between The Beatles's *The White Album* and Prince's *The Black Album* is, of course, not far-fetched, given their similarities in title and appearance, and given Pareles's and Moore-Gilbert's implications that where Prince stands for black pop music, The Beatles embody white pop music. Moreover, such an opposition is intrinsically political, following Sara Ahmed's argument in "Declarations of Whiteness: The Non-Performativity of Anti-Racism", that the white is set up as the stable referent against which any non-white always has to be defined. Ahmed further argues: "It has become commonplace for whiteness to be represented as invisible, as the unseen or the unmarked, as a non-colour, the absent presence or hidden referent, against which all other colours are measured as forms of deviance" (n. pag.).[50] *The White Album* would thereby not be the "silenced Other", but the "silent Other", quietly dominating its black counterpart through mere implication. For these two particular records and their respective musicians, however, the opposition is not as straight-forward as it may seem – recorded in 1968 and shortly after the band came back from a lengthy visit to India, *The White Album* features an eclectic mix of musical styles and influences, ranging from the rock'n'roll of songs like "Birthday" to country in "Don't Pass Me By", and notably also including influences from Indian music. The video to "Wild Honey Pie" shows a sitar, and although the accompanying instrument is a guitar, the glissandi are evocative of the sitar

50 As suggested by Ahmed, also see *White* by Richard Dyer, and Ruth Frankenberg's *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness* for a discourse of whiteness and its implicit racial hierarchy.

sound, while the percussive instrument that can be heard in the background is very reminiscent of tabla accompaniment. Moreover, the underlying chords are not typically to be found in arrangements for Western pop music.[51] The musical implications of these albums, and thus for the novel, suggest that categories of race, just as music itself, are mutable and constantly shifting. Such an understanding defies outmoded notions of essential otherness. In its parallels to Prince and *The Black Album*, the novel *The Black Album* thus clearly endorses a pluralistic view of identity not defined by religious or other certainties, but embracing ambiguity as its core. In the novel, Kureishi collapses the binary oppositions that the title implies by carefully deconstructing the racially imbued colour symbolism in favour of a concept of ethnic identity that is defined by plurality and fluidity, rather than by binary oppositions.

Furthermore, Prince's self-presentation as an artist questions the construct of identity as such, as is evident in his numerous aliases and name changes (which, arguably, at the time the novel is set have not yet happened). Ahmir Thompson for the *Rolling Stone* states that Prince "invented different aliases for himself in a way that rappers have adopted – he was Jamie Starr, Joey Coco or Alexander Nevermind" (n. pag.). Moore-Gilbert suggests that Prince can be seen as having transcended the concept of identity and identification altogether – rather than just playing with the binary oppositions of any concept of identity, such as black and white for race, or male and female for gender – by repeatedly changing his name, from Prince to an unpronounceable symbol to The Artist Formerly Known as Prince to its acronym TAFKAP and another acronym TAFKAS (The Artist Formerly Known as Symbol, when he abandoned the symbolic representation as well).

In *The Black Album*, Deedee embraces what Chad rejects about Prince and music, namely the associations of music with sex and drugs as well as Prince's playful undermining of identity, which threatens essentialist concepts of identity – such as religious submission of the self to god – in favour of "innumerable ways of being in the world" (274). As Moore-Gilbert points out, this renders pop music in Kureishi's novels implicitly political: "pop is valued by Kureishi because it articulates both the political protest and the 'sexual revolution' associated with the 1960s which, in theory at least, pointed the way towards more tolerant and flexible conceptions of sexuality and gender roles as well as of class identities" (*Hanif Kureishi* 9), and of racial identities, particularly when personified by the "half black and half

51 See Alan W. Pollack's harmonic analysis in "Notes on 'Wild Honey Pie'" (n. pag.).

white" Prince. Michael Kramer, in his book review of *Rip It Up: The Black Experience in Rock 'n' Roll*, makes the very important point that race and rock music share an affinity for fluidity:

> Genres overlap, diverge, rejoin, and above all, change, for many reasons: musicians create and originate new combinations of sounds; audiences mix and match their listening; and, of course, record companies and recording artists themselves seek to increase their market shares by crossing over from one genre to another. Not only is musical genre always in motion, always mutating, but also the boundaries of race. (354)

This understanding of pop and race as fluid and thus beyond concrete definition very much resonates with Kureishi's understanding of identity and music, particularly as portrayed and embodied by Prince in *The Black Album*, but also in the author's work generally, as Moore-Gilbert argues:

> His work consistently reflects the belief that gender, sexuality and ethnicity are categories of (self-)identification which, while relational, are just as important as those centred in absolutist conceptions of race, class and nation. Kureishi's vision of identity is thus anti-foundational: the self is always seen as mobile, fissile and plural […] pop culture is valued so highly by Kureishi precisely because it adumbrated such models of identity long before the advent of post-structuralism. (10)

Moore-Gilbert summarises the importance of Prince in the context of Kureishi's pop cultural mission thus:

> In Prince, famous for his makeovers and aliases, Kureishi most graphically represents pop as the crossroads not only of different cultural influences but as a site in which plurality of identity – whether at the level of ethnicity, class, gender or sexuality – is celebrated. As such Prince's music symbolises those trends in the contemporary world which Kureishi most prizes. (117-118)

Identity, Prince seems to suggest, is just another convention that can be played with at will, and thereby Prince becomes the ideal figurehead for Kureishi and the ideal role model for his characters.

3.2 Performing race and postcolonial otherness

3.2.1 *The Black Album*

Questions of gender and racial identity are never far apart for Prince or for Shahid. To start with the role model: as an artist, Prince consciously positions himself outside the cultural performance of gender categories. In his song "I Would Die for U", he sings: "I'm not a

woman. I'm not a man. I am something that you'll never understand" (*Purple Rain*). He defies gender categorisation, and in an act of counter-performance to the normative male and female, Prince performs androgyny. Robert Walser, in his article "Prince as Queer Poststructuralist", notes that Prince "perform[s] through his music and his body a whole range of possible fusions and transformations of conventional gendered signs" (84). Walser also argues for the political implications of this transgression, which undermines patriarchal structures of desire and the sexual objectification of the female body:

> Prince is perceived as threatening not because he is sexually explicit, but because his work often stands in stark contrast to conventional representations of "the masculine" and "the feminine" […]. In songs such as "Kiss," "If I Was Your Girlfriend," Little Red Corvette," and "When Doves Cry," modes of eroticism that are usually associated with women are celebrated and even envied, rather than controlled and trivialized, which are more common impulses in popular as well as classical music. In songs like "Strange Relationship," Prince reflects on the contradictions built into dominant narratives about gender and erotic relationships. (80)

Prince's playful undermining of identity is mirrored and experienced by Shahid when Deedee insists on putting make-up on his face to the sound of Madonna's "Vogue". The song itself provides not only a suitable and sensual background music, but is also a commentary to the scene, as the lyrics to the song suggest that "[i]t makes no difference if you're black or white / If you're a boy or a girl / If the music's pumping it will give you new life" (*I'm Breathless*). The fact that Shahid "loved that track" (117) foreshadows his embracing of unstable signifiers of identity, and the concept of identity not being strictly fixed and homogeneous. Shahid will completely abandon the notion of gender and race as being set, rigid concepts towards the end of the novel, wondering how anyone could "confine themselves to one system or creed" (274). The make-up scene is a crucial step in Shahid's character development, as it first questions and then deconstructs the concept of gender: "Deedee fetched her bag and lay [sic] everything out on a white towel. He sat beside her. She hummed and fussed over him, reddening his lips, darkening his eyelashes, applying blusher, pushing a pencil under his eye. She back-combed his hair. It troubled him; he felt he were losing himself. What was she seeing?" (117). Despite his initial discomfort, Shahid quickly gives in to the situation, surrendering himself completely to Deedee's control, and finding it a relief to do so. He relishes both this feeling of shedding responsibilities and the freedom of expressing a different self that does not have to conform to social expectations and stereotypes: "he liked the feel of his new female face. He could be demure, flirtatious,

teasing, a star; a burden went, a certain responsibility had been removed. He didn't have to take the lead. He even wondered what it might be like to go out as a woman, and be looked at differently" (117-118). The importance of the defining gaze (which is implied to be male) is stressed – and at the same time provocatively undermined – by the quoted first line of Madonna's "Vogue", which asks "What are you looking at?"[52]

This scene stages identity and particularly gender, and thus suggests that gender is an act of performance. In *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler describes gender as performative act, which is performed in the context of a societal construct that dictates what a particular gender should do/act/look like. Butler argues that gender is not a natural fact and category into which we are born, but that it is instead produced by discursive and social norms, which repeated over time establish a conventional referent that determines what gender is defined by. This in turn structures identities along the fault lines of male and female. The heteronormative implications that accompany socially dictated gender divisions are intrinsically political, as they subordinate the female under the male and declare queer sexualities to be deviant. Butler sets out to trouble gender and thus to call into question – and ultimately collapse – its intrinsic structures of power and submission. To recognise gender as cultural performance separate from one's biological sex is a crucial step in that process, as it highlights the constructed nature of gender concepts and shows that there are no such things as "true", "right", or "wrong" gender. As Butler writes: "If the inner truth of gender is a fabrication and if a true gender is a fantasy instituted and inscribed on the surface of bodies, then it seems that genders can be neither true nor false but are only produced as the truth effects of a discourse of primary and stable identity" (136). Drag and cross-dressing, according to Butler, particularly trouble this discourse of primary and stable male and female identities, because drag dramatises "the signifying gestures through which gender itself is established" and points towards the "discursively constrained performative acts that produce the body through and within the categories of sex" (viii). Drag, most commonly thought of in terms of men dressing and acting as women, subverts the 'male' construction of gender by performing 'female' gender attributes. Thereby, drag defies the concept that sex and gender are the same thing. Explaining how drag thus undermines gender, Butler distinguishes between the anatomy – or the sex – of the performer, the gender of the performer, and the gender that the individual chooses to perform:

52 On the concept of the "male gaze", which conceptualises the female as an object of male desire, see Laura Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema".

> If the anatomy of the performer is already distinct from the gender of the performer, and both of those are distinct from the gender of the performance, then the performance suggests a dissonance not only between sex and performance, but sex and gender, and gender and performance. As much as drag creates a unified picture of 'woman' (what its critics often oppose), it also reveals the distinctness of those aspects of gendered experience which are falsely naturalized as a unity through the regulatory fiction of heterosexual coherence. *In imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself – as well as its contingency* […] In the place of the law of heterosexual coherence, we see sex and gender denaturalized by means of a performance which avows their distinctness and dramatizes the cultural mechanism of their fabricated unity. (137, italics in the original)

When Shahid allows Deedee to apply make-up to his face and when Prince performs androgyny, they replace the gender that they usually perform (male) with an imitative performance of femininity, which in turn demonstrates that their masculinity is just as performative. This subversion of male and female creates a tension that troubles the very concept of gender itself. As Butler suggests, "drag fully subverts the distinction between inner and outer psychic space and effectively mocks both the expressive model of gender and of the notion of a true gender identity" (137). This effectively shows that gender is an act of performance, and identity, where it concerns gender, is performative.

I want to argue that the same holds true for race as the defining category for postcolonial identity, and I aim to show that racial hybridity subverts the binaries of white and non-white in a similar way to how drag challenges the binary categories of gender. Hybridity, like drag and androgyny, highlights the fact that essentialist categories of identity are mere convention that rely on cultural performance. Where Butler differentiates between the anatomy of a person's sex and the cultural performance of that person's gender, I would like to differentiate between the anatomy of a person's skin colour and the cultural performance of that person's race. While the colour of someone's skin is a given "natural fact", to use Butler's term, race becomes a "performative act" that relies, like gender, on discursive and social norms, which are repeated over time and which categorise identity along the always already politically implicated fault lines of white and non-white. Although Butler's main example is that of gender,[53] other postcolonial critics have also used the concept of performativity and performative identity widely to explain identity formation in the context of both the colonial and the postcolonial condition.[54] Sara Ahmed, for example, writes that she is "sympathetic

53 Butler explores this most prominently in her seminal work *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity,* published in 1990. Also see Butler's "Gender as Performance: An Interview with Judith Butler" from 1994, and her 1997 publication *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*.

54 See, for example: Sara Ahmed, "Racialised Bodies"; bell hooks, "Performance Practice as a Site of

with the idea that race is performative in Judith Butler's (1993) sense of the term: race as a category is brought into existence by being repeated over time (race is an effect of racialisation)" (n. pag.).

3.2.2 *The Buddha of Suburbia*

The mechanisms of race and racialisation – and how both are performatively undermined by hybridity – are also clearly depicted in Kureishi's first novel, *The Buddha of Suburbia*. The coming-of-age protagonist Karim, also a second-generation immigrant like Shahid, is the son of an Indian father and an English mother. Where Shahid is "not quite" Pakistani (*The Black Album* 2), Karim is "an Englishman born and bred, almost" (*The Buddha of Suburbia* 3). As a "new breed, as it were, having emerged from two old histories" (3), their hybridity challenges racial binaries of black and white as well as the implied colonial binaries of coloniser and colonised. Karim suggests as much when he muses that "[p]erhaps it is the odd mixture of continents and blood, of here and there, of belonging and not, that makes me restless and easily bored" (3). As an aspiring actor, the first role Karim is cast for is Mowgli in a stage production of Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book* (1894). Of all the roles, Karim thus gets to play the stereotypically colonial Indian, raised by wolves and other wild animals until he finds his home in civilisation. Stereotypes like this sustain race as cultural performance, because they come into being by being repeated over time and are thus accepted by a culture as markers for a particular racial identity. When Jeremy Shadwell, the director of the play, casts Karim for Mowgli, he says that Karim is not only "just right for him", but that, "[i]n fact, you are Mowgli. You're dark-skinned" (142). On the basis of Karim's anatomical skin-colour, Shadwell thus constructs and requests a – literal – performance of race that conforms to his stereotypes, which are in turn informed by very conservative notions of authenticity. As Shadwell states, Karim was cast "for authenticity and not for experience" (147), and he demands that Karim put on an Indian accent, as he thinks Mowgli's should be "an authentic accent", seeing that he was born in India, "[n]ot Orpington" (147). Moreover, and despite Shadwell's claims that Karim *is* Mowgli – which conflates Karim's skin colour with the race that is to be performed – Shadwell insists on a costume that merely consists of "a loin cloth and brown make-up" (146). This, too, is

Opposition"; Nadine Ehlers, "'Black Is' and 'Black Ain't': Performative Revisions of Racial 'Crisis'". Ashcroft et al understand the notion of performance more in relation to the body and to orality as a performative act (*Post-Colonial Studies* 289-290).

supposed to render Karim more Indian, more "authentic".[55] What it effectively does, is to render Karim more "other" through analogies with dirt and excrement. Karim describes the make-up as "brown muck" and "the colour of dirt", and he refers to himself as "being covered in shit" (146). Karim's childhood friend and part-time lover Jamila calls this neo-imperial production of Kipling "neo-fascist", "disgusting", and a mere parade of prejudices and "clichés about Indians" (157). Performing Mowgli to Shadwell's stereotypes, Karim becomes the "abject", a term Butler borrows from Julia Kristeva, and which Butler describes as designating "that which has been expelled from the body, discharged as excrement, literally rendered 'Other'" (*Gender Trouble* 133).[56]

Shadwell's conception of authenticity is insofar problematic, as it perpetuates racial stereotypes of primitive indigeneity that are rooted in nineteenth-century racial theory and imperial narratives of anthropology.[57] In this context, 'authenticity' is but a simplification, a type-casting of the other into preconceived stereotypes, and as such it poses a "political trap of essentialism set […] by imperial discourse", as Ashcroft et al. argue:

> Imperial narratives such as that of anthropology in their project of *naming* and thus *knowing* indigenous groups have imported a notion of aboriginality, of cultural authenticity, which proves difficult to displace. The result is the positioning of the indigenous people as the ultimately marginalized, a concept that reinscribes the binarism of centre/margin, and prevents their engagement with the subtle processes of imperialism by locking them into a locally strategic but ultimately self-defeating essentialism. (*Post-Colonial Studies 2* 163)

As the "imperialist corollary of the essentialist argument" (163), 'authenticity' essentialises experience and thereby overwrites "the actual complexity of difference", as Gareth Griffiths writes in "The Myth of Authenticity" (70). Citing contemporary examples of media coverage of issues related to Australian Aboriginal peoples, Griffiths shows how the notion of an 'authentic voice' is used as a label to divide indigenous people by creating a privileged hierarchy between 'authentic' and 'inauthentic' voices. Griffiths describes these representations of 'authentic' indigeneity as "an act of 'liberal' discursive violence, parallel in many ways to the inscription of the 'native' (indigene) under the sign of the savage" (71) in colonialist discourse. Such 'authentic' representation, Griffiths suggests, "may be about the

55 For more on the notion of authenticity, particularly in popular music, see *Voicing the Popular: On the Subjects of Popular Music* by Richard Middleton, and Nathan Wiseman-Trowse, *Performing Class in British Popular Music*.

56 Butler refers to Julia Kristeva's *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*.

57 In *Colonial Desire*, Robert Young traces the language of contemporary cultural theory to Victorian racial theory, showing how contemporary conceptions of race are thus still complicit with colonial views of the 'other'.

inscription of ourselves upon the Australian Aboriginal, an inscription which may overwrite and overdetermine the full range of representations through which contemporary Australian Aboriginality might otherwise effectively be represented" (71). In other words, an 'authentic' representation merely serves the purpose of presenting the other as the mirror-image to the self, while the agency of naming and knowing, to rephrase Ashcroft et al., still resides with the latter. Griffiths concludes that the myth of authenticity is

> in many ways itself a construction which overpowers one of the most powerful weapons within the arsenal of the subaltern subject: that of displacement, disruption, ambivalence, or mimicry, discursive features founded not in the closed and limited construction of a pure authentic sign but in endless and excessive transformation of the subject positions possible within the hybridised. (76)

Similarly, Shadwell's conception of authenticity overpowers Karim's cultural hybridity and reduces his individual experience to the essentialising notion of the savage native, covered in dirt and barely capable of comprehensible communication.

While Karim's Mowgli is not Indian enough for Shadwell, his rendition of his uncle Anwar is too Indian for the cast involved in his second acting project, where he is asked to portray someone from his own background, hence "[s]omeone black" (*The Buddha of Suburbia* 170). Apart from a Nigerian he went to school with, Karim does not know anyone black, and instead settles on Anwar for his performance. The owner of a cornhershop that is regularly vandalised by white young men, his uncle has become "very strange […] roaming the streets every day with his stick, shouting at these white boys, 'Beat me, white boy, if you want to!'" (171), as Karim's aunt Jeeta tells him. When Karim acts out his uncle's idiosyncrasies in front of the group, his act stirs resistance from Tracey, a black woman, who takes Karim's representation as perpetuating racial stereotypes. Tracey accuses Karim of showing black people in a bad light:

> 'Your picture is what white people already think of us. That we're funny, with strange habits and weird customs. To the white man we're already people without humanity, and then you go and have Anwar madly waving his stick at the white boys. I can't believe that anything like this could happen. You show us as unorganized aggressors. Why do you hate yourself and all black people so much, Karim?' (*The Buddha of Suburbia* 180)

Tracey accuses Karim of acting out on stage the white man's misconceptions and stereotypes about immigrants. Her position of speech is that of a unified and homogenised other, which needs to defend itself against the equally as unified and homogenised self: "white people" versus "us", where "us" indifferently comprises "Black and Asian people" (180). Tracey

thereby generalises the experiences of different diasporic ethnicities and fails to recognise the individual truth behind the performance. She talks about the collective experience of "black people" as if all individuals of a race show the same experience, while Karim performs the individual experience of "[o]ne old Indian man" (180). Thereby, Tracey's notion of authentic representation is essentially as racist as Shadwell's, because both essentialise the experience of the colonised (Shadwell) and the postcolonised other (Tracey).

Karim's hybridity of half white, half Indian challenges both positions, and Shadwell requires Karim to stage a stereotypical otherness, because his hybrid racial identity threatens Shadwell's conceptions of race: "What a breed of people two hundred years of imperialism has given birth to. If the pioneers from the East India Company could see you. What puzzlement there'd be. Everyone looks at you, I'm sure, and thinks: an Indian boy, how exotic, how interesting, what stories of aunties and elephants we'll hear now from him. And you're from Orpington" (*The Buddha of Suburbia* 141). Karim's mixed-racial background and hybridity challenge the easy categorisation of white and non-white, of self and other. Instead of portraying authenticity, Karim's performance of Shadwell's racial stereotypes unmasks their artificiality and ridicules them for their blatant neo-colonialism. Where stereotypes sustain race as cultural performance, hybridity challenges those stereotypes and thereby undermines the concept of race as a set construct. Moreover, Karim poses a threat to Shadwell's own sense of identity, because being racially hybrid marks Karim as 'other', but yet with Karim being born and raised in England, he is too similar to Shadwell himself. Thus, Karim threatens Shadwell in his white man's Englishness. In *Lost in the Postmodern Metropolis*, Martina Deny argues that Karim – and particularly his younger brother Allie – embody what Bhabha terms a "mimic man", who imitates the coloniser's behaviour and thus satirises and undermines claims to authority and power:[58]

> Allie verkörpert im Roman Bhabhas dialektisches Konzept der subversiven Mimikry, bei welcher die ehemalige koloniale Autorität durch die Entstehung von etwas noch nie Dagewesenem gebrochen erscheint: 'The *menace* of mimikry [*sic*] is its *double* vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority.' [*Location of Culture* 126] Indem durch die begrenzte Assimilation des ehemaligen *colonial subject* ein verzerrtes, anglisiertes Abbild, 'a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite' [122] zurückgegeben wird, erscheint der Missionierungsgedanke der ehemaligen Kolonialherren ironisiert. Durch ihre

58 Bhabha, in turn, derives his concept of "mimic man" from Macaulay, who in his 1835 "Minute on Education" describes his vision of a "reformed colonial subject" thus: "'a class of interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern – a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect'" (Macaulay 49, qtd. in Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* 124-125).

> Ähnlichkeit mit der weißen britischen Gesellschaft, '[a]lmost the same but not white' [128], und die dieser Differenz inhärente verfremdende Subversivität unterminieren also die so genannten *mimic men* wie Allie und Karim die Autorität der kolonialen Unterdrücker. (192, italics in the original)[59]

Mimicry, too, is always an act of imitation and thus of performance, as it comes into being through repetition (cf. *The Location of Culture* 125). Through performance, race is thereby destabilised as a category of identity. Moreover, the implied hierarchies and politics of white supremacy are thus dismantled as well. Ajit Maan writes in the context of performing postcolonial identity as and in narrative:

> [a]n essential component of post-colonial identity is preliminary deconstruction of what one has been taught about who one is. Postcolonial agency is exercised by undermining traditional identity constructions and processes of self-representation. The postcolonial may engage in subversive identity performances or parodies of the Master voice. The method of the postcolonial subject is performative re-association across borders, languages, and conceptual systems. (417)

Maan celebrates the independent narrative authority of postcolonial identity performances: "On one level 'I' am embodied memory. On another level, one's identity, *ipseity*, rests in one's narrative authority. It is this type of authority that is an appropriate object for longing for those who recognize the synthetic nature of all experience and the artificiality of consistent identity" (417).

In Kureishi's novels, this narrative of an independent postcolonial authority finds voice and expression in music. Shahid is no musician himself, but his identification with Prince enables him to adopt the artist's notion of identity as a "self-in-progress", to use Simon Frith's term. "Music, like identity", argues Frith, "is both performance and story" (109). According to Frith, performance is the link between music and identity, because both rely on performance to come into being, and because identity is best performed through music. Stephen Benson in *Literary Music* defines the term "literary music" as the performance of music in literature:

59 "In the novel Allie embodies Bhabha's dialectic concept of subversive mimicry, which constitutes something that previously did not exist and which thus breaks former colonial authority: 'The *menace* of mimikry [*sic*] is its *double* vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority.' [*Location of Culture* 126] The limited assimilation of the former *colonial subject* causes a distorted, anglicised reflection, 'a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite' [122], which satirises the missionary idea of the former colonial masters. Given their similarities with white British society, '[a]lmost the same but not white' [128], as well as the alienating subversion inherent to their differences, the so-called *mimic men* such as Allie and Karim thus undermine the authority of the colonial oppressors." (My translation, italics in the original.)

> literary music refers in the first instance to the self-evident fact that such music is by definition literary, a music made by the narrative in which it occurs, regardless of whether or not it exists outside the text (as it does, in the majority of cases). The central point about such music is not the success or otherwise of the evocation, but the nature of the performance: the question of how and why music is staged, and to what desired end. Reading music in the novel allows us to see, literally and literarily, how music is received as music. (4)

Hence, the representation of music in literature is itself, according to Benson, an act of performance: "Within this critical context, fictional representations serve as one more performance, one more instance of music making" (5). In the context of the novels Benson discusses, he finds that this performance is often a very personal experience, very intimate and immediate: "The construction of such private moments, and the valuation of music as offering the experience of intimate self-revelation, cannot but be woven into the representation" (5). Thus, literary music is a performance of music in literature, which at the narrative level, becomes a means to perform the identity of the ones who are listening, that is, the characters. Thereby, to understand music and identity as performance opens up the possibility to understand music as a performance of identity.

3.3 Music and "diaspora space" in *The Buddha of Suburbia*

Shahid and Karim use music and performance to undermine the underlying binaries of male/female and white/black, thereby highlighting the artificiality rather than the authenticity of gender and race. In contrast, Charlie uses both music and performance to question what it means to be English in a postcolonial country that has won the war, but lost the empire. Charlie desperately wants to escape his white lower middle-class suburban upbringing. Exceedingly talented and handsome, Charlie idolises David Bowie, who, when he was still known as David Jones, attended Charlie's and Karim's local school. A picture of Bowie on the school walls attracts all the school boys, who pray "to be made into pop stars and for release from a lifetime as a motor-mechanic, or a clerk in an insurance firm, or a junior architect. But apart from Charlie, none of us had high expectations" (*The Buddha of Suburbia* 68). While still at school, Charlie comes into experiencing that collective teenage dream of glamour, popularity, fast cars, and women. He is discovered by a manager, referred to as the Fish – "a tall, straight-backed and handsome ex-public school boy whose father was rumoured to be a Navy Admiral" (70) – who manages and promotes Charlie's career as a

musician. Charlie constantly reinvents himself. As Karim observes, Charlie performs his identity, or rather different versions of identity, trying them on to see how they fit:

> I poked my head through Charlie's trap-door. The place had changed a lot since last time. Charlie's poetry books, his sketches, his cowboy boots, were flung about. The cupboard and drawers were open as if he were packing. He was leaving and altering. For a start he'd given up being a hippie, which must have been a relief to the Fish, not only professionally but because it meant the Fish could play Charlie soul records – Otis Redding and all – the only music he liked. Now the Fish was sprawled in a black steel armchair, laughing as Charlie talked and walked up and down, pouting and playing with his hair. As Charlie paced, he picked up an old pair of frayed jeans or a wide-collared shirt with pink flowers on it, or a Barclay James Harvest album, and tossed it out of the skylight and into the garden below. (88)

Charlie clearly stages himself in front of a willing audience, putting on different faces and appearances ("playing with his hair"), trying on new versions of himself while discarding of his old hippie identity (of which the Barclay James Harvest album would be representative), while the Fish is comfortably "sprawled in a black steel armchair" as if in a cinema, and Karim watches the scene as a voyeur, his head poking through a trap-door.

Charlie's breakthrough as a musician is triggered by his most extreme make-over in terms of identity. The first scene of part two of *The Buddha of Suburbia* sets the protagonists "In the City", where Charlie and Karim witness a gig by a band of "vicious little council estate kids with hedgehog hair, howling about anarchy and hatred" (130). The band and their assembled fans are all dressed in "ripped black clothes […] full of safety-pins. Their hair was uniformly black, and cut short, seriously short, or if long it was spiky and rigid, sticking up and out and sideways, like a handful of needles, rather than hanging down. A hurricane would not have dislodged those styles" (129). Band and fans assault and insult each other, spitting and drinking, and the singer slouched "around the stage as if he were in his living room. His purpose was not to be charismatic; he would be himself in whatever mundane way it took. The little kid wanted to be an anti-star, and I couldn't take my eyes off him. It must have been worse for Charlie." (130) The music is like nothing either Karim or Charlie encountered before:

> the music was trashed out. It was more aggressive than anything I'd heard since early Who. […] No song lasted more than three minutes, and after each the carrot-haired kid cursed us to death. He seemed to be yelling directly at Charlie and me. I could feel Charlie getting tense beside me. I knew London was killing us as I heard, 'Fuck off, all you smelly old hippies! You fucking slags! You ugly fart-breaths! Fuck off to hell!' he shouted at us. (130-131)

After the late-1960s sound of the novel's first part, the second part opens the stage for the punk rock of the early to mid-1970s. It is a new sound, and one that is intrinsically linked to social criticism, rebellion, and an aggressive anarchic vision. As Allan F. Moore in *Grove Music Online* defines it, punk promotes nihilism and is an act of resistance against "tacky bourgeois values" (n. pag.). In his account of punk in British society in the 1970s, *England's Dreaming: Sex Pistols and Punk Rock*, Jon Savage describes punk music as:

> an international outsider aesthetic: dark, tribal, alienated, full of black humour […] For anyone in the UK at that point [1975 and the years after] who felt cast out because of class, sexuality, perception, gender, even choice, who felt useless, unworthy, ashamed, the Sex Pistols [the first big punk band] were an attraction/repulsion machine of, as Paul Morley notes, 'infernal' power that offered the chance of action, even surrender – to something larger than you – and thus possible transcendence. In becoming a nightmare, you could find your dreams. (xiv)

The first time Charlie listens to punk, he recognises the music's potential, not so much for anarchic revolution, but for his own self-invention and future career: "Charlie was excited. 'That's it, that's it,' he said as we strolled. 'That's fucking it.' His voice was squeaky with rapture. 'The sixties have been given notice tonight. Those kids we saw have assassinated all hope. They're the fucking future.'" (131) Karim points out to Charlie that it would be impossible for him to follow in their footsteps due to Charlie's privileged suburban upbringing: "'We're not like them. We don't hate the way they do. We've got no reason to. We're not from the estates. We haven't been through what they have'" (132). But despite Karim's assertion that it would be artificial for Charlie to be part of the punk rock movement, Charlie reinvents himself and joins the movement anyway. He changes his name from Charlie Kay to Charlie Hero, and takes on a new personality, "[h]is hair dyed black now, and it was spiky. He wore, inside out, a slashed T-shirt with a red swastika hand-painted on it. His black trousers were held together by safety-pins, paperclips and needles" (151). From his outfit to his behaviour, Charlie emulates the "council estate kids" and becomes immensely successful as a punk rocker. He and his band, renamed from Mustn't Grumble to The Condemned, "had thrown out everything of their former existence – their hair, clothes, music. They were unrecognizable" (154).

Still, it is obvious, at least to Karim, that Charlie's performance is devoid of the politics originally behind punk. Despite Charlie's rocketing success, at the first gig Karim attends, Charlie and his band "were nervous, not quite at ease yet in their new clothes" (154). Charlie's rage is "manufactured", although Karim finds him "magnificent" in his

performance of anger and defiance: "He was brilliant: he'd assembled the right elements. It was a wonderful trick and disguise. The one flaw, I giggled to myself, was his milky and healthy white teeth, which, to me, betrayed everything else" (154). Karim is "completely impressed by Charlie's big con trick, by having knocked on the door of opportunity and its opening up to him, its goods tumbling out" (154). Karim recognises that Charlie turns punk from protest to commodity, mirroring the money-making concept that the Sex Pistols became. As soon as punk becomes mainstream, it loses its political potential. It ceases to be as radical and oppositional as it claims to be, and becomes just another style to be scoured and emulated. As Savage notes, "[p]unk insisted on living in a hyper-intensive present, but now it's history – just another English dream. This process was inevitable as soon as Punk occurred" (*England's Dreaming* xi). In other words, the moment punk was passing, it was already past.

Nevertheless, Jon Savage argues that punk marks a crisis in British national consciousness and identity, which is intrinsically linked to the newly postcolonial status of the ex-colonising nation. Punk, in its initial phase of radical nihilism and oppositional politics, signifies a radical break away from the conviction that England has won the war to the realisation that it lost the empire. As Savage explains, punk expresses an anger at the loss of the British power and it mourns the empire, thus becoming an expression of post-colonial melancholy. Punk challenges the "Churchillian myth", which postured Britain as the winner of the second World War and which was used as a defining myth for national identity up to the 1970s: "it was this very Churchillian myth that, thirty years after VE Day, Punk set out to challenge across a broad front: England had not won the war but lost. There was no longer the cushion of empire, just dreams of historic glories, of Douglas Bader and Jack Warner, of the Silver Jubilee and all that red, white and blue bunting" (*England's Dreaming* x). The dream of (the second) empire, which England had dreamt since 1765, when the East India Company took control over Bengal, was over and England had to wake up. In an article written for *The Guardian* as recent as 2005, Paul Gilroy argues that England still has not come to terms with the loss of the Empire: "As the generation of 39-45 combatants dies out, we drift towards becoming an anxious nation that can't get away from the Nazis it pluckily vanquished, or past the loss of its imperial pre-eminence. The vanished empire is essentially unmourned. The meaning of its loss remains pending" (n. pag.). Instead of actively dealing with the colonial past, national identity is still defined by perpetuating the victory over

fascism and idealised self-images of a glorious imperial past. In Gilroy's eyes, the scandal around Prince Harry's Nazi costume, which he wore to a friend's fancy dress party in January 2005, is testament of this unresolved issue of postcolonial national identity:

> Harry's behaviour, rather than just being part of the sub-culture of a group of toffs, raises mainstream themes. The telling mix of Nazis and colonial fantasy provides an insight into the core of the two-world-wars-and-one-world-cup mentality. That nihilistic outlook dictates that conflicts against Hitler and Hitlerism remain imaginatively close while Britain's many wars of decolonisation – particularly in Africa, Malaya, Cyprus and Aden – are to be actively forgotten. (n. pag.)

In consequence, this compulsive revisiting of dream worlds (to rephrase Savage) defers "a reckoning with contemporary multiculture and postpone[s] the inevitable issue of imperial reparation" (Gilroy ibid).

In *The Black Album* as well as *The Buddha of Suburbia* this finds expression in unresolved issues of racism and a crisis of Englishness for all the major characters. This becomes obvious when taking into consideration that it is not only the novels' protagonists who are searching for their identity, but that the majority of all the characters in *The Black Album* and *The Buddha of Suburbia* alike are looking for ways, groups, and frames to define themselves; and for most of them, music plays an important role in this process of identification. In a conversation with Shahid, Deedee confesses to having lost her political beliefs:

> 'There was a period, in the mid-seventies, when we imagined history was moving our way. Gays, blacks, women, were asserting and organizing themselves. Less than ten years later, after the Falklands, CND and the miners' strike, even I could see the movement was in a contrary direction. Thatcher had concentrated the struggle. But she'd worn everyone down. Where did we go from here?'
> 'Where, then?'
> 'Who knows? Ask Brownlow. It's been hard enough admitting to defeat and then to uncertainty. Now I don't even want to be certain any more.' (*The Black Album* 97)

Deedee used to be in the Party, was "on picket lines, demonstrations and at Greenham" (96), but as a disillusioned socialist she now tries to find belonging, if not meaning, in the youth culture of the time. Apart from teaching cultural studies, Deedee uses popular culture as a means to communicate with her students and to gain access to their way of living: "The music her students liked, how they danced, their clothes and language, it was theirs, a living way. She tried to enter it, extend it, ask questions" (134). For her, as for Shahid, identity is defined by uncertainty. But contrary to Shahid's situation, this does not liberate Deedee but only fixes her in a perpetual loop of debauchery, inaction, and political ineffectiveness; her

protest at the book burning is muted by shouts from the crowds, and even when she calls the police, they are too late and in consequence she feels the need to go into hiding, fearing the retribution of Riaz's group. Deedee has to realise that her liberal embracing of postmodernism's uncertainties is no match for the religious convictions of Riaz and his group.

Deedee's husband Andrew Brownlow, who is a history professor at the college Deedee teaches at, also shows signs of his identity slowly disintegrating into meaninglessness. The highest ranked student from his graduation class at Cambridge University, Brownlow refused positions at Harvard to come to teach at the London college out of idealism and a sense of disillusionment with his own middle-class privileges: as Hat says, "[h]e hated them all, his own class, his parents – everything. He come to this college to help us, the underprivileged niggers and wogs an' margin people. He's not a bad guy – for a Marxist-Communist" (32). However, Brownlow's socialist utopia had to give way to Thatcherite reality, as he tells Shahid: "everything I believed has turned into shit. There we were, right up to the end of the seventies, arguing about society after the r-revolution, the nature of the dialectic, the meaning of history. And all the while, as we debated in our journals, it was being taken from us. The British people didn't want e-education, housing, the a-arts, justice, equality..." (243). Brownlow blames the working class for having betrayed the struggle he fought on their behalf, and begs Shahid to "[c]-c-cut my throat. Please. Lost in more than my fortieth year – no direction home! End me before things get w-w-w-orse!" (244) The only thing that enables him to relive, at least in his mind, parts of the glories past, is the Beatles's "Hey Jude": "I can see it! Love, freedom, peace, unity! People together – doing their own thing!" (245).

This shows that all characters in *The Black Album* are searching to define their identity, not only those of ethnic minorities, but also those that would normally be defined by their Englishness, such as Deedee or Brownlow. On this note, Jatinder Verma (artistic director of Tara Arts, who staged *The Black Album* at the National Theatre in 2009), argues that all characters in the novel are experiencing crises of identity in a time when suddenly values are being questioned that were taken for granted before:

> the questions of identity were not just questions that were for Asians only, you know, someone like Brownlow, someone like Strapper, someone like Deedee, they were also going through the same questions of 'who am I?' And that has a lot to do with that particular era, that particular period of time in our own history, when a lot of things were up for question. Anti-racism suddenly became something that we would have to question, multiculturalism, we began to fundamentally question that, you know, is it

> right? Should we have it? Should there not be censorship? And I think the whole idea of this notion of Britishness comes directly form that period, this desire to in some way set up certain kinds of core values by which we must live, if the society is going to function. So in all those senses I think, absolutely, it is a state-of-the-nation play. (Interview n. pag.)

Charlie's reinvention in music is therefore the reinvention of all Kureishi's characters that try to map out a new way of being English and what that would entail. As Moore-Gilbert puts it:

> In Kureishi's novels 'Englishness', too, is simply one more constructed and multiply-determined ethnicity, as Karim's encounter with his old schoolfriend in New York makes clear: 'Charlie had acquired this cockney accent when my first memory of him at school was that he'd cried after being mocked by the stinking gypsy kids for talking so posh ... He was selling Englishness, and getting a lot of money for it' (BS, 247). (*Hanif Kureishi* 129)

To define Englishness as just another ethnicity – one amongst many – is crucial for Kureishi's depiction of England as a postcolonial diaspora in which the power dynamics that pit Englishness at the centre and non-English ethnicities at the margins are undermined. The term "diaspora" here is used in a postcolonial sense and context; according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, diaspora means "the dispersion" and was first used to describe "the whole body of Jews living dispersed among the Gentiles after the Captivity" as well as following the exodus from Jerusalem after its destruction by the Romans. First mentioned in "Deuteronomy", Verse 25, it reads, "thou shalt be a diaspora (or dispersion) in all kingdoms of the earth" (Bible qtd. in *OED*). Diaspora therefore connotes a people living outside and dispersed from their original homeland due to forced migration, which is often due to political reasons, but can also be caused by economic or other circumstances. Beyond the Jewish experience, the diasporic situation is also very much embedded in European modernity and its imperialistic quests. In this context, it connotes "a spread which led to the transport and relocation of millions of people, particularly Africans, from one place to another in the world", as Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin explain (*Post-Colonial Studies* 426). Although originally referring to the Jewish diaspora, the contemporary use of the word is therefore frequently understood within the contextual framework of colonialism and its repercussions for postcolonial societies, such as the UK with its long history of immigration.[60]

60 For an excellent study about the centuries-long history of Asian settlements in the UK, see Rozina Visram's *Asians in Britain: 400 Years of History*.

A prominent characteristic of a diaspora is therefore the migration and dislocation of a people from their homeland and their relocation to other places and host countries. There, the diasporic community is, according to Ashcroft et. al., always defined as a minority culture in opposition to a majority culture that in turn is defined by holding social power (ibid). The themes of dislocation and displacement thereby map out the politics of location, to use Avtar Brah's term, which arrange power relations from the centre to the margin, that is, the diaspora. This means that the indigenous centre holds power over the migrant diaspora. In her *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities*, Brah aims to show that this power dynamic does not hold, because rather than forming the margin to a centre, the diaspora is already implicated and contained within the centre itself. To substantiate her argument, Brah develops the concept of diaspora space, which she defines thus:

> Diaspora space is the intersectionality of diaspora, border, and dis/location as a point of confluence of economic, political, cultural and psychic processes. It addresses the global condition of culture, economics and politics as a site of 'migrancy' and 'travel' which seriously problematises the subject position of the 'native'. My central argument is that diaspora space as a conceptual category is 'inhabited' not only by those who have migrated and their descendants but equally by those who are constructed and represented as indigenous. In other words, the concept of *diaspora space* (as opposed to that of diaspora) includes the entanglement of genealogies of dispersion with those of 'staying put'. (181)

Diaspora space might be visualised as a platform where "native" and "diasporan" can meet in dialogue and where binaries of "us" versus "them" can be overcome. In Brah's words, it is a space where "boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, of belonging and otherness, of 'us' and 'them', are contested. […] The diaspora space is the site where *the native is as much a diasporian as the diasporian is the native*" (209, italics original). Thereby, 'Englishness' becomes just another ethnicity, and this essentially depoliticises the politics of location:

> *My argument is that they are not 'minority' identities, nor are they at the periphery of something that sees itself as located at the centre, although they may be represented as such.* Rather, through processes of decentring, these new political and cultural formations continually challenge the minoritising and peripheralising impulses of the cultures of dominance. Indeed, it is in this sense that Catherine Hall (1992) makes the important claim that Englishness is just another ethnicity. (210, italics in the original)[61]

Understanding postcolonial UK as a diaspora space recognises the need for a redefinition of all the ethnicities involved and shows that they are all inter-dependent, constructed, fluid,

61 See Catherine Hall, *White, Male and Middle Class: Explorations in Feminism and History*.

and in Kureishi's novels best performed through music. Susheila Nasta succinctly summarises that

> Kureishi's representations of 'Englishness' […] have consistently pointed to the fluid and constructed nature of all identities – identities, which, as Stuart Hall would argue, are constructed within, and not outside, representation – as well as the need to forge new affiliations across a range of previously exclusive and excluding cultural discourses. The effects, therefore, of the world of Western popular culture (the Rock movement of the 1960s and 1970s, the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, David Bowie, the punks and new romantics) on his mixed race and adolescent narrator Karim in *The Buddha of Suburbia* […] are as pivotal to his representations of a new way of writing 'Englishness' as is the need to re-angle and revision the myths of 'high' culture, whether Orientalist, colonial, or caught by the narrowly parochial vision of the suburbs and the Home Countries. (176)

Kureishi, who is, like his characters Shahid and Karim, himself a second-generation immigrant, is equally convinced that "[i]t 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" ("The Rainbow Sign" 38). In *The Black Album* and *The Buddha of Suburbia,* music is one of these fresh ways of seeing, performing, and experiencing Britain on the level of both individual and national identity, at a time when these identities are being overturned and redefined. And in its connections with youth culture from the 1960s to the 1980s and as a form of rebellion against the status quo, music in Kureishi is not only a *Sign o' The Times*, as I stated at the beginning of the chapter, but it is also a sign that *The Times They Are a-Changin'*.

Chapter 4

"Rockin' All Over the World": Music, Magical Realism, and Globalisation in Salman Rushdie's *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*

> All my life, I worshipped her
> Her golden voice, her beauty's beat
> How she made us feel
> How she made me real
> And the ground beneath her feet
>
> ~U2, "The Ground Beneath Her Feet" (2000)

> Rock music, the music of the city, of the present, which crossed all frontiers, which belonged equally to everyone – but to my generation most of all, because it was born when we were children, it spent its adolescence in our teenage years, it became adult when we did, growing paunchy and bald right along with us: this was the music that was allegedly first revealed to a Parsi Indian boy named Ormus Cama, who heard all the songs in advance, two years, eight months and twenty-eight days before anyone else.
>
> ~Rushdie, *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* (96)

Before its publication in autumn 1999, Salman Rushdie sent two pre-publication copies of his latest novel, *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, to U2 lead singer Bono and U2's manager Paul McGuinnes, "hoping that they would tell me if the thing worked or not" (104), as Rushdie writes in his essay "U2". As a novel that tells the story of rock music from a subcontinental perspective, Rushdie was anxious to know whether his rendering of it, including the various references to existing and fictional singers and bands, quotations from song lyrics, both made-up and not, and the postmodern version of the Orpheus myth, on which the protagonists' tales are modelled, made sense to someone from within the music

business. The novel more than worked, in that Bono subsequently composed a song to express what he called "the novel's 'title track', a sad elegy written by the main male character about the woman he loved, who has been swallowed up in an earthquake: a contemporary Orpheus' lament for his lost Eurydice" (104-105). Where until now the novels I looked at were, apart from *A Suitable Boy* and *The Buddha of Suburbia*, named after music, in this case the novel came first and inspired the song. According to his own account, Rushdie was astonished: "One of the novel's principal images is that of the permeable frontier between the world of the imagination and the one we inhabit, and here was an imaginary song crossing that frontier" (105). The theme of music crossing frontiers of various kinds – mostly geographic, as in *A Suitable Boy* and *Afternoon Raag*, some more spiritual, as in *Psychoraag* – is a leitmotif that pervades this dissertation and finds its climax in the first part of this last chapter. The frontiers that music crosses in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* (and beyond, thinking of Bono) are numerous: from India to the UK to the US, a journey taken by the two main characters, Ormus Cama and Vina Apsara, who are both legendary musicians – hers the voice of a goddess, his a mythical talent for songs. Music also crosses the frontier between the novel's world – its main diegesis – and an "otherworld" that the text suggests exists on an extra-diegetic level, and then there is the "underworld" from where Ormus's dead twin Gayomart sings "the future into his ears" (*The Ground Beneath Her Feet* 378) and where Ormus desperately wants to descend after Vina's death in order to rescue his lost Eurydice through music.

The Ground Beneath Her Feet is a novel about music itself: it is the story of rock'n'roll and its effects on a global audience. It is also the story of two musicians that form the legendary band VTO, Ormus Cama and Vina Apsara, and theirs is a contemporary version of the Orpheus myth, which "winds through a story set in the world of rock music. Orpheus is the defining myth for both singers and writers – for the Greeks, he was the greatest singer as well as the greatest poet" ("U2" 104). The novel's Orpheus, Ormus, was born in Bombay on 27 May 1937, and is a prodigy when it comes to music. He soundlessly plays air guitar from the minute of his birth (*The Ground Beneath Her Feet* 23) and grows up to become an "absurdly handsome and impossibly gifted hero" (86). Vina Apsara, Ormus's Eurydice, learns her singing from the birds when she is a little girl, her voice "like a rocket blast of power" (107). As a grown woman, her voice "*is music*; music in its most profound essentials" (392), as a fictional critic in the novel attests.

Like Kureishi's novels, *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* features parallels to the real world of rock music. In an interview with the German weekly *Die Zeit*, Rushdie credits the life and success story of Queen lead singer Freddie Mercury as "[den] einzige[n] Präzedenzfall für meine Idee".[62] Moreover, and as Jonathan Lethem in his article "Rock of Ages" points out, Ormus is, "like Elvis Presley (and Philip K. Dick), the surviving sibling of a dead baby twin" (n. pag.). It is Ormus's dead twin who sings him the songs of the Beatles and the Rolling Stones long before they are released, and like John Lennon, Ormus is shot dead on the street. He is "a godlike amalgam of Gatsby and Dylan and Orpheus, and by the end of the book he's a little bit of David Bowie's character in *The Man Who Fell to Earth* as well" (ibid.). Vina, on the other hand, is a fictional amalgam of Janis Joplin, Tina Turner, and Madonna, as Lothar Müller describes her in his review of the novel, published in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*. Born in America to a Greek mother and an Indian father, she is sent back to family in India after her mother kills her second husband, his children, and finally herself. Vina is what Lethem calls an "orphan emigrant-in-reverse" (Lethem n. pag.). In India, she gets to know Ormus, they meet in a record shop and, as Shaul Bassi phrases it in his chapter on "Orpheus's Other Voyage. Myth, Music and Globalisation": "their postmodern love emblematically originates under the sign of music in the age of mechanical production" (107). As the novel progresses, Vina ascends to "Madonna-esque stardom singing lead vocals in Cama's music and dies in an earthquake, then becomes the center of a Princess Diana–sized posthumous cult" (Lethem n. pag.). As characters, their biographies and talents are the stuff that the star cult of rock is made of, and their music is the stuff that dreams are made of. Early on in the novel, music is defined as a mystery (*The Ground Beneath Her Feet* 20), and this notion of music as an inexplicable and ineffable enigma, with its mythical roots and its magical effects, is – quite literally – a leitmotif that permeates the whole text.

Parallels to the Orpheus myth pervade the novel and credit music in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* with mythical origins, which in turn account for its magical effects. This magic allows music to cross between the novel's present world, the underworld, and the "otherworld". At the same time, the theme of multiple worlds marks the novel as a magical realist text. In the context of postcolonial fiction, the trope of alternative worlds is often used to rewrite dominant narratives in order to suggest that the world as presented by the West does not represent the ultimate truth. History is thereby presented at an angle, and the myth

62 "the only precedent for my idea" (my translation).

of origin, being one of the founding myths for colonisation, is challenged. In *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, Rushdie rewrites the history of rock music, a predominantly Anglo-American art form, by suggesting that it originally came from the East. This does not only, as Shaul Bassi suggests, "destabilise and disable all the discourses on origins and originality that are often vitiated by supremacist implications" (111), but it also counters theories of cultural imperialism. These theories usually regard rock as a cultural mass medium that has been exported from the US around the world in an act of neo-imperialism or Americanization. As David Hesmondhalgh puts it in his case study of the music industry, "Globalisation and Cultural Imperialism":

> This new hegemony was based on a more indirect form of power: the fostering of cultural forms which would sap the cultural strengths of the less-developed countries, and which would allow Western-based transnational corporations to dominate non-Western economies, by encouraging a desire on the part of the post-colonial peoples for Western products and lifestyles. (163)

For Rushdie, however, rock music is a means of liberation rather than an agent of domination. In his "Rock Music" essay, he stresses the revolutionary potential of (early) rock music, which is common to a whole generation: "for popular music fans of a certain age the ideas of rock and revolution are inseparably linked" (299). This spirit of revolution, intrinsic to rock music, unites people around the world:

> rock'n'roll's rough, confident spirit of rebellion may be one reason why this strange, simple, overwhelming noise conquered the world nearly half a century ago, crossing all frontiers and barriers of language and culture to become only the third globalized phenomenon in history after the two World Wars. It was the sound of liberation, and so it spoke to the free spirits of young people everywhere. (300)

Where the cultural imperialism theories condemn rock music as colonising, theories of globalisation by and large praise rock for its unifying tendencies. As a global form of mass culture, rock music can unite peoples all over the world. While this is a very positive picture of rock music as a product of mass culture and an agent of cultural globalisation, it also mirrors how music functions in the novel and, on a larger scale, suggests that there is something in music that has the power to bring people together, irrespective of politics of location. Through examination of the novel, it becomes clear that this "something" in music is not political, but aesthetic, and that the magic that is music confronts us not only with our individual identity, but with our shared humanity.

4.1 Music, Myth, and Magic

Very early on, the novel defines music as one of five mysteries that "hold the key to the unseen":

> the act of love, and the birth of a baby, and the contemplation of great art, and being in the presence of death or disaster, and hearing the human voice lifted in song. These are the occasions when the bolts of the universe fly open and we are given a glimpse of what is hidden; an eff of the ineffable. Glory bursts upon us in such hours: the dark glory of earthquakes, the slippery wonder of new life, the radiance of Vina's singing. (*The Ground Beneath Her Feet* 20)

In its roots and effects, music is mysterious, defies explanation and definition, and transcends human experience. The power of songs derives from the "strangeness" of music's very existence:

> Why do we care about singers? Wherein lies the power of songs? Maybe it derives from the sheer strangeness of there being singing in the world. The note, the scale, the chord; melodies, harmonies, arrangements; symphonies, ragas, Chinese operas, jazz, the blues: that such things should exist, that we should have discovered the magical intervals and distances that yield the poor cluster of notes, all within the span of a human hand, from which we can build our cathedrals of sound, is as alchemical a mystery as mathematics, or wine, or love. (19)

In its effects, music thereby elevates us in our being, and presents us with a utopian vision of the world and of ourselves in this world: "Song shows us a world that is worthy of our yearning, it shows us our selves as they might be, if we were worthy of the world" (20). For Ormus and Vina, music becomes the means to express their love, it is "their real lovemaking" (423). Music, in essence, "*is the sound of love*", as the cover to their album *Doctor Love and the Whole Catastrophe* reads, and since love itself is magical and one of the five mysteries cited by Rushdie, music is the expression of that magic; music is love's spell: "*Songs are love's enchantment. They are everyday magic. The Siren's song drew men to their deaths. Calypso's song kept Odysseus enchanted by her side. No man can resist the song of Aphrodite, or of Persuasion, her singing witch. Songs enchant away our pain*" (423, italics in the original). Music is mythical in origin and magical in its effects: Ormus (and to an extent Vina, too) is a modern-day Orpheus, whose music symbolises life and has the ability to cross the different worlds that Rushdie writes into the novel. In *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, music becomes an agent of magical realism and allows for the characters to rewrite the (Western) history of rock'n'roll.

4.1.1 Music's mythical origins: Ormus as Orpheus, I

The framing musical myth at the heart of *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* is that of Orpheus, his musical powers, and the death of his wife Eurydice. In the opening scene of the novel, Vina gives a performance for a distillery owner in the Mexican town Tequila. She sings the two soprano parts (Euridice and Amor) of the "Trionfi Amore" aria that concludes Christoph Willibald Gluck's opera version of the Orpheus and Eurydice story, *Orfeo ed Euridice* (1762). The power of Vina's voice is accredited with an ability to move the earth, which applauds her performance (12) and initiates a series of earthquakes that devastate Mexico and kill Vina. In a rendering of Vina's death that parallels Eurydice's descend into the underworld, the earthquake causes a gigantic fault to open up along the Pacific coast line and the ground "simply opens and eats her, like a mouth" (472). The novel starts with a prolepsis of Vina's death and concludes with Ormus's attempts to reclaim her from the underworld with music. Like Orpheus, however, Ormus fails to bring her back and finally has to concede to having lost Vina for good.

Based on the Orpheus myth, Ormus and his music, as a parallel to Orpheus, have their roots in Greek mythology. Orpheus, son of the muse Calliope and the god Apollo, is a mythological singer and musician, whose song and lyre playing is accredited to have more than human power.[63] In his classic text on Greek mythology, *Mythology* (first published in 1855), Thomas Bulfinch describes Orpheus thus:

> He was presented by his father with a lyre and taught to play upon it, which he did to such perfection that nothing could withstand the charm of his music. Not only his fellow-mortals, but wild beasts were softened by his strains, and gathering round him laid by their fierceness, and stood entranced with his lay. Nay, the very trees and rocks were sensible to the charm. The former crowded round him and the latter relaxed somewhat of their hardness, softened by his notes. (Chapter XXIV, n. pag.)

In the most well-known version of the Orpheus myth, narrated by the Roman poets Virgil (in *Georgics* 4.453-525) and Ovid (in *Metamorphoses* 10.1-11.84), Orpheus' wife Eurydice dies from a snakebite, and Orpheus, heartbroken, descends into the underworld to reclaim her.[64]

63 While the parentage of Orpheus is not quite clear, as some sources cite the Thracian river-god Oeagros as Orpheus' father, the majority of sources name Apollo as the father. For a more detailed account of the Orpheus myth, see Edith Hamilton's *Mythology* and Thomas Bulfinch's *Mythology* as the two standard mythology sources, or John Warden's *Orpheus – The Metamorphoses of a Myth*. As Sámal Kristian Jacobsen points out, the Orpheus-Ormus parallel is substantiated by the comparison the novel makes between Ormus's father Sir Darius Xerxes Cama and Apollo, who is "generally believed to have fathered Orpheus" (47).

64 The myth was already known in some form in the 5th century BCE, as Fritz Graf argues in his entry on "Orpheus" in *The Oxford Companion to Classical Civilization*.

His song is of such power that it enchants Hades, and Orpheus is allowed to take Eurydice back with him. Ovid, in Lombardo's translation, recounts the episode thus:

> As he said these things, plucking the strings
> To his words, the bloodless shades wept. Tantalus
> Stopped trying to scoop up the receding water,
> And Ixion's wheel was stunned. The vultures
> Left off from Tityus' liver, Belus' granddaughters
> Put down their urns, and even you, Sisyphus,
> Sat on your stone. Then for the first time, they say,
> The Furies, charmed by his song, wet their cheeks,
> Nor could the royal consort or her dark lord
> Refuse his request. They called Eurydice,
> Who was still among the recent shades,
> Walking slowly with a limp from her wound. (268)

The only condition is for Orpheus not to turn and look at Eurydice on their way up. Orpheus fails, turns around before they reach the world of the living, and consequently loses his wife for the second time, but this time without hope for re-recovering her. Devastated, Orpheus retreats into wild nature and laments his loss. His song enchants the trees to gather around him and the rivers to change their course, and his voice tames wild beasts and even moves stones.[65] The magic of Orpheus' music metamorphoses nature, because his music represents life. Although Orpheus does not succeed in reanimating Eurydice and loses her back to the underworld, his playing inspires the animals, the trees, everything on the earth growing and alive, and it even animates inanimate objects like rocks. In the context of death and the underworld, Orpheus' music is a life force that allows him to enter – and return – alive from the underworld, an extraordinary feat for a mortal man; Odysseus is able to go to the underworld and come back; Hercules goes in and comes out as part of his twelve labours; in Virgil's *Aeneid*, Aeneas is able to go into the underworld and come back alive. What saves all these men from harm is a special gift or knowledge that they possess, and in Orpheus' case, it is his music. Representing life and the living world, Orpheus' music has the power to change Hades's mind, to put a little bit of life back in Eurydice so that she can return to the upper world. That Orpheus fails in the end and looks back is not by fault of his music, which in its origins and effects is magical and therefore not human. Orpheus' human weakness shows most clearly when he tries to achieve the super-human act of not only entering and returning from the underworld, but to return with the soul of his wife. While the music Orpheus plays

65 For a (much) more detailed account of Orpheus and the magic of his music, see, for example, John Warden's *Orpheus: The Metamorphosis of a Myth*.

potentially holds this power, Orpheus himself is not powerful enough to wield it, and cannot resist the human temptation to look back to Eurydice as he comes up.

Like Orpheus, Ormus's musical talent is magical in both its origins and its effects. Moments after his birth, Ormus plays what "any guitarist could have identified as chord progressions", which the text describes as a "miracle": "the pudgy hands of baby Ormus incontestably playing air guitar, moving soundlessly through a complex series of monster riffs and dizzy licks with a speed, and feeling, of which the instrument's greatest practitioners would have been proud" (23). Moreover: "From the moments of his birth, he had given many extraordinary indications of the depth of his precocious musical talent – not only the chord progression of his finger movements but also the syncopated drumming of his tiny feet against his crib and the perfect-pitch gurgles that went up and down the musical scale, *saregama padhanisa, sanidhapa magaresa*" (46). As Sámal Kristian Jacobsen writes, "[f]rom the beginning of the novel he [Ormus] is portrayed as a modern day Orpheus with musical skills that can only be characterised as magical" (45). Like Orpheus, Ormus's singing moves animals and silences even the rivalling birds. As a young boy he sings in his sleep "so sweetly that birds had woken, thinking the dawn had come, and gathered on his windowsill to listen" (46). However, where Ormus lives in a world of sound, the rest of his family is "cocooned in silence" or not listening (46), because on the day Ormus was born, his twin brother Gayomart was born a stillborn. That same day, Ormus's older brother Virus is brain damaged in a cricket accident and consequently turns mute. Their father Sir Darius Xerxes Cama is responsible for the accident, because he hits the ball intending to strike a group of musicians who are playing while Darius is out on the field. The musicians, "a band of nationalist sympathizers" (28), anger Darius. As a British loyalist, he does not agree with their "deafening musical instruments" and their "particularly tasteless type of musical heckling" (28), promoting a ban on cricket for its colonial connotations:

> Sir Darius Xerxes Cama was aware that Mahatma Gandhi and his followers had denounced the Pentangular Tournament as a communally divisive, anti-national throwback, in which men of colonialized mentality performed like monkeys for the amusement of the British and gave unhelpful assistance to the policy of divide-and-rule. Sir Darius was no Independence merchant. Nationalists! He entertained the gravest doubts about the wisdom of surrendering the governance of India to men of such limited musical sense. (28)

When the musicians start ridiculing Darius himself and when "[t]he music of their merry hostility clamoured in his ears" (29), he loses his nerve and strikes the ball in their direction,

but ironically hits his son instead. Consequently, he bans music "of all types" from his house, because "as well as himself he blamed music for having caused the accident" (37). The miracle singer Ormus is therefore born into a family in which music is seen as a disease, "a virus, an infection" (38). In a household that shuns music, Ormus's nightly singing is not met favourably by his other older brother and Virus's twin Cyrus. Music is a painful reminder of what had been lost: Ormus's melody "contained such joy in life, such optimism and hope, that it drove Cyrus Cama insane, and clutching his pillow in his hand he went to Ormus's bed, intent on murder" (46). Cyrus, like his father, blames music and Ormus for Virus's accident, and wants to suffocate Ormus with his pillow, thus effectively silencing him. Although Cyrus does not succeed in killing his brother, because the family's nurse intervenes just in time, Cyrus does temporarily silence Ormus – after the incident, Ormus does not sing again for fourteen years. The opposition of sound and silence in the Cama family, where sound signifies life just as silence symbolises death, dominates Ormus's life: "Sound and silence, silence and sound. This is a story of lives pulled together and pushed apart by what happens in (and between) our ears" (47). As it is for Orpheus, music is Ormus's life force, his gift of giving life to those who hear. It is Vina's source of life too, because she sets his music free after his fourteen years of not singing (47) and later in the novel her voice awakens Ormus from a coma, although he dies for "one hundred and fifty seconds" (322). Ormus rises again "from the dead" because he hears Vina's voice "calling behind him" (322).

Moreover, like Orpheus, Ormus loses the love of his life and his wife Vina to the underworld, and try as he might, he cannot reclaim her: "chasms did open. They can, and did. They consumed his love, stole his Vina from him and would not give her up. And they did send him, as we shall see, all the way to Hell and back" (54). After the earth opens up and swallows Vina during the earthquake in Mexico, Ormus is obsessed with the idea that Vina will come back to him, and he tries to revive her with music. Amongst the countless Vina lookalikes that try and make a career after her death, Ormus finds Mira Celano, twenty years old and Vina "to the life" (519), her disguise as perfect as her voice. Convinced that Mira is Vina incarnated, Ormus organises a VTO revival tour, fittingly titled "Into the Underworld", which is based on a narrative about "an overworld/underworld love story, perhaps a rescue" (547). But just as Orpheus fails in retrieving Eurydice, Ormus does not succeed in resurrecting Vina either. After a disastrous first concert, Mira confronts Ormus and demands that she perform as herself and not as an impersonation of Vina: "No more

Vina, she says. She's standing toe-to-toe with him, she's the taller and stronger of the two and isn't planning on letting him get away. Okay, Ormus? We do it my way or let's forget the whole thing right now. Are you listening? Can you deal with this? Nobody comes back from underground. Nobody did return. Vina Apsara's gone" (552). Mira forces Ormus to look her in the face, standing in close proximity "toe-to-toe" to him, and she forces him to accept the fact that Vina is dead ("Vina Apsara's gone"). At that moment Ormus is forced to admit that Vina is not coming back: "Vina Apsara?", Ormus asks quietly, "Oh, I'm sorry, she died" (552). And just as Orpheus' glance at Eurydice condemns her to the underworld forever, Ormus's words kill Vina for good, as the novel's narrator Rai writes later in the text: Vina's "final death occurred when my darling Mira Celano forced Ormus Cama who loved Vina best to speak the words that killed her for all time to come" (557).

The parallel to Orpheus imbues Ormus with a talent that is more god-given than natural. Like Orpheus, Ormus is "a musical sorcerer whose melodies could make city streets begin to dance and high buildings sway to their rhythm, a golden troubadour the jouncy poetry of whose lyrics could unlock the very gates of Hell" (89). Also, like Orpheus' song, Ormus's music has "magical powers" and people believe that it can "literally change the world" (547). People beg Ormus "to turn his magical powers towards the good. *Heal the breaking planet, sing to us and soothe the aching earth*" (547). Similarly, Vina's voice is described in super-natural and super-human terms: her voice is that of a "goddess" (384), a "golden voice" (394), a "voice-of-the-century-voice" (423). She is "Vina the Voice" (429), and like Ormus with his god-given talent, "it was as if she'd been born that way" (423). Although she is cast as Eurydice in this contemporary retelling of the myth (described in the novel as "Vina Apsara, the beautiful, the dead […] the Indian Lyre. Apsara, from apsarus, a swanlike water nymph" [55]), Vina's voice, too, can "bring about miracles" (483): she sets Ormus's music free after his fourteen years of not singing, and, Orpheus-like, her voice makes Ormus wake up from a coma. Vina's voice promises redemption to all the world's sinners, and moves millions of fans to tears and to ecstasy. As Rai attests:

> Yeah, but you're Orpheus too, I start to tell her. It's your voice that's making the enchanted stones of the city rise deliriously into the blue, that causes the city's banks of electrical images to dance. *Oraia phone*, the best voice, we all know to be yours, not his. And meanwhile he's the one sinking into his otherworld-underworld, and who's going to rescue him […] *Who if not you* […] And I go on, Anyway, Orpheus dies too. (460)

In the end, both Vina and Ormus die (as do Eurydice and Orpheus), but their music lives on, and with them, to a degree, so do Vina and Ormus (just as Orpheus' head, after he is torn apart by the Maenads, is said to have carried on his lament for his wife): "I thought they were supposed to be *dead*", Tara says while zapping TV channels, which all show programmes about Vina, Ormus, and VTO, "but in real life they're just going to go on singing" (575). Again, music gives life, even beyond death, and thus music crosses the borders between worlds, which is its ultimate magic.

4.1.2 Music from another world: music and magical realism

This mythical doubling (Ormus as Orpheus, Vina as Eurydice), which at its core is musical, marks the central position of music in the novel's magical realist narrative. As a magical realist text, *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* integrates the magical effects of music into the text to affect and alter the course of the narrative. In his 2009 publication *Magical Realism and the Postcolonial Novel: Between Faith and Irreverence*, Christopher Warnes defines magical realism as "a mode of narration, that naturalises or normalises the supernatural" (3). Importantly, neither magic nor realism "assert a greater claim to truth than the other" (2), but instead are "represented in a state of equivalence" (3). This creates a productive tension between the magical and the real that renders the form politically subversive and therefore very suitable for postcolonial texts that aim to critique Western concepts of reason and rationality by writing against the predominantly Western narrative mode of realism. As Wendy B. Faris and Lois Parkinson Zamora state in the introduction to their 1995 anthology of essays on magical realism, "[m]agical realist texts are subversive: their in-betweenness, their all at onceness encourages resistance to monological political and cultural structures, a feature that has made the mode particularly useful to writers in postcolonial cultures and, increasingly, to women" (Faris and Zamora 6). While Warnes's own definition of magical realism heavily relies on Faris's and Zamora's anthology, which he considers to be "[t]he landmark publication in English-language critical discourse on magical realism" (4), Warnes also calls for a more differentiated analysis of the mode that takes into account the various national and cultural heritages of authors as different as Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Jorge Luis Borges, Ben Okri, and Salman Rushdie, to name but a few. To this end, Warnes analyses magical realist novels along the fault line between faith and irreverence, where the former tendency describes texts that in their use of magical elements aim to reinstate faith in the

magical, while the latter, irreverent mode aims to dismantle realism as a discourse and its truth claims of perception. As Stephen M. Levin puts it in his review of *Magical Realism and the Postcolonial Novel*, "[i]f faith-based magical realism attempts a reclamation of alternative modes of perceiving the world, irreverent magical realism aims to defamiliarize and deconstruct the reliability of our perceptions altogether" (574). Warnes cites Rushdie's fiction as an example of the irreverent mode and argues that his amalgam of "dreams, reality, psychosis and the supernatural" (Warnes 108), all of which present in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, destabilises established truths and calls into question history as presented by the West. As I will argue in more detail below, music as the agent of the magical thus rewrites the cultural history of rock music from a postcolonial perspective.

It is a mythical gift that Rushdie accredits to Ormus through the analogy with Orpheus, and like Orpheus' song, which allowed him to travel to and return from the underworld, Ormus's music is described as having the power of crossing borders between worlds: he is "the despised *citharode* – the singer with the lyre, or, let's say guitarist – the trickster who uses his music and wiles to cross boundaries, between Apollo and Dionysus, man and nature, truth and illusion, reality and the imagination, even between life and death" (498). This shows most obviously in the effect of Ormus's music and Vina's voice, which is described in terms of sublime beauty that transcends all other music: "when they blend, [they] create a magical third, more Righteous than the Righteous Brothers, Everlier than the Everlys, Supremer than the Supremes" (379). In short: their music is not from this world. The otherworldliness of music is taken literally in the novel, as the text cites Ormus's dead twin Gayomart to be the source and inspiration for Ormus's early music. In 1956, aged 19, Ormus first hears "Heartbreak Hotel" by one Jesse Garon Parker, "reigning king of rock 'n' roll" (91) and the fictionalised version of Elvis Presley, whose alter ego in the novel is named after Elvis's twin brother Jesse Garon Presley (Jesse, like Gayomart, was a stillborn). The effect the song has on Ormus is extraordinary, because in contrast to the maddening crowd of fans and "that legion of impersonators who first rejoiced in, and afterwards rendered grotesque, the fame of a young truck driver from Tupelo, Miss., born in a shotgun shack with a dead twin by his side" (89), Ormus becomes enraged upon hearing the song. He accuses Parker of thievery, because according to Ormus, he (Ormus) wrote the song long before Parker recorded it. As he tells Vina during their first conversation: "I called him a thief because that's what he is. That's my song. I wrote it years ago. Two years, eight months and

twenty-eight days ago, if you want to know" (93). Ormus hears "the future's music playing in his head" (521), not only Parker/Presley, but The Beatles and Bob Dylan, too. He hears the music as well as the vowel sounds, albeit "[t]hose cockeyed words may be somebody else's – a song about *blue shoes*? What *bakvaas*, I swear! – but the vowel sounds are mine" (93). By this logic, the answer is not "Blowin' in the Wind", but "the ganja is growing in the tin" (141), and "[s]ure enough, however, one thousand and one nights later, 'Blowin' in the Wind' hit the airwaves in its authentic version and Ormus shouted at me, 'Do you see now? Don't you see?'" (141). Ormus is not deterred from his conviction that the pop and rock songs that wrote music history are originally his, and all those who heard his versions first "were forced to concede the reality of Ormus's magic gift" (141):

> It was an amazing proposition: that the music came to Ormus before it ever visited the Sun Record Studio or the Brill Building or the Cavern Club. That he was the one who heard it first. Rock music, the music of the city, of the present, which crossed all frontiers […] this was the music that was allegedly first revealed to a Parsi Indian boy named Ormus Cama who heard all the songs in advance, two years, eight months and twenty-eight days before anyone else. (96)

As Rai, the novel's homodiegetic narrator, VTO's chronicler, contemporary Scheherezade and sometimes-lover of Vina, points out: "Two years, eight months and twenty-eight days, by the way, adds up (except in a leap year) to one thousand and one nights. Nineteen fifty-six, however, was a leap year. Go figure. This kind of spooky parallel doesn't always exactly work out" (96). In its reference to *One Thousand and One Nights*, also known as the *Arabian Nights*, the novel blends aspects of the Orpheus myth with 'Eastern' storytelling traditions. Despite Rai's efforts of demystification, Ormus's music and his musical talent is therefore firmly rooted within the myths of Western and Eastern mythology: Ormus is an Orpheus "made in India" (96).

The prophetic music that Ormus hears is not only the music from the future, but it is the music from another world, a "dreamworld" (99) where Ormus imagines his dead brother Gayomart to be, and Gayomart turns out to be the messenger of the music to come. Ormus follows his twin into this dreamworld, which he can access by playing a trick on his mind (97):

> As he stares at the fan he can "make" the room turn upside down, so that he seems to be lying on the ceiling looking down at the fan which is growing like a metal flower from the floor. Then he can change the scale of things, so that the fan seems gigantic, and he can imagine himself sitting beneath it. Where is this? […] It's an oasis in the sands, and he's stretched out in the shade of a tall date palm, whose head tosses slowly in the warm

> breeze. Now, by dint of deeper dreaming, he populates that desert-ceiling […] He is no longer in an oasis but in a city of dazzling lights, standing in front of a building that might be a theatre or a casino or some other secular temple of delights. He plunges in and at once he knows who he's looking for. He can hear his brother, whose voice is faint but not so very far away. His dead twin is singing to him, but he can't make out the song. (97-98)

Gayo's song guides Ormus through the dreamworld: "Like a dark shade detached from his owner, Gayomart Cama slips through this gathering of brighter shadows, singing his elusive song" (98). Growing increasingly desperate to catch his brother and the tune, Ormus follows Gayo "down staircases of decreasing grandeur, through rooms of growing gloom" (98) until he finally reaches a "series of narrow iron steps descending into pitch blackness and Ormus knows his twin brother is down there, waiting, but he's too afraid to descend" (98). Instead, Ormus sits on top of the stairs and listens to his brother sing unfamiliar songs, of which Ormus only hears the melodies and vowel sounds, but never the words: "Gayo has a fine, even a great, singing voice: perfect pitch, immense vocal range, effortless control, expert modulation. But he's too far away; Ormus can't make out the words. Just the vowel sounds" (99). This is how Gayomart sings "the future into his [Ormus's] ears" (378), and this is how Ormus knows the pop and rock songs that write music history (both on the narrative and the extra-textual level) two years, eight months and twenty-eight days before they are released. Although Ormus cannot follow Gayo into the underworld, he takes the songs with him and "Gayomart's elusive songs, those devil-tunes wafting up from satanic darkness, became Ormus's own" (99).

This exemplifies how music can cross boundaries between different worlds, in this case the narrative world Ormus inhabits and his dreamworld, which in Rushdie's description reads like a combination of Gaston Bachelard's internal space, Michel Foucault's heterotopia, and a six-circle version of Dante's Hell:

> Less glamorous than the hall of uncreated film and television characters is the room of unmade stage rôles, and tawdrier still is the parliament chamber of future betrayals, and the saloon bar of uninvented books, and the back alley of uncommitted crimes, until finally there is just a series of narrow iron steps descending into pitch blackness, and Ormus knows his twin brother is down there, waiting, but he's too afraid to descend. (98)

This "dreamworld" through which Ormus chases Gayomart seems to exist primarily in Ormus's head, and he accesses it "by dint of deeper dreaming" (97). Thereby, the dreamworld constitutes what Bachelard terms inner or internal space. In his "Des espaces

autres" lecture ("Of other spaces") from 1967, Michel Foucault describes Bachelard's internal spaces thus:[66]

> Bachelard's monumental work and the descriptions of phenomenologists have taught us that we do not live in a homogeneous and empty space, but on the contrary in a space thoroughly imbued with quantities and perhaps thoroughly fantasmatic as well. The space of our primary perception, the space of our dreams and that of our passions hold within themselves qualities that seem intrinsic: there is a light, ethereal, transparent space, or again a dark, rough, encumbered space; a space from above, of summits, or on the contrary a space from below of mud; or again a space that can be flowing like sparkling water, or space that is fixed, congealed, like stone or crystal. Yet these analyses, while fundamental for reflection in our time, primarily concern internal space. I should like to speak now of external space. (23)[67]

In response to Bachelard, and in clear contradistinction to his concept of internal spaces, Foucault develops the concept of heterotopias, which delineate the space in which we live. For Foucault, a contemporary understanding of space centres on sites, which are defined "by relations of proximity between points or elements" (23). In turn, the relations among sites is what constitutes space: "Our epoch is one in which space takes for us the form of relations among sites" (23). Now, referring to Bachelard, Foucault explains that the spaces we live in are discrete: "we live inside a set of relations that delineates sites which are irreducible to one another and absolutely not superimposable on one another" (23). Heterotopias, then, are specific sites that are in an antagonistic relation to other sites, because heterotopias question the very foundations upon which sites are built. In Foucault's words, heterotopias "have the curious property of being in relation with all the other sites, but in such a way as to suspect, neutralize, or invert the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror, or reflect" (24). They are spaces that "are linked with all the others, which however contradict all the other sites" (24). Utopias, too, fulfil these conditions, but Foucault focuses on heterotopias, because, contrary to utopias, heterotopias are sites that refer to real places, such as cinemas or cemeteries. These are integrated places within the real space people live in, but they present an alternate and/or alternative space, or the possibility thereof:

> real places – places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society – which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the

66 Foucault here refers to Bachelard's *La Poétique de l'espace* (1958), translated into English by Jay Miskowiec as *The Poetics of Space* (1964).

67 As the journal's editor notes: "This text, entitled 'Des Espaces Autres,' and published by the French journal *Architecture-Mouvement-Continuite* in October, 1984, was the basis of a lecture given by Michel Foucault in March 1967. Although not reviewed for publication by the author and thus not part of the official corpus of his work, the manuscript was released into the public domain for an exhibition in Berlin shortly before Michel Foucault's death." (footnote 1, p 22)

> real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality. (24)

Albeit Ormus's dreamworld is, as argued above, an internal space because it seems to exist exclusively in Ormus's head, the dreamworld also bears characteristics of a heterotopia. It is a place where Ormus cannot freely navigate, but where he passively finds himself at particular places without possessing the active agency of getting there; therefore, his dreamworld is not his alone, because it functions within certain axioms of time and space that are independent of Ormus's control and mind. In his description of the building that Ormus enters in his dreamworld, which "might be a theatre or a casino" (97), and which is inhabited by incomplete and yet-to-be-created film, television, and book characters, Rushdie recalls Foucault's cinema or theatre as two prime examples of a heterotopia, in which the audience is presented with alternative narratives. Rushdie's theatre-casino fulfils at least four of Foucault's six characteristics of heterotopias[68]: in a single place it hosts a multitude of possible (fictitious) "sites that are in themselves incompatible" (Foucault 25): "In a corner, Death plays chess with a knight on his way home from the Crusades, and in another corner a Japanese samurai scratches desperately at an itch he cannot reach" (*The Ground Beneath Her Feet* 98).[69] Complying with the rules of a heterotopia, Ormus's dreamworld is not freely accessible to anyone at all times, and Gayomart's songs from the future are an "absolute break with […] traditional time" (Foucault 23). Heterotopias present us with the possibility of alternate spaces and thereby undermine our everyday conviction that the space – the reality, the world – as we know it is the only valid option. As a heterotopia, Ormus's dreamworld – after Foucault – inverts the set of relations that are valid on the level of the narrative, and things that are impossible in the world of the narrative are made possible in Ormus's dreamworld, which accounts for his magical gift of knowing all the songs 1001 nights in advance, and of rock'n'roll coming from the East to the West.

68 Ian Buchanan for the *Oxford Dictionary of Critical Theory* succinctly summarises these six characteristics thus: "(i) heterotopias are of a specific type; (ii) heterotopias can be transformed, reinvented, or made afresh; (iii) heterotopias have the ability to juxtapose in a single real place several emplacements that are incompatible in themselves (cinema is his prime example of this); (iv) heterotopias are connected to what he [Foucault] calls heterochronias, ruptures or breaks in time; (v) heterotopias always presuppose a system of opening and closing that isolates them and makes them penetrable at the same time; (vi) heterotopias transform our relations with other real spaces either to make us see them as less real or to compensate us for their relative shoddiness" (n. pag.).

69 While Foucault insists that heterotopias are spaces within a real place, the fictionalisation of the novel suspends any notion of real places, which is why the theatre-casino in Ormus's dreamworld can be considered, within the diegesis of that dreamworld, as real.

The theme of different worlds is common in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, as Elsa Linguanti points out in her introduction to *The Great Work of Making Real*. Linguanti distinguishes between a "triad" of three worlds that are featured in the novel: "our-world – the underworld – the otherworld" (17). The "our-world" describes the narrative's main diegesis. The underworld refers to the world of the dead and the mythical place Ormus wants to venture to in order to reclaim Vina (also, the "steps descending into pitch blackness" [*The Ground Beneath Her Feet* 98] where Gayomart resides can easily be read as a potential entrance to the underworld). Thirdly, the otherworld, as it is called in the novel, is the text's principal heterotopia and the narrative's ultimate other, because it is implied that this other world is the world outside the narrative. It is an extra-diegetic level that describes the author's world where John F. Kennedy is shot, "Nixon's President" (350), British troops have never fought in Vietnam, and where "Lou Reed's a *man*", as Ormus tells Vina (350). Ormus first glimpses this otherworld on a plane from Bombay to London through a "tear in the sky, and for a terror-stricken instant [he] glimpses miracles through the gash, visions for which he can find no words, the mysteries at the heart of things, Eleusinian, unspeakable, bright" (253). What first reads like a metaphor of travel and change ("[t]he person who arrives won't be the one who left, or not quite" [253]), becomes more substantiated as the narrative progresses and particularly so after a car accident leaves Ormus with a literal double-vision that allows him to see the "our-world" with his one eye and the otherworld with his other. In Ormus's descriptions, the otherworld is a place that is different, not better, than the "our-world": "it wasn't a better place, just a different one, no more than a variation that didn't quite work" (537).

Like Ormus's dreamworld, the otherworld is not a utopia, but a heterotopia: "It's not paradise, he says. It's not so very unlike here" (349). The otherworld is an imperfect mirror-image, recognisable but with alterations: "I'd call them variations, moving like shadows behind the stories we know. This doesn't have to be supernature, it doesn't have to be god. It could be just – don't ask me – physics, okay? It could be some physics beyond our present capacity to comprehend. It could just be I found a way of stepping outside the picture" (350). The border between the worlds is permeable to an extent: Ormus can see it; later in the novel Rai can record it; two women are able to cross from one world to the other. This shows that the otherworld is not a mere figment of Ormus's imagination, and thereby not an internal space in Bachelard's sense, but a heterotopia in Foucault's. This is substantiated when Rai

manages to capture a woman from the otherworld on film and thus present the reader with "proof". However, as discrete heterotopias, the our-world and the otherworld cannot exist in the same space; they are on a collision course and at the end of the novel the otherworld has to give way and vanish.

Through his vision, Ormus, like his brother Gayomart, has "heterotopian tendencies" (537), which he uses mainly to draw inspiration for his music: "He shuts out the world and hears the music of the spheres" (383), and what he hears and sees of the otherworld inspires Ormus to write the music that makes VTO successful. Again, music crosses boundaries and thus travels between worlds: as with the "our-world – underworld" boundary, music crosses the border between the "our-world" and the otherworld and Ormus can listen to it. As Linguanti writes, music and love are "the reconciling forces" between the three worlds (17). The implication that the novel's otherworld is the author's/reader's our-world also suggests that the music Ormus hears is not only the music from the future and his dreamworld, presented to him by his heterotopian twin, but that it is also the music from the otherworld (after all, most of the musical references are also valid on the extra-diegetic level, as I have already implied with the Elvis parallel and of course the novel's mentioning of The Beatles and Bob Dylan).[70] As stated above, Ormus's (and Vina's) music and talents are not from this world, and this would be a very literal rendering of music's otherworldliness. Also, heterotopias make the miracle of music crossing the worlds credible (because different worlds rely on different rules), but the reverse is also true: given its magical origins and effects, which are stressed throughout the novel, music suspends disbelief and can account for the fantastic, in this case for the existence of different worlds and alternative realities, thus making the magical real. In its (magical) ability to cross boundaries and travel worlds (of all kinds), music thus becomes an agent of the magical.

According to Wendy B. Faris, the co-existence of different worlds is one of the key features of magical realism in literature. In her chapter "Scheherazade's Children: Magical Realism and Postmodern Fiction", in *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, Faris identifies five primary characteristics of magical realist fiction, of which the fourth states: "We experience the closeness or near-merging of two realms, two worlds" (172). This includes "[f]luid boundaries between the worlds of the living and the dead" (172) and "the boundary between fact and fiction", both of which are often blurred in magical realist texts

70 Christopher Rollason delves into extra-diegetic musical references in his essay "Rushdie's Un-Indian Music: *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*".

(173). Seeing that the magical elements of magical realist fiction are grounded and embedded within realism and therefore "grow organically out of the reality portrayed" (163), the reality portrayed is usually recognisable to the reader. However, as Faris argues, history is represented in variation, rendering the fictional world an alternate version of the world outside the text: "In many cases, in magical realist fictions, we witness an idiosyncratic recreation of historical events, but events grounded firmly in historical realities – often alternate versions of officially sanctioned accounts" (169-170). This grounding in reality symbolises the anchoring of the magical elements in realism. This historical anchoring, as Faris argues in reference to John Foster, "is well demonstrated in what John Foster calls "felt history," whereby a character bodily experiences historical forces. This phenomenon is exaggerated and particularized in magical realist fiction" (170), and Ormus's literal double vision of alternate realities, where one eye sees a different world than the other, is a case in point.[71]

What makes the co-existence of alternative worlds important within a postcolonial context is the fact that alternative realities present history at an angle and as slightly askew from the commonly held historical beliefs. As in Rushdie's novel *Shame*, the fictional world – the "our-world" – in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* exists "at a slight angle to reality" (*Shame* 29): it is off-centred, and thus questions our perception of the centre of reality. Michael Wood, in his discussion of *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* for the *New York Times*, focuses on the effect of such divergences of fictional and real worlds, and argues that "[t]here is a speculative or satirical edge to their divergences; the country at an angle is a quizzical commentary on our own. History disappears into fantasy only to reappear as a haunting or a reproof" (n. pag.). The heterotopian otherworld in the novel, which correlates to the reader's "our-world", literally others the world we live in and thus makes it strange and appear as less real. This questions the assumption of validity that underlies our – and from a postcolonial reading of the novel the West's – self-image. By asking what is to be considered real in fiction, magical realism in general questions the concept of truth and the project of history writing as such. Therefore, *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* falls into the category of what Brian McHale coins "postmodernist revisionist historical fiction", in which "history and fiction exchange places, history becoming fictional and fiction becoming 'true' history – and the real world seems to get lost in the shuffle" (96). Magical realism thus provides a

71 See John Burt Foster Jr.'s essay on "Magical Realism, Compensatory Vision, and Felt History: Classical Realism Transformed in *The White Hotel*", in *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community* (267-283).

platform to rewrite history, and in a postcolonial context, the form as such offers a critique of cultural imperialism, as Faris emphasises:

> That realism has been a European, or first world, export, in conjunction with its mimetic program, its claim to fashioning an accurate portrait of the world, has in some instances tended to ally it with imperialism – Spanish, English, French, Russian, U.S. – endowing it with an implicitly authoritarian aura for writers in colonial situations. Taking all of this into account, we can see that magical realism does continue in the critical vein of realism, but it achieves its critical aims with different, postsurrealistic, resources and questions homogeneous systems in the name of plurality. (180)

Where realism presents a singular version of the world that claims (and relies on its claim) to be true, magical realism presents the world with a twist and offers a version of the real as it is not. Thereby, magical realism "creates space for interactions of diversity" (Faris and Zamora 3). In this, magical realism is intrinsically political, because it defies realism's hegemony: "In magical realist texts, ontological disruption serves the purpose of political and cultural disruption: magic is often given as a cultural corrective, requiring readers to scrutinize accepted realistic conventions of causality, materiality, motivation" (3).

Given its magical qualities, music in the novel acts as an agent of the magical by travelling between the different worlds. As argued above, these include the triad of our-world, otherworld, and underworld, as well as different countries and continents: "Music – Vina's voice, singing Ormus's melodies – surges round the world, crossing all frontiers, belonging everywhere and nowhere, and its rhythm is the rhythm of life" (*The Ground Beneath Her Feet* 482). It thereby marks the instances in which the text moves back and forth "between the disparate worlds of what we might call the historical and the imaginary" (Faris and Zamora 1), or, to recall Rushdie's words, music crosses "the permeable frontier between the world of the imagination and the one we inhabit" ("U2" 105). Crucially, and in a reversal of cultural origins, Ormus's songs, which in the otherworld (and by implication the reader's world) are the songs that write Western rock history, originate in India and travel to the US. Thereby, music in the novel undermines the history writing of Western culture and destabilises its myth of origin, which is essential for the postcolonial agenda of counter-acting hegemonic powers of location. In *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, the cultural history of rock music is thus presented at an angle to reality and rewritten from a postcolonial perspective by suggesting that this predominantly Western art form has its origins in the East: "But it's this boy from Bombay who will complete the American story, who will take the music and throw it up in the air and the way it falls will inspire a generation, two

generations, three. Yay, America. Play it as it lays" (252). Ormus takes his music Westward, and disoriented America turns East in order to find itself in Ormus's songs:

> Ormus's music has arrived like an affirmation from another East to enter the musical heart of Americanness, to flow into the river of dreams; but it's driven by the democratic conviction, retained by Ormus from the days when Gayomart sang the future into his ears, that the music is his as well, born not just in the U.S.A. but in his own heart, long ago and far away. Just as England can no longer lay exclusive claim to the English language, so America is no longer the sole owner of rock'n'roll: that is Ormus's unstated sub-text (Vina, always the loudmouth, the thrower-down of gauntlets, will come out with it soon enough, and put a few patriotic noses out of joint) […] America, disoriented, seeking a new voice, succumbs to theirs. Young Americans, in search of new frontiers, board VTO's Orient express. (378-9)

This desire of the West to define itself against the East by idolising its exoticism can be read in terms of Said's theories on Orientalism as a neo-colonial act of utilising the East's otherness as a mere mirror for the West's selfness. As Said writes in *Orientalism*, "[t]he Orient was almost a European invention, and had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences" (1). In a more recent publication, *The Postcolonial Exotic* published in 2001, Graham Huggan extends the notion of the exotic oriental other, arguing that postcolonial writing, both fiction and non-fiction, often perpetuates exoticism in order to appeal to a predominantly Western reader (and scholar). This "cultural commodification of postcolonial writing", Huggan states in his introduction, rests on "the exotic appeal attributed to putatively 'marginal' literatures and cultures" (ix). According to Huggan, postcolonial tactics of resistance depend on Western modes of production and consumption, and this dependency encourages an exoticised representation of the postcolonial other.

To a certain extent, and the quote above is a good example of this, *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* portrays India as such an exotic spectacle, desirable to the West precisely because of the allures and pleasures promised by describing Ormus's music as an "affirmation from another East" that flows "into the river of dreams" from "far away" (378). However, the episode above, and particularly the reference to "VTO's Orient express" (379), can also be read by taking up the Orpheus parallel explored at the beginning of this chapter and arguing, with Shaul Bassi, that music is used here in an act of reverse cultural imperialism. In his chapter on "Orpheus's Other Voyage", Bassi focuses on the Orpheus myth that casts him as one of the Argonauts, sailing on the Argo in search of the golden fleece, on a journey which, as Pierre Brunel points out, "becomes frankly colonial" (qtd. in Bassi 99). Bassi argues that

Orpheus' music does not only, as argued above, give life, but that "[h]is lyre has also been played at the service of a different order, that of Western colonisation. In this light Orpheus can be said to epitomise the ambivalent role of music in the millennial process of contact between different cultures" (99). Bassi proposes a reading of *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* as "the most recent chapter in a long narrative that figures the relationship between music, colonialism and globalisation through the myth of Orpheus" (100). His main thesis is what he terms the "dual role of music", whereby music is an instrument of both cultural communication and cultural domination. Music is regarded "ideologically as an agent of colonisation and utopistically as a vehicle of dialogue and liberation" (100). During the journey of the Argo, Orpheus performs two central acts of colonial appropriation: he names the desert island of Thynias, thus performing "the classical act of nomination that symbolically appropriates a territory", and his lyre is stronger than the Sirens' melody, "a scene that could metaphorically be read as the defeat of an alluring and threatening (female) native culture" (101). As Bassi concludes: "Orpheus leaves his trace on all the acts of colonisation performed by the Argonauts" (101). Thus, music becomes an instrument of colonisation: Bassi sketches colonial measures that used music as a means to appease possibly violent indigenous people, and to demonstrate cultural dominance over the natives. This shows "the ambivalent nature of music in transcultural contacts. On the one hand, it appears as a language capable of communicating across civilisational divides and, on the other, it is an instrument (pun intended) of conquest and, at a later stage, of cultural colonisation" (103). Reversing imperial geography, Rushdie's Orpheus comes from the East and conquers the West in an act of reversed cultural colonisation. America follows his tune and finds affirmation of its identity in Vina's voice.

4.2 Rock music, cultural imperialism, and theories of globalisation

4.2.1 Music and cultural imperialism

As shown throughout the first part of this chapter, the music that Ormus brings West is rock'n'roll, rather than traditional Indian music. This fact leads Christopher Rollason in his essay "Rushdie's Un-Indian Music" to conclude that "[t]he reader will search in vain for any but the most superficial references to any subcontinental musical tradition, be it erudite,

folkloric or popular" (18). Instead, "Ormus and Vina are stuck firmly within the Anglo-American rock-music mainstream" (11), and neither Ormus nor Vina are "modelled on an Indian singer" (11). Rollason observes that "VTO's music, and, therefore, the greater part of both Vina's and Ormus' musical production is, from the textual descriptions and the sources and analogies named, clearly a textbook case of mainstream Anglo-American 60s/70s stadium rock, bereft of any 'Asian' input other than the two stars' national origins" (19). What Rollason mourns and derides about the novel is the lack of cultural 'authenticity' (which, as I will argue below, is as problematic as Shadwell's notion of authenticity in *The Buddha of Suburbia*): "We could have had an Indian Buena Vista Social Club; what we got was VTO, playing born-in-the-USA rock'n'roll while laying claim to an Asian 'authenticity' that derives from literary sleight-of-hand alone" (21). The alternative that Rollason would have wished for is a homage to world music, which in his eyes is "a viable contemporary alternative to the commercial excesses of today's mass-consumption Anglo-American music" (20).

In the novel, this position is taken by Ormus's brother Cyrus, who accuses Ormus of betraying his cultural and national origins: "My brother, I regret so much to say, you have become a man who hates his own kind" (*The Ground Beneath Her Feet* 556). According to Cyrus, Ormus's music is a weapon of cultural mass destruction from the West: "We must not take Ormus Cama at his own low estimate, as a mere troubadour or popster; for his self-hating, deracinated music has long been at the service, I would even say at the very heart, of the arrogance of the West, where the world's tragedy is repackaged as youth entertainment and given an infectious, foot-tapping beat" (556). Cyrus's line of attack is taken up by Indian government officials that deny Ormus and his band the permission to perform in India, because "his songs and performances are open attacks on intercultural as well as intracultural stability; and that accordingly Ormus and his collaborators should under no circumstances be permitted to perform on Indian soil" (556).

The problem with Rollason's – and Cyrus's – argument is that Rollason's notion of world music is idealised and based on a concept of "authenticity" that is in turn defined by its relationship to nationalism. Paul Simon's album *Graceland* is legitimised in Rollason's view by Simon's "collaboration with South African musicians", and the *Buena Vista Social Club* project (film and CD) gain their cultural credibility by virtue of the "agglomeration of superb Cuban musicians" (Rollason 20). Rollason's idealised vision of world music as entailing "an openness to musical dialogue and cooperation on a footing of cultural equality" (20),

however, does not hold. As Shaul Bassi explains, what is hailed as world music often either resurrects an outdated style (such as Paul Simon's *Graceland* album of 1986, which takes up African musical influences that are two decades old), or presents an idealised cultural still life outside historical-political contexts (as Slavoj Žižek argues in *Welcome to the Desert of the Real* about Wim Wenders's presentation of Cuba in *Buena Vista Social Club* [cf. Bassi 111]). Rollason's notion of world music is idealistic and thereby simplistic, because while he champions world music as an antidote to Anglo-American mass consumerism, Rollason ignores the commercial side of world music and the fact "that the very category of World Music was a commercial coinage agreed upon in 1987 by the major independent record companies" (Bassi 110). Therefore, and as Simon Frith argues in "The Discourse of World Music", the economic innocence of world music is a myth in itself: "From the start, therefore, world music described the commercial process in which the sounds of other people ('Diverse forms of music as yet unclassifiable in Western terms') were sold to British record buyers" (305).

The commercial process that motivates the marketing of world music calls for a label that homogenises differences and stresses the local, while ignoring global interdependencies of music production. As Frith explains:

> On the one hand, there is remarkably little information available about the licensing and publishing deals involved, about copyrights and contracts, about the money flow. On the other hand, world music sleeve notes systematically play down the role of record producers in shaping non-Western sounds for Western ears, in describing Western markets to non-Western artists. When the sales emphasis is on local musical authenticity, the creative role of the international record producer is best not mentioned. (309)

Thus, there is clearly an economic motivation behind world music's myth of authenticity. Also, it does not matter if the music is authentic, so long as people think it is authentic. Bassi therefore concludes that "the paradox of a world music lies in the possibility that it may offer a superficial tribute to cultural diversity while in fact concealing more sophisticated forms of depoliticised exoticism" (111). Thus understood, authenticity is a re-inscription of the exotic, as Frith argues:

> in the context of the denunciation of Western pop artifice and decadence, the authentic itself becomes the exotic (and vice versa). This move is familiar enough from the long European Romantic celebration of the native (the peasant and the African) as more real (because more natural) than the civilized Westerner. The implication is that world musicians can now give us those direct, innocent rock and roll pleasures that Western musicians are too jaded, too corrupt to provide. (308)

The notion of the authentic taps into a neo-colonial discourse of the exotic other. From a postcolonial perspective, the notion of world music's authenticity is therefore very problematic, because it serves as an ideological construct that perpetuates cultural imperialism. For Frith, this marks a "suspicion that what 'world music' really describes is a double process of exploitation: Third World musicians being treated as raw materials to be processed into commodities for the West and First World musicians" (308).

Moreover, in his insistence on a cultural authenticity based on national belonging and his critique of Rushdie's music as being "Un-Indian", Rollason essentially reduces art to the politics of ethnic representation. As Bassi phrases it: "his solution is to pin down individuals to their ethnic 'destiny', as if Asian musicians were bound to produce only Asian music (an opinion which, if applied to classical music, would be blatantly racist)" (111). Rollason thereby reduces VTO's music to a very simplistic political statement (of good wholesome world music from the East versus bad capitalist rock music from the West) and denies it its artistic validity. As John Joughin and Simon Malpas argue in their introduction to *The New Aestheticism*, to reduce art to political, cultural, or any other kind of discourse, is to negate its aesthetics and to deny art its 'art-ness'. Joughin and Malpas instead argue that the aesthetic is the irreducible element in art, which cannot – and should not – be explained away:

> the equiprimordiality of the aesthetic – that, although it is without doubt tied up with the political, historical, ideological, etc., thinking it as other than determined by them, and therefore reducible to them, opens a space for an artistic or literary specificity that can radically transform its critical potential and position with regard to contemporary culture. (3)

In other words, the aesthetic in art is its defining element, which accounts for it being art and which cannot be reduced to any other discourse: "Aesthetic specificity is not, however, entirely explicable, or graspable, in terms of another conceptual scheme or genre of discourse" (3). "The singularity of the work's 'art-ness'", as Joughin and Malpas write, escapes any contextual meaning, because it marks the meaning of the artwork as being art (3). Therefore, from a postcolonial reading of Rollason's argument, to criticise VTO's music for its Un-Indianness is to reduce the music to a question of ethnic politics, which in turn is not only racially essentialist as Bassi implies (it is that, too), but also neo-colonial, because Rollason assumes a position from which to judge – and deny – the music its 'art-ness', thereby perpetuating colonial discourse.

4.2.2 The politics of rock: from cultural imperialism to globalisation

Despite the irreducible aesthetic element of music, the politics of music in the novel in regards to location are not definitive, and therefore require further discussion. Throughout the novel, it does not become apparent whether rock music is an instance of cultural imperialism from the West, a hybrid global cultural form that allows for localised appropriation (or even, as in Ormus's case, for cultural liberation brought Westward), or whether rock music, indeed, transcends the politics of location by belonging to a global youth generation, united by the music's spirit of revolution and its potential for liberation. Rollason's line of criticism is an example of theories hinging upon postcolonial cultural imperialism, a set of theories according to which the West still holds a position of predominant power in the postcolonised world. This power, however, is not as obviously cemented in imperial conquest and political domination, but finds expression in more subtle forms of cultural influences, as well as the propagation of "a global system of consumer capitalism" and the reality of "unequal access to the means of production, distribution, ownership, control and consumption" (Hesmondhalgh 180). According to cultural imperialism theorists like Rollason, the established colonial paths of political and economic dependency between former colonisers and former colonies are now being re-used to implement cultural dependencies. Rushdie at one point acknowledges this notion of cultural imperialism, by describing Western music as the Trojan Horse outside the gates of Indochina that, once let in, revealed its weapons of cultural mass destruction and in an act of cultural neo-imperialism conquered and ultimately won the cultural war. As the novel's narrator Rai comments:

> My idea was that the war in Indochina hadn't ended at the time of the ignominious U.S. withdrawal. They'd left a wooden horse standing at the gates, and when the Indochinese accepted the gift, the real warriors of America – the big corporations, the sports culture of basketball and baseball, and of course rock 'n' roll – came swarming out of its belly and overran the place. Now, in Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi, too, America stood revealed as the real victor. Indochina became just another consumer-serf of (and supplier of cheap labor to) Americana International. Almost every young Indochinese person wanted to eat, dress, bop and profit in the good old American way. MTV, Nike, McWorld. Where soldiers had failed, U.S. values – that is, greenbacks, set to music – had triumphed. (441)

Here, rock music is depicted as part and parcel of a form of cultural imperialism that has been termed "Americanization", and which George Ritzer and Todd Stillman define as a "cousin to a neo-Marxian conception of economic imperialism and cultural hegemony" (31).

Americanization describes a process by which the world is increasingly shaped by culture as commodity exported from the US, including the technological means required for the production, distribution, and consumption of a cultural mass medium such as rock music, which is one of the most prevalent examples used.[72] In 1962, Williams defined Americanization as the "propagation of American ideas, customs, social patterns, industry and capital around the world" (qtd. in Ritzer and Sillman 36). The implications of Americanization are neo-imperial in that "America's aggressive exporting of media and comodities amounts to a crypto-imperialist attack on national sovereignties" (31). This depiction of rock music is at odds with Ormus's earlier claim in the novel that the US, despite being regarded as the birthplace of rock music, can no longer claim ownership to the music, because Ormus has appropriated the music for himself. Taking a closer analytical look, it becomes clear that the rock musics discussed in the examples above are of two different kinds: one from the West, the other from the East. Where Western rock is described as part of the Trojan Horse of US-American cultural domination, Ormus's music, on the other hand, is depicted to have the same effects (he came, sang, and conquered), but with Ormus, rock music holds a positive connotation: a whole generation of young Americans finds its new identity in his music (rather than a whole generation of young Indochinese being robbed of their old identities). It is the same music causing the same effects, but with different names – cultural domination versus cultural liberation – and the deciding difference is where it comes from. Location, or more precisely, origin, becomes the determining factor for labelling music as a positive or negative influence. Yet, this interpretation of music, and with it the cultural and geographical politics of rock music, are not intrinsic to music itself, but ascribed to, and informed by, the socio-political context of its production and/or reception. Music is thereby depicted as intrinsically ambiguous, pitted as a colonising force on the one hand, and as a liberating force on the other.

Rather than emphasising the homogenising effects of cultural Americanization, theories on the globalisation of culture, in general, stress the intermingling and intermixing of cultural influences and the hybridisation of cultural products. In "'Rockization': Diversity within Similarity in World Popular Music", Motti Regev argues that popular music around the world has adopted and implemented what he calls "the rock aesthetic", which has its origins

72 See, for example, Simon Frith's *The Sociology of Rock* (1978), in which Frith examines the consumption, production, and ideology of rock music and analyses rock as leisure, youth culture, a force for liberation or oppression, and as background music. He argues that rock music is a mass cultural form which derives its meaning and relevance from being a mass medium.

in Anglo-American pop and rock, but which is being appropriated into different cultural contexts around the world. Regev defines "the rock aesthetic" thus:

> a set of constantly changing practices and stylistic imperatives for making popular music, based on the use of electric and electronic sound textures, amplification, sophisticated studio craftsmanship, and 'untrained' and spontaneous techniques of vocal delivery. Central to the rock aesthetic is also an eclectic logic that encourages the application of these means to any musical style. In addition, the rock aesthetic tends to emphasize the authorship of performers. (224)

Although Regev recognises the Anglo-American origin of "the rock aesthetic", he emphasises that this set of characteristics has been globally adapted into different cultural contexts; while the form stayed the same, the content differed: "Paradoxically enough, at least initially, an Anglo-American cultural form, associated with multinational media and cultural industries, was absorbed into local cultures as a tool for expressing local cultural uniqueness" (226). Frith, too, stresses this point when he describes rock music as "the other of non-Western cultures" ("World Music" 313). Strengthening local identity in the face of a globalised culture, rock "can be seen as the authentic articulation of a local identity in its very recognition of the complexity of that identity, of the global in the local and the local in the global" (314).

This renders rock music simultaneously globally recognisable and locally specific. As Regev points out, "[p]opular music thus epitomizes the new forms of cultural diversity associated with the globalization of culture – diversities based on cores of shared practices and technologies, and on logics of eclecticism and hybridity" (222). This "eclecticism and hybridity" is obvious in Ormus's music too, which the novel describes as a hybrid mixture of cultural influences, ranging from "the great American musical truths, the foot-tapper tempi that start out walking and then find the dance hidden in the walk; the placing of the beats that tug at our bodies; the speak-to-me rhythm and blues" (*The Ground Beneath Her Feet* 379) to the "un-American sounds" that Ormus includes in his songs: "the sexiness of the Cuban horns, the mind-bending patterns of the Brazilian drums, the Chilean woodwinds moaning like the winds of oppression, the African male voice choruses like trees swaying in freedom's breeze, the grand old ladies of Algerian music with their yearning squawks and ululations, the holy passion of the Pakistani *qawwals*" (379). Therefore, the musical story that *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* tells is not one of a packaged American culture exported into the world with intent towards homogenisation, but of multicultural influences coming in and

rendering American music more heterogeneous. In a country where "everyone comes from somewhere else" (252), the music, too, is "smuggled-in music" from all over the world:

> The drums of Africa that once beat out messages across a giant landscape in which even the trees made music, for example when they absorbed water after a drought, listen and you'll hear them, yikitaka yikitaka yikitak. The Polish dances, the Italian weddings, the zorba-zithering Greeks. The drunken rhythm of salsa saints. The cool heart music that heals our aching soul, and the hot democratic music that leaves a hole in the beat and makes our pants want to get up and dance. (252)

This interconnection between the migration of people and the correlated migration of culture is explained by Arjun Appadurai, who in *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* theorises the condition and process of global culture by examining the interrelations between global media, global migration, and imagination. Building on Anderson's concept of imagined communities, Appadurai devises the concept of imagined worlds, which extends Anderson's community from the national to the global level. Appadurai argues that global "mass-mediated images, scripts, and sensations" in combination with a global mass migration of people leads to an imagination of the self and the world as being mobile and in constant flux, and to "a new order of instability in the production of modern subjectivities" (4). Crucial for this argument – and for theories of globalisation more generally – is the dissociation of imagined communities from the nation state, on which theories of cultural imperialism very much rely. As Hesmondhalgh points out, according to the globalisation approach, the cultural imperialism model is "outdated", because it relies on relationships between nation-states that do not hold up in an increasingly globalised world (166). And music, again in a paradoxical double-function, strengthens the nation, as I argued in Chapter One, while also escaping national borders, because it is not contained by geography. As Appadurai shows, imagination travels along the global routes of migration, and music is a particularly potent traveller. "Music is always in constant flux, music is the perennial undocumented immigrant; it has always moved beyond borders without the required paperwork", write Corona and Madrid in *Postnational Musical Identities* (5).

4.2.3 Make music, not war

What accounts for the globalising and unifying force of rock music is not only the ubiquitous aesthetics of music itself, but the intrinsic politics of rebellion and subversion that rock

music holds, which render it a global force of political protest and potential liberation. In the novel, Ormus's music and Vina's singing attract a broad following because their audiences in America find their own anger, frustration and disillusionment with the American government and the war in Vietnam captured within Ormus's music. Set at the end of the 1960s, when opposition against the war was rising amongst the American public, the release of VTO's second album, the *Peace Ballads*, strikes a nerve with the American people:

> "Picking up the Pieces," "(You Brought Me) Peace Without Love," "Long Journey Home," "Might As Well Live": it's easy enough to hear the bitter, disabused ironies in many of Ormus's songs. But the music he's come up with is jauntily, almost perversely up-tempo. The overall effect is oddly affirmative, even anthemic, and for many young people these jaundiced, dystopic tracks become unlikely, adult anthems of relief, a new beginning, release. (381)

Ormus's music comes at a time when a whole youth generation is disillusioned, and at a time when peace seems like an afterthought to war. Rock music becomes an outlet for political frustration and an anthem of peace: "because in this dark time it's the rock music that represents the country's most profound artistic engagement with the death of its children, not just the music of peace and psychotropic drugs but the music of rage and horror and despair. Also of youth, youth surviving in spite of everything, in spite of the children's crusade that's blowing it apart" (265). The *Peace Ballads* in their titles and descriptions are reminiscent of the songs released at the time, including John Lennon's 1969 anti-war anthem "Give Peace a Chance". Kim Herzinger, in "The soundtrack of Vietnam", lists "Bring the Boys Home" by Freda Payne (1971), "America" by Simon and Garfunkel (1968), and "Peace Train" by Cat Stevens (1971), amongst others, and analyses the ways in which rock music was indeed an anti-war response. Herzinger argues that first, rock was an "expression of confusion, perplexity, and instability"; second, it reflected the people's "demoralized helplessness about the ongoing war" by expressing a "doomed sense of political, cultural, or moral sickness"; and third, rock music came to embody "anger and accusation", directly aimed against "the military, the draft, public complacency, the perceived intolerance and inflexibility of those who supported the war, or the very idea of war itself" (265). This rendered rock music not only a comment on the times, but a means of political expression. According to Herzinger, rock music "gave voice to the anger and frustration of the period" (267), to feelings of disillusionment and "an idyllic version of America that seemed to be teetering on the edge of collapse" (268). Rock music was the perfect medium of protest against the Vietnam war,

because it united people in their opposition against the war and provided them with a mouthpiece to voice this protest:

> The power of rock music was that it was capable of speaking across an entire spectrum of attitudes and positions, and to articulate them so memorably and expressively that [...] it has become practically impossible to remember, or even imagine, the Vietnam War without its rock soundtrack. Vietnam was a 'rock-and-roll war,' as Samuel Hynes has said, both for the soldiers on the ground and for American culture as a whole. (268)

The spirit of protest and rebellion is at the core of rock's faculty to unite people, not only within one country, but on a global scale. The subversive capabilities demonstrated by rock music in the 1960s allowed for its successful adaptation as a mechanism for protest and change all over the world in the 1970s and 1980s. As Regev points out:

> [rock music] was not necessarily perceived as another cultural form embodying blatant cultural imperialism. The rock aesthetic was accepted by musicians and audiences around the world as a way – as *the* way for some of them – to make local music that expressed rebellion against conservative traditional cultures and authoritarian regimes. Local hybrids of rock music often came to be perceived as authentic expressions of a modern and contemporary spirit within local or national cultures. ("Rockization" 226)

Rebellion against authority is universal, argues Lane Crothers in *Globalization and American Popular Culture*, and rock 'n' roll, as the political and expressive medium of choice for this rebellion, is therefore "at the center of contemporary globalization" (55).

4.3 Conclusion

While the novel very much endorses this political function of rock music, it also entertains the notion that there is a mythical-magical aspect within music that cannot be reduced to politics, an element that is ineffable and that escapes any contextualisation. Such mythical-magical powers are able to transcend the borders between worlds, and thus unite people across national borders and continental rifts. Music in general is rebellion against authority, because it refuses to stay put within any prescribed borders of meaning. Therefore, while music can be appropriated by political agendas related to cultural imperialism, globalisation, and postcolonialism to mean for them, music cannot be reduced to a purely political function, as Malpas and Joughin demonstrate. Music is not oppositional in the political sense, because of its ability to transcend political meaning. Music is more universal than the particularities of politics, because it is not political by nature; it is music by nature, and it holds a significance which unites people on a more general level. Music is egalitarian: "Rock

music, the music of the city, of the present, which crossed all frontiers, which belonged equally to everyone" (*The Ground Beneath Her Feet* 96). The open accessibility of music is furthered because the meaning of music is not contained within the words that come with the rock and pop songs Rushdie cites throughout the novel. When Ormus hears Parker's/Presley's version of "Heartbreak Hotel", he stresses that the music and the vowel sounds are his, whereas the words to the song are nonsense lyrics that are made up by somebody else ("a song about *blue shoes*? What *bakvaas*, I swear!" [93]). Early in the novel, it is explained that Ormus does not understand the lyrics to the songs that Gayomart sings to him, because his brother is too far away and Ormus is afraid to follow him. All that Ormus is able to discern, then, are the melody and the vowel sounds, "[t]he noise without the meaning. Absurdity. Eck-eck eye ay-ee eck ee" (99). Instead of the original lyrics, Ormus invents his own:

> At first Ormus played only the songs he had half learned from Gayomart in his dreams, singing those strange vowel sequences of his that made no sense to anyone, or fitting non-sensical words to them that utterly undermined the mysterious authority of the dream-music: "The ganja, my friend, is growing in the tin; the ganja is growing in the tin:" (And then, diminuendo:) "The dancer is glowing with her sin. The gardener is mowing with a grin. The ganja is growing in the tin." "For Pete's sake, Ormus," Vina protested, giggling. "But that's what it sounds like," he'd complain, sheepishly. "It's hard to hear." (141)

There is no logical meaning to the lyrics, only absurdity. Rushdie here seems to suggest that the significance of the song lies within the lyrics and that the absence of words equals absurdity, but when Ormus finally hears the "true" lyrics to his songs, he finds them much more absurd than his own nonsensical versions. This questions and undermines the 'actual' lyrics and meaning of the songs; and it shows that while music can obviously cross the boundaries between worlds (Gayo's underworld, Ormus's our-world) and countries (music from the West heard and played first in the East), the song lyrics lack that capacity. Language is bound to and by cultural specificities and circumstances, music is not. The meaning of music and its potential to unite people does not reside within the words as the source for concrete meaning, but within the sound of the music itself (highly ironic, since it is set in a novel where all music is rendered in terms of lyrics and linguistic descriptions). The meaning that the audiences in the novel derive from music is universal, insofar as music subverts the identity politics of postcolonialism and globalisation.

Moreover, it is not only the magic of VTO's mythical music that travels borders and connects people around the world in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, but the connection also demonstrates the very humanness of the characters. The novel implies that music transcends the limits of humanity, that music is therefore super-human and not from this world. This transcendence, however, also renders music in its core essentially human, because it highlights – by contrast – the humanity of the musicians. What connects the audiences in the novel is the reverence for Vina in particular, rendered god-like by the music, but also very much human by her human fallacies, scandals, her outrageous behaviour, and her love. These very human weaknesses are highlighted by the super-human quality of Vina's voice and VTO's music, just as Orpheus' weakness – his looking back to his wife Eurydice – marks the essence of his humanity (no god would look back), a humanity contrasted with the god-like power of his music which allowed him to enter – and leave – the underworld alive. Similarly, Ormus is marked as human, in that he is not powerful enough to resurrect Vina, but his music renders them both immortal, so that at the end of the novel and despite their deaths, "they're just going to go on singing" (575). The people love Vina because she herself is a lover, and they love her even more in death, that most human weakness of all:

> On the front lines of the world's armed conflicts, amid the noxious fumes of ancient hatreds, men and women gather in cratered roads and sniper alleys, and embrace. It was always Ormus Cama's hope that it might be possible for human beings – for himself – to transcend the frontier of the skin, not to cross the color line but to rub it out; Vina had been skeptical, questioning his universalist premises, but in death she has indeed transcended all frontiers: of race, skin, religion, language, history, nation, class. (480)

As Rai testifies: "By her dying she has momentarily re-invented their sense of a larger kinship, of their membership in the family of mankind" (480). Personified in Vina, music and the legacy it leaves behind unites people through a shared sense of humanity.

Conclusion

Sounding together

"Alle Menschen werden Brüder"

~Friedrich Schiller, "An die Freude" ("Ode to Joy" [1785], 1803 version)

"Imagine all the people […]
A brotherhood of man"

~John Lennon, "Imagine" (1971)

Comparing the works discussed throughout this thesis, it is notable how the themes that surfaced in the analysis of Seth, Chaudhuri, Saadi, and Kureishi find their repercussions in Rushdie's *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, thereby pervading this thesis from beginning to end. Highlighting these themes, this conclusion will compare the effects of music across the different novels discussed. What will become clear from these comparisons is that despite the different postcolonial situations and despite the different traditions of music that are described in the novels, the role, the significance, and the means of music to express postcolonial identity are essentially the same, because music allows for the plurality of the postcolonial condition. This renders music an ideal mouthpiece for postcolonial voices, because it fulfils the call of postcolonial theorists such as Ella Shohat, Anne McClintock, and Stuart Hall for a differentiated analysis of different postcolonial contexts.[73] Most important in this respect are the interrelations between music, identity, and place. With its deep roots in its respective culture and tradition, music is a strong agent of cultural identification and

73 See, for example, Anne McClintock's "The Angel of Progress: Pitfalls of the Term 'Post-Colonialism'", Ella Shohat's "Notes on the Post-Colonial", and Stuart Hall's "When Was 'The Post-colonial'?", who all strongly criticise a generalising and therefore uncritical approach of postcolonial theory. While Hall and McClintock charge linear European historicity with neo-colonialism, Shohat points out that "the politics of location of the very term 'post-colonial'" are often not addressed ("Notes on the Post-Colonial" 99). This generalisation of spatial as well as temporal parameters renders scholarship "ahistorical" and "universalizing", which in turn has "potentially depoliticizing implications" (99).

postcolonial identity. At the same time, music constantly escapes its contexts of meaning, and this essentially aesthetic quality provides, as I will argue towards the close and in reference to Thomas Docherty, for a common ground of cultural understanding that forestalls cultural differences.

To start with a comparison between Rushdie's *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* and Kureishi's novels, it is notable how the revolutionary potential that popular music bears for the youth culture of its respective times is crucial for both authors. While Kureishi casts pop music as a sign of the times, underscoring the socio-political circumstances of his characters, Rushdie sees rock music as emerging from "oppositional origins [in] its anti-establishment heyday" ("Rock Music" 300). It is a rebellious form of youth culture protesting against the status-quo, questioning older generations and the establishment. At its core, rock promotes liberty and freedom, because rock is essentially egalitarian; it is, for Rushdie, the first global cultural phenomenon that crosses national, political, cultural, and ethnic borders. Rushdie's description of rock music as "the third globalized phenomenon in history after the two World Wars" (300) and his essays on the grand tours of U2 and The Rolling Stones in the 1990s bear testament to the capacity of rock to create collective experiences and communities around the world. Likewise does the success story of the band that, according to the author, provided the role model for his fictional mega stars: Queen, and particularly Freddy Mercury.[74]

This marks another parallel between *The Black Album* and *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* – musicians, fictional and non-fictional alike, become figureheads for a whole youth generation of mixed race. Vina Apsara, American-born daughter of a Greek mother and an Indian father, "sing[s] out for American blacks," because, like Prince, she "has crossed the color line: not away from, but towards" (394). Yet, for all the similarities in subject matter between the two authors, their means and methods of style and presentation are fundamentally different. Where Kureishi is very much a temporally grounded historical relativist, Rushdie employs great mythological story arcs and narrative modes of the fantastic and the magical realist to portray contemporary cultural clashes. The specific events in Kureishi become timeless allegories in Rushdie. Despite their differences in style, however, the overlaps in musical content and effect are significant. In the novels discussed, both writers use music to make sense of the postcolonial condition – both individual and

74 See a featured interview with Salman Rushdie and German rock musician Herbert Grönemeyer in the German weekly *Die Zeit* from 15 April 1999 (online version, n. pag.).

communal – of their characters. Charlie and Vina both reinvent themselves with music in order to belong where they are initially excluded. Charlie becomes a punk despite his privileged social upbringing, and Vina's voice is her green card from India back to the United States. Moreover, both Kureishi and Rushdie use references to non-fictional musicians, Prince and Freddy Mercury, to contextualise their protagonists' identities in terms of race and ethnicity (the difference between the two being that Freddy Mercury very much tried to hide his Parsi origins and instead fashioned his career as Anglo-American as possible, while Prince performs and embraces the play with racial ambiguity).

Another comparison can be drawn between *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* and *Afternoon Raag*, in that the soundscape that characterises Chaudhuri's Bombay also marks the birthplace of Rushdie's characters. The protagonist in Chaudhuri's novel grows to "love that lane" (238) in Bombay where his parents moved to while he was in Oxford. From the veranda of his parents' flat, which "brought one marginally closer to its [the lane's] life" (238), he observes the busy and noisy streets. In the morning, the noises of men working wake him up:

> I was woken by an insistent metallic noise, something between a hammering and a ringing. The door at the end of the room opened on to a veranda, and when I went out, I saw a rubbish truck standing in the lane […] The tallest man among them was standing just outside the gate to our building, and with cheeky disregard continually beating a plate with what might have been a spoon. (237)

Similarly, Rai in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* perceives the noise of the city through an open window:

> through the window comes all the tumultuous sensation of the city: the scents of channa and bhel, of tamarind and jasmine; the shouting voices, because nobody ever says anything in these parts without first raising his voice; and the quarrel of traffic, the hooves, the sputtering exhausts, the bicycle bells; the brilliant light of the sun on the harbour, the hooting of warships and the electricity of a society at a point of transformation. (43)

Sound thereby characterises places and serves as a marker for orientation. Sound is also an indicator of change and technological progress ("the electricity of a society at a point of transformation"), of history moving forward. In contrast, silence, as embodied in the Cama household by Ormus's mute brother Virus, is a sign of unnatural standstill, of history "going the wrong way" (38). Silence in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* also symbolises death or the absence of life as we know it (Ormus's twin is a stillborn, Virus is mute and inhabits his own internal space), just as it does in Chaudhuri's novels (the unnatural silence during curfew, the

loneliness that the absence of everyday noises signifies for the protagonist in *Afternoon Raag*).

Also important is the relation of music to nationalism and cultural imperialism, which links *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* back to *A Suitable Boy*. Notably, the music discussed in the former is of (albeit disputed) Western origin and non-classical, where Seth focuses mainly on North-Indian classical music. Yet both kinds of music work in similar ways, as they defy easy categorisation and politicisation of national identity, in relation to Hindu nationalism in *A Suitable Boy* and Americanization in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*. While the respective historical context suggests a politicisation for each type of music, the novels endorse the aesthetic qualities of music. For Ustad Majeed Khan, music is absolute art that must not be politicised; Rushdie subsumes music to the dimension of the mythical-magical. In both cases, the aesthetics of music supplant and supersede the specific historical-political context. This exemplifies that the politics of music, and particularly those linked to politics of place (such as cultural imperialism and nationalism), are constructed by the people who use music for political purposes, and are not intrinsic to the music itself.

Music is used as an expression of postcolonial identity for all six novels covered in this thesis. In *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, Mull Standish, broadcaster and Ormus's mentor, says that "music comes out of the self, the self as given, the self in itself" (*The Ground Beneath Her Feet* 303), upon which Ormus elaborates:

> What I want the music to say is that I don't have to choose […] I need it to show that I don't have to be this guy or that guy, the fellow from over there or the fellow from here, the person within me that I call my twin, or whoever's out there in whatever it is I get flashes of beyond the sky; or just the man standing in front of you right now. I'll be all of them, I can do that. Here comes everybody, right? (303)

Ormus yearns to be himself, and music is his means to both define and express himself. The multiplicity of his being, the "all of them" and "everybody," marks an element of his identity that only music can reconcile. "There are too many people inside Ormus, a whole band is gathered within his frontiers playing different instruments, creating different music" (299). Eventually, the "different instruments, creating different music" will sound to create a comprehensive whole: "He hasn't fully grasped how to make of multiplicity an accumulating strength rather than a frittery weakness. How the many selves can be, in song, a single multitude. Not a cacophony but an orchestra, a choir, a dazzling plural voice" (299). Ormus's experience of the self as a multiple, heterogeneous entity mirrors Shahid's conviction that

there "had to be innumerable ways of being in the world" (274), and the means of expression for both men is music. Music also expresses communal identity, from newly independent India in *A Suitable Boy* to the postcolonial diaspora in Kureishi's fiction. In relation to Seth's use of music, Benson states that the author values music "as a communal, physical and essentially human activity, necessarily rooted in convention and tradition" (*Literary Music* 144). To further explain music's power in shaping identity, Benson writes that "music is a singularly effective agent of subject and group formation, via such routes as the highly personal workings of memory and the ritualized enactment of performance" (148). As I have argued in Chapter Two, memory in its connection with music is very potent in forming the protagonist's identity in *Afternoon Raag*. Performance, on the other hand, is crucial for Kureishi's characters, who use music to perform who they are.

These comparisons imply that music in relation to postcolonial identity works to similar effects across all the different novels. As indicated above, this allows for the heterogeneous portrayal of the different postcolonial conditions that postcolonial critics ask for. When the postcolonial as a term is ill-defined, because the temporal and spatial parameters used to discuss issues of postcoloniality are not specified, the term loses its political agency. As the preceding analysis of the novels has shown, music allows for a differentiated expression of heterogeneous identities and for the recognition of difference across multiple postcolonial situations (take post-Independence India and the South-Asian diaspora in 1980s London). Music is depicted as a product of its time and place of cultural production, thereby fulfilling Shohat's call for taking into consideration the "politics of location" ("Notes on the Post-Colonial" 99). Music is also, however, described as easily transcending times and places, and in this dislocating function that forestalls politics of location, music brings people together on an aesthetic level that stresses commonality rather than difference.

One of the central narratives that pervades this thesis is therefore the relation between music, identity, and place. This is most pronounced in *A Suitable Boy*, where Hindustani music is very firmly located within the North-Indian setting of the novel. In *Afternoon Raag*, the relationship between music and place is already once removed, as the music is always from some place other than the characters' location. Yet, the music still bears meaning from these places and thus reconnects characters to their homeland. In its intrinsic connection with place, music shapes identity. Rushdie's character Vina, who "was a rag-bag of selves, torn fragments of people she might have become" (*The Ground Beneath Her Feet* 122), changes

her name when coming to India and constructs her new identity from the "Indian goods" that the Merchant household offers her. She begins with music:

> "Vina". She'd heard a musician in Piloo's entourage playing, coarsely and without feeling, an instrument that in spite of such brutalisation "made a sound like god; and when I found out what it was called, I knew that was the name for me." The music of India, from northern sitar ragas to southern Carnatic melodies, always created in her a mood of inexpressible longing. She could listen to recordings of ghazals for hours at a stretch, and was entranced, too, by the complex devotional music of the leading *qawwals*. Longing for what? Not, surely, for an "authentic" Indianness that she could never attain? Rather, I must conclude – and this is hard for a lifelong sceptic like me to write – that what Vina wanted was a glimpse of the unknowable. The music offered the tantalising possibility of being borne on the waves of sound through the curtain of *maya* that supposedly limits our knowing, through the gates of perception to the divine melody beyond. (122-123)[75]

Rai wonders "how she would have sounded singing ghazals. For even though she dedicated her life to another music entirely, the pull of India, its songs, its languages, its life, worked upon her always, like the moon" (124). This quote depicts music as being particular to a location and to the culture of that location (Rai lists India's songs together with the country's languages and life); but music also transcends that culture and place as a "divine melody beyond" (123). Music is, as Benson writes, "always already worldly" (*Literary Music* 141), but it is also irreducible to worldliness. It carries meaning of a particular place, but is capable of going beyond that place. By this logic and in an act of perpetual relocation, Zaf in *Psychoraag* broadcasts music from all over the world to listeners (potentially) all over the world. The music Shahid listens to in *The Black Album* is much more difficult to place. With his own mixed cultural background, Prince's identity defies concrete localisation, and his self-image as an artist is very consciously modelled on the ideal of elusiveness (take the unpronounceable symbol that Prince used as an alias in the 1990s). Furthermore, pop music is a much more globalised phenomenon than Indian classical music rooted in its long cultural tradition and history that cannot be separated from its place of cultural production. This allows Rushdie to take the instability of spatial references one step further; it is not only the characters and music that are displaced in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, but the ground beneath his characters' feet is itself prone to shake, quake, and collapse:

> The ground, the ground beneath our feet. My father the mole could have told Lady Spenta a thing or two about the unsolidity of solid ground […] We find ground on which

75 In *A Suitable Boy*, Seth also names one of his characters after the instrument (albeit in a different spelling, *veena*). Like Rushdie's Vina, this Veena does not play the eponymous instrument, but sings instead (*A Suitable Boy* 208).

> to make our stand. In India, that place obsessed by place, belonging-to-your-place, knowing-your-place, we are mostly given that territory, and that's that, no arguments, get on with it. But Ormus and Vina and I, we couldn't accept that, we came loose. Among the great struggles of man – good/evil, reason/unreason, etc. – there is also this mighty conflict between the fantasy of Home and the fantasy of Away, the dream of roots and the mirage of the journey. And if you are Ormus Cama, if you are Vina Apsara, whose songs could cross all frontiers, even the frontiers of people's hearts, then perhaps you believed all ground could be skipped over, all frontiers would crumble before the sorcery of the tune. (54-55)

Related to the theme of music and place is that of music and the dislocation and relocation of postcolonial characters, so prominent in Chaudhuri and Saadi, and a concept Rushdie deems "[d]isorientation: loss of the East" (3). The protagonists in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* also leave their home country India to go West, and they, too, are forced to find their home not in a geographically mappable place, but in music. Just as Zaf locates his identity in the songs he broadcasts, music "was home" for Rushdie's Ormus Cama, too, because "India wasn't real, it was just another transit zone" (559). This description of India as an unreal place mirrors the dream-like sense that the protagonist in *Afternoon Raag* has of Oxford. In both cases, places cease to signify belonging and instead music instils this sense of belonging in the characters, thereby substituting concrete places as a home. Crossing borders and transcending places, music creates its own spaces, and Ormus's life is "in reality lived not in one place or another, but in music" (571).

This works because music, like the postcolonial voices it expresses, is displaced from the text which features it. In all the novels, music as an art form is present *in absentia*: it is not represented – neither as sound, nor as sheet music on the page – but it resounds throughout the text and with the reader through a web of inter-textual and extra-textual references to songs, modes, traditions, musicians and bands, both fictional and non-fictional. Music is dislocated on the levels of text, narrative, and on the level of extra-textual references. As to the first level, music is absent – and thereby displaced – by its transformation into text. Benson analyses this in detail, focusing on the opposition between the silence of the text and the sound of the music. He explains that, "[l]iterary music is founded on an empirical impossibility: language is silent, perhaps never more so than in poetic attempts to replicate some pre-defined aspect of musicality" (141-142). Reviewing *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* for *The Guardian*, Stephanie Merritt points towards this paradox of representation that accompanies the musical moments in the novel: "The obvious irony, the gap at the heart of the novel, is that the transcendent, magical power of music that

Rai attempts to evoke can never be expressed in words. We aspire to the mythical because the ground beneath our feet is uncertain and prone to collapse, and there is always a chasm between the image and the reality" (n. pag.). Despite this, Benson argues that literature is most successful in evoking music when the text embraces the paradox that the presence of music is revealed through its absence:

> the absence of music only serves to bolster its (music's) strength, to make it more palpably present. It permeates what we read, suggesting the possibility that musically-inclined fiction is most potent not in those rare exceptions when it manages somehow to catch the coat tails of its object, but rather when it works to deploy its necessary silence. (142)

In the context of postcolonial fiction, these necessary silences are even more significant in that they reflect the historical silencing of the postcolonial voice.

The second level of musical dislocation is that of the narrative. In *A Suitable Boy*, the Ustad is nostalgic for what he considers the lost tradition of hereditary art music, a tradition of times past. In his case this is the lost tradition of a past place, too, namely that of India as part of the British Empire. The Ustad deplores the development of art music after the recent demise of the British Raj, because the end of colonial rule coincided with abolishing feudalism and hence the patronage system of the arts, which were "thriving under British colonial 'protection'" and the feudal courts, as Qureshi explains in *Music and Marx* (85). As a tradition that heavily relied on the feudal system and court patronage of musicians, Hindustani music was strongly affected by the demise of Empire, and the change in tradition brought about by independence destroyed the livelihood of many musicians. As Ruckert testifies, after independence "[t]he old feudal system, with its maharajas and nawabs, courts and refined society, began to disappear in favor of a new democracy – one in which the classical musician was no longer the employee of a privileged society, nor protected from the economics of competition" (*Music in North India* 34). In this context the Ustad's nostalgia firmly situates his music in a past time and place. In Saadi, Chaudhuri, and Rushdie the displacement of music is a more literal one, because it refers to the physical act of the characters' migrations with music as part of their cultural luggage. In *Postnational Musical Identities*, Corona and Madrid describe how music migrates and thereby defines identities that are located beyond the borders of the nation-state. Zaf's parents are a case in point here when they sing songs from Pakistan on their journey to Scotland, and so are Chaudhuri's characters: the music they play is always from elsewhere. Music is at the same time a relic

from and a means of reconnection with a home that is lost as a place, in the past, or both. Ormus and Vina, on the other hand, create new homes for themselves in, but also with, music. Rock music is their green card to the United States, and from there they take their music on a tour around the world. In Kureishi's novels, scrutiny is centred upon the United Kingdom, for its role as the former centre of Empire, as the present multicultural postcolonial nation, and for the diaspora that it more often than not refuses to acknowledge playing a part in forming. "The immigrant is the Everyman of the twentieth century" (141), writes Kureishi in *The Buddha of Suburbia*, and in Kureishi's novels, music provides the soundtrack to the immigrant experience.

The third level of musical dislocation concerns the dislocation of music on the extra-textual level. This facet very much depends on the reader and on whether the music in the novel is fictional or not; it is the evocation of music, its transmutation from the text – a text that can only ever describe but never represent music – back to its original form as an aural experience that signifies this level. If the reader recognises the musical references, the music that is read can transform into sound and be heard. On the extra-textual level and depending on the familiarity of the reader with the music written about, music is dislocated from the page and, divorced from its circumscription as text, transcends it. So with every reader, the music can lend a different perspective and experience, depending on the reader's thoughts, memories, perception of the music incorporated in the novel. On this level, the reader and not the text provides for the meaning of the music encountered. Music thereby goes beyond the meaning of its location (the text) and therefore does not have to rely on a particular place to be meaningful.

In sum, music offers an alternative framework of definition and identification for characters who, by their postcolonial condition, find themselves dislocated. Music creates a space for identity and identification that goes beyond mappable places and that is instead in the music itself. Music is "transition", as Daniel Barenboim describes it, allowing people to be "at peace with the idea of fluidity" (*Parallels and Paradoxes* 4). Thereby, music in literature does not only mirror the postcolonial experience of dislocation, but it suspends the defining moment of locality. Music creates an alternative space for previously absent voices to be present and to be heard.

Going beyond the text that contains it, music in literature challenges borders "between words and elsewhere, inside and outside" (Benson 141), and, from a postcolonial point of

view, music challenges borders between the worlds of the postcoloniser and the postcolonised. Thereby, music unites people. It connects audiences in shared experiences of performance; in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, VTO's world tour shows that their music creates communities irrespective of identity markers such as race and nationality, and the global mourning that follows Vina's death proves that "she has indeed transcended all frontiers: of race, skin, religion, language, history, nation, class" (480). According to Rushdie's character Mira, this is "what VTO started to do, what I always thought Vina stood for. Crossing frontiers. Bringing in the rest of the fucking world" (545). To analyse music as something that goes beyond, is also to understand it with Thomas Docherty and in the specifically postcolonial context of this thesis as something that goes beyond Europe. Docherty charts this place beyond Europe, the former colonial centre, as "a condition rather than a place", a condition that he characterises "as the 'impossible possibility' that is democracy-as-potential" (149). Beyond the colonial centre that was Europe lies the postcolonial condition. Music, then, in going "beyond Europe," opens up the condition of the postcolonial.

Music threatens and dissolves borders, and it connects people on a level that is not concerned with politics of origin. To explain this, Said in response to Daniel Barenboim talks about an observation he made during the Weimar workshop of the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra in the summer of 2000.[76] Said observed that while these young people were playing music together, their national identities that usually kept them apart were superseded by a communal musical identity that united them. Politics were eclipsed by music:

> In my opinion, what you saw had no political overtones at all. One set of identities was superseded by another set. There was an Israeli group, and a Russian group, and a Syrian group, a Lebanese group, a Palestinian group, and a group of Palestinian Israelis. All of them suddenly became cellists and violinists playing the same piece in the same orchestra under the same conductor […] The transformation of these kids from one thing to another was basically unstoppable. (*Parallels and Paradoxes* 9-10)

Music sounds in harmony through polyphony; it relies on the co-existence of various and different voices to come together. Thereby, music presents us with a utopia of community and of being together in concordance and harmony. At the same time, music confronts us with the other. Said recognises this when he argues that even more than expressing and

76 The orchestra that Said and Barenboim founded in 1999 brings together young musicians from Israel, Palestine, and other countries in the Middle-East on an annual basis in order to foster Arab-Israeli understanding through music.

experiencing one's own identity, music enables a recognition of the other. He explains this aspect of the other in the context of Barenboim's work with the orchestra:

> One of the striking things about the kind of work you do is that you act as an interpreter, as a performer – an artist concerned not so much with the articulation of the self, but rather with the articulation of other selves. That's a challenge. The interesting thing about Goethe – and also about our experience in Weimar – was that art, for Goethe especially, was all about a voyage to the "other," and not concentrating on oneself, which is very much a minority view today. There is more of a concentration today on the affirmation of identity, on the need for roots, on the values of one's culture and one's sense of belonging. It's become quite rare to project one's self outward, to have a broader perspective. (11)

In *Aesthetic Democracy*, Thomas Docherty specifies the othering – or altering – effect of art and explains that the aesthetic object confronts the subject that beholds it with alterity.[77] The object is "a conceptual other against which they [the "subjects of perception"] can identify themselves" (x); but more than merely signifying an other to the self of the beholder, the aesthetic object also confronts the self with her own intrinsic alterity: "Culture [which for Docherty is located in the object of art] can be defined as that event of perception – the root sense of 'aesthetic' (*aisthanomai*) – that calls a human subject to differ from itself, and to find or to constitute its very identity precisely through the specific mode of that differing" (xiii). Docherty explains this in reference to the paradox of writing, according to which, and following Maurice Blanchot in *The Work of Fire*, writing is the expression of a talent to write, but this talent can only come into being – find expression – through writing. Blanchot argues that everything that comes into existence transforms the world at large, but also the person who brought it into existence (*Aesthetic Democracy* 35-36). To quote Docherty: "In writing, claims Blanchot, this transformation is writ large, and the book that the writer makes 'is precisely myself become other'. Insofar as the self is 'altered' in and through writing, one can say here that the authentic self would be the consequence or product of the act of writing" (37).[78] Docherty extends this paradox to the act of reading, and in reference to Alasdair MacIntyre, defines reading as "a transforming activity" (37). Not only does a reader interpret a text, but the text also interprets the reader insofar as the reader "has to learn about him or herself […] that it is only the self as transformed through and by the reading of the

77 While Docherty focuses mainly on high culture as an agent to bring about democracy, my analysis throughout this thesis and the comparisons in this conclusion show that popular music shares essential aesthetic qualities with art music that forestall politics and enable an encounter with alterity. I therefore treat popular music on the same grounds as art music and apply Docherty's aesthetic theory to all kinds of music encountered in the novels.

78 See Maurice Blanchot, *The Work of Fire* (313).

texts which will be capable of reading the texts aright"; moreover, "it seems that only by learning what the texts have to teach can he or she come to read those texts aright, but also that only by reading them aright can he or she learn what the texts have to teach" (qtd. in Docherty 37).[79] Thereby, reading, like writing, is an act of altering the self, and in extension it is an act of opening the self up to otherness.

For Docherty, this marks what he calls with Derrida a "hospitality of reading", which in turn is the mark of culture itself:

> I am stressing that the preference for one reading must always maintain the other reading as an unrealised potential or possibility; and that it must maintain it as ghostly, as a potential guest in a spirit or occasion of hospitality. That hospitality is what I will now identity firmly with and as culture; or, as Derrida has it in a different context, 'Hospitality is culture itself and not simply one ethic amongst others'. (72)[80]

In a postcolonial context, the confrontation with alterity that hospitality as culture allows for is the precondition for an ethical understanding of the postcolonial condition. Docherty explains the difference between a moral and an ethical judgement thus: where a moral judgement is to know or assume to know the other, the ethical requires one not to know the other, but instead to encounter the other as other, thereby granting her the freedom to be the other to oneself. In other words: pre-assumed knowledge of otherness collapses the other and their difference into the self and sameness. As Docherty phrases it:

> It would be an error to assume a knowledge of this Other, for any such knowledge would be a resolution of the ambiguity that she presents into a closed and univocal meaning; and that meaning would be 'always already' given by the shape of my own consciousness. This error allows for the possibility of moral judgements; but it is a judgement that, in denying freedom – and indeed otherness – to the Other, fails to rise to the level of the ethical. (87)

This also implies that the aesthetic moment of art must precede its politicisation (art must be read as art before it is read as politics), because to infuse art with political meaning is to deny it its ambiguity and therefore to inhibit alterity, and to imbue art with values that "are themselves shaped and conditioned by the political values of the victors in the triumphal procession that we call a history of civilisation," a history that specifically marks European modernity and the imperial project (70). Therefore:

> the premature politicisation – 'realisation' – of the text or of the aesthetic encounter is always barbaric and anathema to culture, for it actively denies the experience of the present moment, refuses the encounter with death that is at the centre of all art, an

79 See Alasdair MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry* (82).
80 See Jacques Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness* (16).

> encounter that is actually a moment of transgression, a moment of engagement, an event or an adventure whose outcome cannot be given in advance. (71)

The cultural document, on the other hand, is "neither intrinsically civilised nor intrinsically barbaric. Rather, the document manifests itself as the merest potentiality for either civilisation or barbarism. 'Culture' would now be the name that we give to the inhabiting of this potentiality" (70).

The key for understanding the role of music in the postcolonial context of the literature discussed throughout this thesis is, therefore, to understand music as primarily an aesthetic event, and it is the aesthetic qualities that allow for an engagement with the political dimension of the postcolonial condition. The defining aesthetic moment of music in all the novels is its transgression of texts and contexts. For Seth's characters, to experience music is to enter a trance-like state that takes them beyond themselves: Lata explains to Kabir that "[s]imply strumming the tabla, even if I don't sing a single note, puts me into a trance. Sometimes I do it for fifteen minutes before I come back to myself" (*A Suitable Boy* 179); Ishaq sits "still, deep more in trance than in thought" after having listened to the Ustad performing Raag Todi (320), while the Ustad himself forgets himself (319) while playing. For Zaf, music transgresses into the realm of "beyond the beyond" (*Psychoraag* 210), which for Rushdie's characters marks the world of the mythical-magical. In Chaudhuri's descriptions, music is purely aestheticised: "A raag, spacious as the mansion the rain builds, enfolds – / and sighs, like one of the elements. / Inside the great architecture of the raag, through the clear / archway of notes, world without humans / two figures sit, each alone" (*Afternoon Raag* 177). The raag is a "self-created galaxy of notes, sight of the elements" (179), and "they seem to be timeless" and exist independent of the people that perform them (259). Even in *The Black Album*, which of all the novels discussed most overtly politicises music (when Deedee plays Jimi Hendrix's "Star Spangled Banner" in a lecture and asks "'What's that stand for?'", Shahid answers "'America'" [27]), music still refuses to being reduced to any kind of ideology.

The other that music confronts us with is therefore not only the postcolonial other, but an other that is variously described as otherworldly, super-human, god-like, transcendental. Docherty refers to Hegel when he argues that "artificially made beauty" (*Aesthetic Democracy* 157), or aesthetics, is a condition which requires human consciousness to go

beyond itself, to imagine something that previously did not exist, to create something out of nothing:

> For Hegel, to make something come of nothing was, in some ways, the very mark of freedom; the model was an aesthetic one. In the introduction to his *Aesthetics*, Hegel argues that there is a distinction to be made between a naturally occurring beauty and an artificially made beauty. The latter is infinitely superior because it is entirely unnecessary, purely contingent, and more importantly still, the symptom of a human consciousness exceeding or going beyond itself. (157)

The aesthetics of music, which exceed or go beyond human consciousness, connect us on a deeply human level that precedes all the political circumstances that divide us. Music thereby opens us not only to the experience of alterity, as Docherty has it, but also to a recognition of similarity. The aesthetic experience of music unites people. While the cultural context of music is specific and therefore creates art that potentially seems foreign on the levels of content and expression, the aesthetics that underlie every kind of music are recognisable beyond specific cultural contexts (and of all the comparisons I have made between the novels, my analysis in Chapter One of Seth's use of Hindustani music in *A Suitable Boy* and of Western classical music in *An Equal Music* seems to me to be the most immediately convincing case in point here). Music elevates us in our being, because it bears an element within itself that transcends our being human – an element that is magical, mythical, superhuman, godlike, ephemeral, ineffable, transcendental, or, in short, aesthetic. The aesthetics of music are what mark "the symptom of a human consciousness exceeding or going beyond itself" (Docherty 157) and which thereby confront us with our being human. Being thus faced with the "beyond human", we recognise our shared humanity. The experience of music thereby allows for a recognition of sameness (we are all human) that accounts for the ability of music to unite people irrespective of politics of origin. Or, to put it differently: in music, community – or a brotherhood of man, as both Beethoven and Lennon have it – is imagined beyond the borders of nation-states.

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