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Cultural Conflicts in the Writing of Hanif Kureishi

Kulturní konflikty v díle Hanifa Kureishiho

Bakalářská práce

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Abstract

The situation of immigrants in Britain has been inspiring writers for several decades and Hanif Kureishi is no exception. His own background allows him to describe the immigrant experience from the realistic perspective of an insider and his characters reflect the conflicts that immigrants have to deal with during their life among the members of the dominant culture of the state. The thesis focuses on *The Buddha of Suburbia*, while it also makes short digressions and touches upon a number of other works which were published by Kureishi from the mid 1980s to the late 1990s, such as *The Black Album*, *My Son the Fanatic*, *My Beautiful Laundrette*, *The Rainbow Sign* and *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid*. The whole discussion consists of three parts and begins with a chapter which primarily concentrates on important theoretical terms and their definitions that are necessary for all analyses of diasporic literatures; the terms and concepts are then applied to Kureishi's books and scripts. The second chapter deals with the conflicts experienced by the first generation immigrants who try to find out who they are as people as they oscillate between the culture of their country or origin and England, while the third chapter focuses on the second generation immigrants born in Britain who want to gain an identity in England but are constantly stereotyped and met with hostility and prejudice towards their cultural background. In addition to the conflicts of the individual generations of immigrants, the work also comments on conflicts that are generational, i.e. the differences between the parents and their children, which are present in all of the pieces of writing the work analyses. Furthermore, the thesis explores racism and the various types and levels of racial intolerance that both of the generations have to deal with. The main goal of the thesis is to analyse all the types of conflicts which arise due to the clash of Eastern and Western cultures and the feelings of rootlessness experienced by the immigrants in the cultural environment that they find themselves in. The work illustrates the ways in which individual characters differ from each other in their search for identity and their stance in relation to racism and prejudice. The aim of the thesis is to discuss the conflicts and the ways in which they are presented in Kureishi's writing as fully as possible.

Abstrakt

Situace imigrantů v Británii inspiruje autory již po několik desetiletí a Hanif Kureishi není výjimkou. Kulturní původ mu umožňuje popsat v dílech zkušenosti imigrantů realistickým způsobem a jeho postavy představují konflikty se kterými se imigranti musí potýkat během svého života mezi lidmi, kteří se řadí k dominantní kultuře státu. Bakalářská práce se zaměřuje na román *The Buddha of Suburbia*, který je pro ni stěžejní, ale také obsahuje krátké odbočky ve kterých se dotýká dalších Kureishiho děl, jež byla publikována mezi polovinou 80. let až do konce let 90., např. *The Black Album*, *My Son the Fanatic*, *My Beautiful Laundrette*, *The Rainbow Sign* a *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid*. Celá diskuse se skládá ze tří hlavních částí a začíná kapitolou věnovanou teoretickým termínům a jejich definicím, které jsou nezbytné pro všechny analýzy literatur diaspory. Tyto pojmy jsou dále aplikovány na Kureishiho díla na následujících stranách práce. Druhá kapitola se soustředí na konflikty, které zažívá první generace imigrantů, jejíž zástupci se snaží formovat svou osobnost zatímco oscilují mezi kulturou své původní domoviny a Anglie. Třetí kapitola se zabývá druhou generací imigrantů narozených v Británii, kteří chtějí získat identitu v Anglii, ale neustále se potýkají se stereotypy, nepřátelstvím a předsudky vůči jejich kulturnímu pozadí. Kromě konfliktů jednotlivých generací imigrantů se práce soustředí i na generační konflikty, neboli rozdíly mezi rodiči a jejich dětmi, které jsou přítomny ve všech dílech, jež práce využívá při analýze. Diskuse se navíc věnuje i rasismu, různým typům a míře rasové netolerance, se kterou se obě generace v průběhu Kureishiho románů a scénářů setkávají. Hlavním cílem bakalářské práce je popsat všechny druhy konfliktů, které vznikají na základě střetu východní a západní kultury a vykořeněnosti pocíťované imigranty v kulturním prostředí, ve kterém se nacházejí. Analýza ilustruje odlišnosti mezi jednotlivými postavami a jejich způsoby hledání identity, postojů k rasismu a předsudkům. Cílem práce je prodiskutovat konflikty a jejich prezentaci v Kureishiho díle co nejúplněji.

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1. Introduction

[...] It is the British, the white British, who have to learn that being British isn't what it was. Now it is a more complex thing, involving new elements. So there must be a fresh way of seeing Britain and the choices it faces: and a new way of being British after all this time.¹

The thesis will deal with various cultural conflicts described in the writing of Hanif Kureishi. The conflicts that Kureishi illustrates in his fiction are usually based on the state and changes of British society which took place in Britain in the second half of the 20th century and are rooted predominantly in the clash of two contrasting cultures and generational differences in immigrant families. As the above quote suggests, Kureishi deals in his writing with the complexities of the post-colonial society in Britain, mostly of the 1970s and 1980s, which means he often discusses issues around what it means to be British. Kureishi is a contemporary English writer who was born in 1954 in Bromley, South London where he spent his childhood and adolescent years dealing with racism because of his mixed racial background. Already as a child, Kureishi had a great passion for literature, music, film and theatre and he was supported by his father, an immigrant from India, to pursue a job as a professional writer.² After graduating from university where he studied philosophy, Kureishi began his career as a playwright and wrote several plays in the 1970s and 1980s such as *Soaking the Heat*, *The King and Me*, *Borderline*, *The Mother Country* and *Outskirts*. However, the 1980s also saw Kureishi's rising interest in film and script writing. During this period, Kureishi wrote *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid* and *My Beautiful Laundrette* for which he received an Academy Award.³ Despite his continuing interest in film, Kureishi began to concentrate mostly on short stories and novel writing in the 1990s and produced the Whitbread Award-winning novel *The Buddha of Suburbia*, *The Black Album*, *Intimacy* and a collection of short stories *Love in a Blue Time* while also working on the release of his next film *My Son the Fanatic*.⁴ Some of his most recent works of literature include, for example, *My Ear at His Heart*, *The Mother*, *Gabriel's Gift*, *Venus*, *The Word and The*

¹ Hanif Kureishi, *My Beautiful Laundrette and The Rainbow Sign* (London: Faber and Faber, 1986) 38.

² Ken Kaleta, *Hanif Kureishi: Postcolonial Storyteller* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998) 18.

³ Mohit Kumar Ray, *Atlantic Companion To Literature in English* (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 2007) 302.

⁴ Ray, 302.

Bomb, Weddings and Beheadings, and *The Body*. His latest novel, *Something to Tell You*, was published in 2008, the same year that Kureishi received the title of Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire from Queen Elizabeth II. Despite slight changes in the focus of his writing during the past decade, Kureishi has always been deeply interested in popular culture, love, sexuality, psychology, and human desires and he is often seen as a controversial writer because he discusses themes such as race, racism, drugs and Islamic fundamentalism. All of these concerns still run deep within his fiction because Kureishi, continuing to be very frustrated by the situation in Britain and the number of racially motivated attacks, uses writing as a vital means of expression and a kind of coping mechanism.⁵ However, Kureishi has never believed that writing itself can change people and the way they act; instead he sees literature as a medium which can 'contribute to a climate of ideas' and claims that 'it is important to ask questions about how we live sexually, how we live racially, what our relations are with each other emotionally' - for him these are the things 'artists can do rather than change society in any specific way'.⁶ Since his works mirror the real life experience of immigrants and their children in Britain and the issues, conflicts, and struggles such people had to deal with, terms such as diaspora, hyphenated identities, hybridity and mimicry are important theoretical concepts when discussing Kureishi's fiction. Accordingly, the terms must play a crucial role in any analysis of the conflicts illustrated in his writing.

The term diaspora can be interpreted in various ways. *Webster's II New College Dictionary* provides several definitions of diaspora from a narrow meaning of the term, for example diaspora as a dispersion of Jews beyond Israel in the 6th century BC, to its broader and more general meanings such as 'dispersion of people from their homeland' or 'a dispersion of an originally homogenous entity, such as a language or culture'.⁷ Avtar Brah argues that diaspora is always connected with 'the image of a journey' and stresses the importance of the beginning of this movement along with its conditions and circumstances as well as the conclusion of the journey or arrival at the final destination.⁸ It is the journey of South Asians to Britain which is central for this work as most of Kureishi's characters are of South Asian origin or descent. Furthermore, it is important to stress that diaspora does not only have a spatial but also a temporal dimension. Therefore, diasporic identity is different for the first immigrants and second

⁶ Susheila Nasta, *Home Truths: Fictions of the South Asian Diaspora in Britain* (New York: Palgrave, 2002) 197.

⁷ Steven R. Kleinedler, et al., *Webster's II New College Dictionary* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2004) 319.

⁸ Avtar Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities* (London: Routledge, 1996) 182.

generation descendants and each of these generations has its own struggles. Nevertheless, despite the generational differences, what is according to Brah crucial for diaspora is a sense of shared collective past as 'personal biographies and group histories are mutually immanent'.⁹ Kureishi deals with generational differences as he describes the first two generations of South Asians in Britain in his works: the texts describe the first immigrants which came from the former British colonies in India and arrived on the isles in 1950s to work and make a better living and furthermore, they also focus on the sons and daughters of these people who were born in Britain and among whom Kureishi himself belongs. While the first generation of South Asians in Britain theoretically had an option to either stay or return to their native country, the next generation had a different outlook on their own life situation. In other words, the second generation of South Asians that were born in Britain did not have any personal experience of the places their parents came from and they could not possibly think of escape as a means of solving their problems in the same way as the first generation may have done when dealing with the negative reactions to their culture and ethnicity in Britain where the indigenous people took the white colour of the skin, among other factors, for a part of being British.¹⁰ Nevertheless, diaspora always has a sense of 'home' in its core. Speaking of the feasible return of the immigrants to their country of origin, it is important to stress that despite the fact that it was possible to physically go back to the place they once came from, it was often in reality 'a place of no return' as 'home' becomes 'a mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination'.¹¹ Over time, the homeland can become only imaginary, and the immigrants do not talk about 'actual cities and villages, but invisible ones' and the past can be seen as 'home, albeit a lost home in a lost city in the mists of lost time'.¹²

The texture of British society in the second half of the twentieth century rapidly changed due to immigration from the East and the process of assimilation of Asian people into white British society, which was very complicated. Furthermore, local communities often had negative attitudes towards the immigrants who then had to face high levels of pressure and deal with personal quests for identity, whether cultural, personal or religious. Salman Rushdie, one of the

⁹ Brah, 117.

¹⁰ M. Stopes-Roe and R. Cochrane, *Citizens of This Country: The Asian-British* (Bristol: Multilingual Matters, 1990) 10.

¹¹ Brah, 192.

¹² Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands: The Essays and Criticism 1981-1991* (New York: Penguin Books, 1992) 9.

major authors of British diasporic literature, comments on the problematic issues of identity in his collection of essays *Imaginary Homelands* and argues that the identity of the immigrant is 'plural and partial' at the same time: 'Sometimes we feel that we straddle two cultures; at other times, that we fall between two stools. But however ambiguous and shifting this ground may be, it is not an infertile territory for a writer to occupy.'¹³ Rushdie's statement is therefore concerned with the immigrant's feeling of belonging to two cultures at once as well as with the idea of complete alienation and not belonging anywhere. Rushdie himself calls such Asians in Britain 'translated men', people who were borne across the continents and had to define their position in a society with different cultural habits; they had to find their way of life in the world.¹⁴ In other words, Rushdie touches upon the ideas of hyphenated identities and hybridity which also dominate Kureishi's fiction. The term hybridity is inseparable from the discussions of diaspora and diasporic writing. Tabish Khair argues that hybridity is a term invented by Indian English intellectuals 'to escape the negative connotations of being described as alienated' because 'alienation presumes a conflict while hybridity assumes a conjoining, perhaps even an organic synthesis'.¹⁵ In its basic biological sense the term means a mixture of various different aspects and the cultural definitions of hybridity derive from this concept. For example, *The SAGE Dictionary of Cultural Studies* claims that 'hybridity involves the mixing together of previously discrete cultural elements to create new meanings and identities'.¹⁶ However, in the context of postcolonial literature, the term is given even more specific connotations and definitions. For instance, in this thesis hybridity refers to the intermingling of Eastern and Western habits and mixing of different cultural attributes, religion, language or even race. The product of this mix of East and West in a person is a hybrid identity which Kureishi's heroes often deal with and suffer from. In other words, hybridity is a possible source of pain for the immigrants because they are devoid of any location where they can feel firmly rooted and safe.¹⁷ We can see this manifested in both first and second generation immigrants of Kureishi's novels who are always torn between two significantly contrasting cultures and places, which causes them a great deal of unhappiness. Nevertheless, as Rushdie argues in *Imaginary*

¹³ Rushdie, 15.

¹⁴ Rushdie, 17.

¹⁵ Tabish Khair, *Fictions: Alienation in Contemporary Indian English Novels* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) 79.

¹⁶ Chris Barker, *The SAGE Dictionary of Cultural Studies* (London: SAGE Publications, 2004) 89.

¹⁷ John McLeod, *Beginning Postcolonialism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000) 215.

Homelands, hybridity should not be perceived only as a negative aspect of the immigrants' lives and a source of suffering but positive aspects of hybrid identities should be highlighted as well. The major favourable feature that *Imaginary Homelands* discusses is the fact that immigrants can use their condition as a source of cosmopolitan creativity and this condition allows them to see more truly. In other words, Rushdie says that people are 'capable only of fractured perceptions' and therefore that we should look at meaning as 'a shaky edifice' that 'we build out of scraps' and 'perhaps it is because our sense of what is the case is constructed from such inadequate materials that we defend it so fiercely, even to the death'.¹⁸ This approach gives the immigrants many new ways of perception due to a lot of possibilities how to combine these numerous scraps.¹⁹

Hyphenated identity is yet another term which implies that an individual oscillates between two different cultures and struggles to find a balance between them. In general, hyphenated identities appear all over the world where the original culture of the immigrant meets the dominant culture of the state. Particularly in Britain many people now choose to call themselves British-Asians or British-South Asians, which is also how Kureishi's characters are usually referred to. Yasmin Hussain argues that children of the first generation of immigrants who have a British-South Asian identity are 'linked to their parents by religion and language, but by growing up and undergoing schooling in this country [Britain], they also come under the influence of other, strong, distinct but very different cultural patterns of White British society'.²⁰ In other words, Kureishi's British-South Asians have to oscillate between their experience at home and the general practices and lifestyle of the British nation.

Closely connected to the idea of hybridity is the concept of mimicry, which is a term largely discussed by a cultural theorist Homi K. Bhabha in his essay 'Of Mimicry and Man'. Bhabha calls mimicry 'one of the most elusive and effective strategies of colonial power and knowledge' and the idea of mimicry in postcolonial discourse is defined by him as 'the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite'.²¹ In other words, mimicry can also be interpreted as copying of the dominant culture of

¹⁸ Rushdie, 12.

¹⁹ McLeod, 215.

²⁰ Yasmin Hussain, *Writing Diaspora: South Asian Women, Culture, and Ethnicity* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2005) 26.

²¹ Homi K Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1994) 122.

the state by the immigrants. However, as Bhabha suggests, the result of the adoption of the culture in power by the immigrants is never a perfect copy of the dominant society. Therefore, mimicry is often an exaggeration and as an imperfect copy, almost but not quite, it becomes a subversion of the hegemonic culture, rather than necessarily an assumption of pre-given scenarios of identity. Furthermore, Bhabha supports his argument about mimicry by quoting Jacques Lacan, a French psychoanalyst and psychiatrist, who claims that ‘the effect of mimicry is camouflage’ but ‘it is not a question of harmonizing with the background’.²² The idea of mimicry is yet another aspect which Kureishi examines in some of his novels.

The argument of the thesis will be based on both primary and secondary literature. However, due to the large amount and thematic versatility of Kureishi’s published novels and stories, the analysis will have to focus primarily on the most seminal pieces of his work. The novel which will be central for the analysis is *The Buddha of Suburbia* that was first published in 1990. *The Buddha of Suburbia* is still considered to be Kureishi’s most successful work and partly derives its plot from the author’s own youth spent in Britain as a child of a British mother and a Pakistani father. The visibly autobiographical material and deep personal experience with the situation in Britain of the 1970s and 80s can be identified in several of Kureishi’s other works as well. These works will also serve as subjects of the analysis. Namely, *The Black Album* from 1995 which explores the state of religious fundamentalism and the theme of fatwa against Salman Rushdie and the 1996 screenplay *My Beautiful Launderette* which reflects more cultural struggles in Thatcher’s Britain. Furthermore, the thesis will analyse *The Rainbow Sign*, Kureishi’s essay about his visit to Pakistan, *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid* from 1988 and a short story *My Son the Fanatic* from 1994. In case of *My Son the Fanatic*, the analysis will address the screenplay version of the story. The film adaptations of Kureishi’s writing will be considered as they are an inseparable part of his creative output. All the texts and films mentioned above were chosen for the thesis because, despite the different characters and overall plot lines, they all have in common the expression of cultural conflicts in Britain and the theoretical terms connected to diasporic writing discussed in this chapter can be identified in them.

The aim of the thesis is to describe the immigrant identity on several levels and as fully as possible. The first part of the thesis will deal with the first generation immigrants in Kureishi’s writing. In particular, the main focus will be on the characters of Haroon, Anwar but also Jeeta from *The Buddha of Suburbia* who will be contrasted with some other immigrants from

²² Bhabha, 121.

Kureishi's works. The second part of the thesis will then discuss the second generation immigrants, especially the protagonist of *The Buddha of Suburbia*, Karim, but also Jamila. Similarly, as in the case of the first part of this work, discussions of the two characters will include comparisons with other second generation immigrants featured in Kureishi's works. In both parts of the thesis, all the struggles which take place in the minds of the characters and through which they gain new understandings of themselves and their surroundings will be considered. Furthermore, how the immigrants try to define their identity and roots, and cope with the level of conflict that arises, will be discussed, including an analysis of the difficulties of living in a place where the immigrant is treated mostly without respect and becomes the subject of mockery due to their cultural difference. The focus will be on the position of the immigrants in British society and their relationships with the white British citizens as well as on the relationships among the immigrants themselves. It needs to be stressed that not all of the characters deal with their position in Britain in the same way, therefore not only conflicts between individuals of the same background but also conflicts which arise due to generational differences in families must be analysed. In other words, the discussion will illustrate how the characters accept or reject the cultural surroundings of the country they live in and what their expectations of the place are according to the generation they come from. However, the thesis will also comment on various abuse on the basis of race that is very frequent in Kureishi's fiction. Accordingly, the topics of racism and social prejudice will be touched upon throughout the analysis as racist attacks are one of the major obstacles which the immigrant has to face. Furthermore, the thesis will examine a number of general conflicts which are based on different cultural values and beliefs within society - it will discuss the attacks of the white population against the immigrants as well as the various sorts of rebellion of the Asian-British.

In discussing all the above mentioned works and themes, the thesis will seek to explore the range of conflicts which arise as a legacy of the British Empire in the 20th century British society and the way in which Kureishi's writing mirrors the struggles of South Asian diasporic communities in such difficult times; the times during which the word 'Pakistani' began to be used as an 'insult' by the dominant culture and 'the British complained incessantly that the Pakistanis wouldn't assimilate ... they wanted the Pakistanis to be exactly like them. But of course even then they would have rejected them' because, as Kureishi argues in his essay *The Rainbow Sign*, it was the British who 'were doing the assimilating: they assimilated Pakistanis to their world view. They saw them as dirty, ignorant and less than human - worthy of abuse and

violence'.²³ As the conception of the argument and the general complexity of the analysis will consider the mingling of the inner life of the immigrant figure and the external factors that influence their everyday activities in Britain, it will serve to provide a broader understanding of such cultural conflicts.

²³ *My Beautiful Laundrette and The Rainbow Sign*, 12.

2. Conflicts of the first generation immigrants

As stated in the introduction, a line must be drawn between the experience of the first and second generation of immigrants in Britain because their position in society and view of Britain as a place differs greatly. However, this statement does not imply that all immigrants of the same generation have identical attitudes to their life in the country to which they have moved. In other words, in discussions of the first generation immigrants in this chapter, it is important to keep in mind that despite the fact that these characters belong to the same generation and often share a common past, the way they deal with their position in Britain varies in several aspects and the individual characters sometimes do not understand each other's behaviour. In Kureishi's works there are several first generation immigrants: they are men and women who came to Britain in the 1950s, and who had to deal with the initial shock of arriving in the country as immigrants from the East, in particular from Pakistan and India. Although Kureishi's novel *The Buddha of Suburbia* focuses predominantly on the male characters, Haroon and Anwar, when it comes to the first generation, he also examines Princess Jeeta, who came to Britain with her husband to start a new way of life. Other first generation immigrants in Kureishi's works include Rafi from *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid*; Nasser, Bilquis and Papa from *My Beautiful Laundrette*; Parvez, Minoo, and Fizzy from *My Son the Fanatic* and Shahid's father and mother in *The Black Album*.

Haroon plays several roles within *The Buddha of Suburbia*: he is 'Haroon' the immigrant from India who married an English working-class woman from the suburbs and started a family with her, he is Karim's father also referred to as 'Daddio', and yet he is also 'Harry' in the eyes of his English relatives and a spiritual man, the 'Buddha of suburbia', at the same time. This illustrates the extent to which Haroon has multiple identities and the number of viewpoints from which he can be analysed as a character. The narrator informs the reader that Haroon, who was sent by his family from India to England, faced a lot of unforeseen issues when he started to settle in the place that was to become his new home because his idea of the West had been rather unrealistic before he arrived and began to personally experience the true everyday life in Britain. As the narrator says in the novel:

[...] He'd [Haroon] never seen the English in poverty, as roadsweepers, dustmen, shopkeepers and barmen. He'd never seen an Englishman stuffing bread into his mouth with his fingers, and no one had told him the English didn't wash regularly because the

water was so cold - if they had water at all.²⁴

In other words, the novel illustrates a strong sense of disillusionment on the part of this first generation immigrant upon his arrival. However, the initial shock after moving to Britain seems stronger for Haroon than it may have been for many other immigrants of the time, because as his wife Margaret stresses, Haroon's family in India is 'higher than the Churchills' and he does not belong among the 'Indian peasants' that came to Britain in the 1950s and 1960s and are not even 'familiar with cutlery'.²⁵ Therefore, Haroon, as an upper class Indian brought up in relative luxury in India where he was in personal contact with people from the West, arrives in England with a number of false, pre-constructed ideas of Britishness that were formed as a result of his previous encounters with the rich, upper class, educated English people in Bombay, who spent their time in India and played cricket with the natives. Furthermore, his background and the way of life he experienced in India plays a large role in Haroon's personal development throughout the novel because he is someone who had servants and 'went to school in a horse-drawn carriage' and suddenly he has to face a new reality and take care of himself.²⁶ In other words, there is a large gap between his quality of life in the country that he left and the London suburbs he moves to. It therefore becomes a difficult task for Haroon, who thought that Britain would be 'roast beef and Yorkshire pudding all the way' and provide him with wealth and success, to deal with his new position. Subsequently, when the reality does not meet his expectations, Haroon struggles with simple daily tasks: he is not used to a great deal of responsibility and hard work, which is reflected in his failure to finish his law studies. This provokes the anger of his Indian family that decides to stop sending him money when they find out that Haroon has no will to fulfil their wishes and appears to be stuck in one place going nowhere with his life.²⁷ However, this disillusionment with the state of the new homeland and the change of responsibilities which it carries for the immigrant character goes hand in hand with the racial prejudice that the dominant culture has towards them. In other words, for Haroon, the typical disillusionment does not only stem from the state of society but also the ways in which the society as a whole accepts, or rather does not accept, the South-Asian immigrant. Racism and racially motivated attacks are

²⁴ Hanif Kureishi, *The Buddha of Suburbia* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1990) 24.

²⁵ *The Buddha of Suburbia*, 24.

²⁶ *The Buddha of Suburbia*, 24.

²⁷ *The Buddha of Suburbia*, 24.

very common at the time when the first generation immigrants started arriving in Britain and as Kureishi states in *The Rainbow Sign*, these immigrants were ‘derided on television and exploited by politicians’ and ‘they had the worst jobs, they were uncomfortable in England, some of them had difficulties with the language. They were despised and out of place.’²⁸ Several conflicts arise in Haroon’s life due to his ethnicity, for example when he is attacked on the streets by schoolboys who throw ‘stones and ice-pops’ at him only because he does not have white skin.²⁹ However, he also mirrors Kureishi’s statement from *The Rainbow Sign* quoted above in a sense that he has a badly paid job in which he will never be promoted due to racial prejudice. Therefore, it is possible to argue that it is a combination of false expectations before the arrival, negative reception of Haroon in Britain due to his race and his oscillation between the practices in India and the country he moves to that triggers his series of inner conflicts, i.e. the transformations and attempts to find himself and who he really is.

The concept of being stuck in one place and going nowhere that is mentioned above in connection to Haroon’s early days in Britain is important for Kureishi’s *The Buddha of Suburbia* in particular because the image of characters stranded in a location and in a certain stage of their life is very strong in the novel. Haroon’s condition of not moving anywhere is not only a consequence of racism in British society - nevertheless, it undeniably stands behind his inability to reach the quality of life attainable by the dominant culture. This reflects the state of Britain itself and the way it strongly favoured monocultural white society in all spheres of life during the time it was faced with an unprecedented flux of immigrants from the East. When Haroon moves to Britain, it is however also his personal stance, his own carelessness and lack of interest in anything that keeps him from moving forward and it takes him some time to find a job. What is then absolutely crucial in *The Buddha of Suburbia* is the actual transition from staying in one place for a long period of time and then eventually going somewhere. In other words, the novel does not only work with an idea of the first generation immigrant’s journey from India to Britain but also with a different kind of journey within a smaller geographical area in the place of the arrival. As it will be touched upon later in this chapter, it is possible to claim that Haroon’s conception of identity is partly connected to such changes of location as he moves from the suburbs to the city, from Bromley to the vibrant streets of the centre, which is also the same movement mirrored by his son Karim.

²⁸ *My Beautiful Laundrette and The Rainbow Sign*, 9.

²⁹ *The Buddha of Suburbia*, 28.

Haroon is rather successful in a sense that he finds a way of living in Britain and fights to define himself until the end of the novel. However, this is not the approach that all of Kureishi's first generation immigrant characters demonstrate. For example, in *My Beautiful Laundrette* we can see a completely opposite behaviour from that of Haroon's in the character of Papa. While they might share some common characteristics, for instance, the typical desire of the first generation immigrant to have a child who gains a good education, money, success and a brighter future, Papa is a first generation immigrant who is portrayed as struggling much more than Haroon. Both in the script and the film, Papa is most of the time portrayed as a man who can not take care of himself at all: he does not have any desire to work, he only lies in bed all day and develops serious problems with alcohol. This results in him losing his job as a clerk and makes his son turn to different people like Nasser or the other characters who believe in England and are interested in business. Unlike the disillusioned Papa, these characters think that as an immigrant in England 'you can get anything you want' because it is 'all spread out and available'.³⁰ In contrast, Papa is frustrated by the treatment of the immigrants in Britain to the point that he is completely defeated and does not show any signs of wanting to face his situation and improve his life. While Papa seems to seriously regret living in Britain and says that 'This damn country [Britain] has done us [immigrants] in. That's why I am like this. We should be there. Home.', the idea of really leaving the country and going back to the imaginary homeland that Papa calls 'home' in this scene of *My Beautiful Laundrette* is something that never occurs to Haroon as a possibility.³¹ Haroon wishes to remain in England even though he internally returns to India in his thoughts and the reader is informed that he begins to write about his childhood in Bombay towards the end of the novel. Furthermore, it is through the lack of actual desire to return to India combined with the internal return through his book writing that Haroon creates an interesting irony in the novel and it can be interpreted in two possible ways. On one hand, it can be argued that through the memories that he puts down on paper, Haroon is enabled to recall moments from the past which might help him to understand himself better as a person. In other words, Haroon can come to terms with who he is through writing about his life. On the other hand, it could simply be an interest in creating immigrant fiction that he can put on the market, and therefore an attempt to sell the immigrant identity, a concept which the discussion returns to later. Nevertheless, what is important to stress at this point is that in contrast to the regrets and

³⁰ *My Beautiful Laundrette and The Rainbow Sign*, 57.

³¹ *My Beautiful Laundrette and The Rainbow Sign*, 107.

defeat that some of the first generation characters feel because they can not distance themselves from their past and dream of returning to their imaginary homelands, Haroon takes a different approach by embodying his hyphenated identity in an inventive way. As Michael L. Ross argues, Haroon's 'approach to identity, if duplicitous, is also versatile and creative; he comes across as both droll and formidable' and he possesses 'a performative concept of ethnicity, enabling him to shuttle fluently from one persona to another'.³² In this sense, the duplicity is Haroon's deviation from the Muslim way of life he knows from Bombay, in other words his incline towards Englishness, and his newly constructed Buddha identity. The 'performative concept of ethnicity' is then at the forefront of the novel while the memories of coming to Britain and experiences from India are mostly in the background to provide general context for the reader to see what sort of person Haroon develops from.

As suggested above, Haroon shows the straddling between two cultures that is a typical sign of hybridity: he is an Indian who tries to learn how to be English but never fully succeeds to be one or the other. In other words, he is stuck in the typical hybrid condition of 'feeling neither here nor there, unable to indulge in sentiments of belonging to either location, defined by others often in unflattering ways'.³³ This is illustrated in the novel very clearly when the reader learns that Haroon spent years trying to be English and yet at the beginning of *The Buddha of Suburbia* the narrator comments on his father's inability to navigate himself through the streets of London and says:

[...] Dad had been in Britain since 1950 - over twenty years - and for fifteen of those years he'd lived in the South of London suburbs. Yet still he stumbled around the place like an Indian just off the boat, and asked questions like, 'Is Dover in Kent?' I'd have thought, as an employee of the British Government, as a Civil Service clerk, even as badly paid and insignificant a one as him, he'd just have to know these things.³⁴

Therefore, despite his unrelenting motivation and keenness to be accepted by the dominant culture in Britain, Haroon, who carries around a dictionary 'making sure to learn a new word every day' because he finds it extremely important to be able to impress the English if only with his knowledge of a 'heavyweight word', is however still completely lost in the British

³² Michael L. Ross, *Race Riots: Comedy and Ethnicity in Modern British Fiction* (London: McGill-Queen's Press, 2006) 239.

³³ McLeod, 214.

³⁴ *The Buddha of Suburbia*, 21.

environment.³⁵ In other words, as Susheila Nasta argues, Karim ‘the protagonist of Kureishi’s first novel can *home in* on English culture in a way that Haroon, his father who is still in many ways caught up in a Naipaulian discourse of arrival and loss, cannot.’³⁶ Nevertheless, that does not seem to be in the way of his aspiration to be an Englishman and the English identity that is also often imposed on him. For example, as an employee of the British government, Haroon is forced to play the part of a mimic man and take commands from the dominant culture and work for ‘his country’.³⁷ Furthermore, Haroon’s attempts to be an Englishman would be approved of by Margaret’s relatives. Jean, Margaret’s sister, and her husband Ted show the typical prejudice about Haroon’s roots. While Ted seems to begin to accept Haroon and see him as a wise man who is equal to him during the course of the novel, Jean never really gets rid of her prejudice. In other words, Jean strongly refuses to accept ‘the real Haroon’, i.e. the Indian immigrant with his inherent characteristics and behaviour. In this sense, Jean can be seen as a representative of the dominant culture, i.e. the white British that simply do not accept the immigrant for what they are. The initial inability of Ted and Margaret’s sister Jean, and mostly Jean later in the novel, to accept the immigrant is reflected in the way they refer to him:

[...] Ted and Jean never called Dad by his Indian name, Haroon Amir. He was always ‘Harry’ to them, and they spoke of him as Harry to other people. It was bad enough his being an Indian in the first place, without having an awkward name too. They’d called Dad Harry from the first time they’d met him, and there was nothing Dad could do about it.³⁸

According to Benedict Alliot, for Margaret’s sister and her husband Ted re-naming Haroon means to simply ‘define and fix the Other’, it is a way of making him English because ‘naming and mostly nicknaming work as ways to conceal the origins and identity of a person’.³⁹ However, despite Haroon’s own tenacious attempts to be an Englishman and Ted and Jean’s endeavour to reform him and make him seem to be a white British man by referring to him by a typically English name in front of the people they meet and socialise with, he can never really

³⁵ *The Buddha of Suburbia*, 28.

³⁶ Nasta, 176.

³⁷ Nahem Yousaf, *Hanif Kureishi’s The Buddha of Suburbia: A Reader’s Guide* (New York: Continuum, 2002) 47.

³⁸ *The Buddha of Suburbia*, 33.

³⁹ Benedict Alliot, ‘Misplacement in Hanif Kureishi’s *The Buddha of Suburbia*,’ *Commonwealth: Essays and Studies* 4 1997: 98.

become 'Harry' through such attempts to anglicise him. It is possible to claim that Haroon is firmly trapped in his hybrid identity and lives what Homi Bhabha calls the 'border life' - in other words, he is stuck 'on the margins of different nations, in-between contrary homelands'.⁴⁰

However, Haroon gradually seems to find his way out of the identity that his British environment constantly tries to force onto him through his life phase during which he becomes the Buddha of suburbia.⁴¹ As the narrator says in the beginning of the novel, Haroon 'spent years trying to be more of an Englishman' and 'to be less risibly conspicuous' but during his Buddha phase he suddenly starts to put his Indianness 'back in spadeloads' by 'hissing his s's and exaggerating his Indian accent':⁴²

[...] He was certainly exotic, probably the only man in southern England at that moment (apart, possibly, from George Harrison) wearing a red and gold waistcoat and Indian pyjamas. He was graceful, a front room Nureyev beside the other pasty-faced Arbuckles with their tight drip-dry shirts glued to their guts and John Collier grey trousers with the crotch all sagging and creased.⁴³

Haroon's continual transformation into the Buddha figure is yet another form of mimicry which he illustrates in the novel. Therefore, what the reader can see in Haroon's character in *The Buddha of Suburbia* is the instability of an immigrant's identity, that it never stays the same because it is always in motion and that there is the possibility of swapping one form of mimicry for another.⁴⁴ As the narrator puts it, 'perhaps Daddio [Haroon] was really a magician' because he 'transformed himself by the bootlaces ... from being an Indian in the Civil Service who was always cleaning his teeth with Monkey Brand black toothpowder manufactured by Nogi & Co. of Bombay, into the wise adviser he now appeared to be'.⁴⁵ In other words, Haroon exchanges the life he leads as a mimic during his every day job for the British government for his new version of himself, the exaggerated Indian Buddha figure that is however nothing else but yet another example of mimicry because after years in England he no longer has his 'original identity'. In other words, he is not the Indian man that he used to be but has a hybrid British-

⁴⁰ McLeod, 217.

⁴¹ Yousaf, 47.

⁴² *The Buddha of Suburbia*, 21.

⁴³ *The Buddha of Suburbia*, 31.

⁴⁴ Graham Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* (London: Routledge, 2001) 96.

⁴⁵ *The Buddha of Suburbia*, 31.

Asian identity. Drawing on the definition of mimicry discussed in the introduction where it was stated that mimicry means not to harmonise ‘with the background, but against a mottled background’, it is possible to argue that before entering the Buddha phase, Haroon accomplishes living exactly this ‘mottled’ existence as he succeeds in mastering the technique of camouflage that is typical of mimicry.⁴⁶ However, the ‘itself that is behind’ in the process of mimicry comes to the surface when Haroon becomes the Buddha of suburbia.⁴⁷ Through turning to what he knows about the country of his birth and focusing on the Indian culture that the white British perceive as exotic, Haroon finds an inventive way of dealing with his hybrid identity in Britain. The man that was described as wearing ‘a black polo-neck sweater, a black imitation-leather jacket and grey Marks and Spencer cords’ in the beginning of the novel becomes someone who comes home in his ‘bespoke Burton’s suit, a yellow waistcoat with a watch on a chain . . . , and striped tie in pink and blue with a knot as fat as a bar of soap’ as he turns into ‘a porky little Buddha’, someone who is no longer plain but ‘vibrant’ and ‘life itself’.⁴⁸ In other words, Haroon becomes visibly different as he starts to wear gaudy clothes and appears more energetic. This transformation results from his new performative self, the self that gradually embraces the stereotypical ideas of Indianness that the white British people have and with the help from his mistress Eva, who plays a large role in his Buddha transformation, he uses these stereotypes for his own gain throughout the novel. As Graham Huggan argues, Haroon uses the Buddha persona to ‘show others the hollowness of their provincial lives - a life he himself leads, and whose self-centred materialist values he shares’ and by that he also exposes ‘the fraudulence of his middlebrow suburban public, whose feeble efforts to appear sophisticated merely accentuate their own provincialism’.⁴⁹ Therefore, by such behaviour, Haroon also illustrates how mimicry can become a subversion of the hegemonic culture. Furthermore, towards the end of the novel the narrator begins to talk about his father’s development in the city and states:

[...] Dad was teaching this several times a week at a nearby Yoga Centre. I’d always imagined that Dad’s guru business would eventually fall off in London, but it was clear now that he would never lack employment while the city was full of lonely, unhappy, unconfident people who required guidance, support and pity.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Bhabha, 121.

⁴⁷ Yousaf, 48.

⁴⁸ *The Buddha of Suburbia*, 6, 84.

⁴⁹ Huggan, 97.

⁵⁰ *The Buddha of Suburbia*, 279.

In other words, the dominant culture in *The Buddha of Suburbia* starts to blindly trust the immigrant character. The British are interested in Haroon's Eastern religion and as a result of that they find him and follow, practise and trust his Buddhist teachings while Haroon himself does not seem to believe the things he preaches until the very end of the novel. Therefore, paradoxically, by embracing the exotic roots that are often the reason behind the racist attacks the immigrants have to face throughout the novel, he gains a following among the white British who seek help, rely on his words and live their lives according to his teachings. Furthermore, thanks to Haroon's mistress Eva who introduces him to a lot of people who look for such spiritual guidance he can turn his sessions into his everyday job and as a result of that he is labelled by the media as a 'dark charlatan' who solves the mysteries of life 'at taxpayers' expense'.⁵¹ Indeed, during his guru evenings, Haroon acts as a mimic Indian and by showing such artificially constructed cultural difference to the white British he personifies their own ideas of 'the oriental Other' and sells it to them.⁵² In other words, as the discussion foreshadowed in connection to Haroon's tendencies to write a book, it is possible to argue that in the character of Haroon, Kureishi illustrates a commodification of both identity and mimicry and shows the readers that the immigrant can find a way to make it marketable to the white British who have certain unrealistic and stereotypical perceptions of what it means to be Indian. Furthermore, marketing of otherness and selling it as a commodity introduces something that is new and appealing to the white British. In general, it is possible to claim that such adept selling of identities does not only bring profit to someone who represents 'the oriental Other' but it can also trigger more interest among members of the dominant culture in the exoticness itself and what sort of things it can offer. In other words, many ethnicities, including the South-Asian ones that are the subject of Kureishi's writings, have the capacity to evolve into concepts that sell in the West because the exoticism that is connected with them can become fashionable and fill in the gaps on the Western markets by offering something foreign and therefore also attractive. Moreover, the cultural difference which is sold by the immigrant figures often becomes domesticated, especially in case of things such as exotic music, food, or unusual clothes that are some of the most common articles generally contained and consumed by the dominant culture in the West.

⁵¹ *The Buddha of Suburbia*, 115.

⁵² Sabrina Brancato, 'Transcultural Outlooks in *The Buddha of Suburbia* and *Some Kind of Black*,' *A Sea For Encounters: Essays Towards a Postcolonial Commonwealth*, ed. Stella Borg Barthet (New York: Rodopi, 2009) 51-67.

The commodification of identity and mimicry in *The Buddha of Suburbia* in particular recalls one of the scenes in Kureishi's film *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid* in which the audience witnesses a conversation between the British girl Anna and her lover's father Rafi who arrives from the East to spend some time in Britain and slowly discovers his son's way of life:

[...] ANNA: (To Rafi) I do Gestalt therapy, an hour of Indian yoga, followed by Buddhist chanting. Do you chant?
RAFI: Chant what, my dear?
ANNA: Mantras, to calm yourself.
RAFI: I am calm. It is agitation I seek. You young international people mystify me. For you the whole world and culture is a kind of department store. You go in and take something you like from each floor. But you're attached to nothing. Your lives are incoherent, shallow.⁵³

In the scene quoted above, the young photographer Anna reflects the kind of people who would go to Haroon's Buddhist sessions in *The Buddha of Suburbia* because she has the same limited notions of what it means to be Indian as Haroon's audience. Therefore, as Rafi suggests, she has no real knowledge of the culture and only adopts the stereotypical visions that the white Britons have about Indian immigrants. In other words, as Tracey K. Parker argues, during this conversation with Rafi 'Anna has no idea that she is talking to a Muslim or what that even really means; to her, anyone from South Asia would chant'.⁵⁴ Furthermore, similar assumptions from the side of the white British are illustrated in *The Rainbow Sign* where Kureishi briefly describes his childhood during which he used to meet his uncles from India who often came to England because of their business:

[...] When I was nine or ten a teacher purposefully placed some pictures of Indian peasants in mud huts in front of me and said to the class: Hanif comes from India. I wondered: Did my uncles ride on camels? Surely not in their suits?⁵⁵

As a result of such stereotypical assumptions of the white British as shown in *The Rainbow Sign* or *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid*, the Buddha mimicry exemplified by Haroon in *The Buddha of*

⁵³ Hanif Kureishi, *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid: The Script and the Diary* (London: Faber and Faber, 1988) 36.

⁵⁴ Tracey K. Parker, *Pop Life: Images and Popular Culture in the Works of Hanif Kureishi and Zadie Smith* (Ann Arbor: ProQuest, 2008) 42.

⁵⁵ *My Beautiful Laundrette and The Rainbow Sign*, 9.

Suburbia proves to be very easily believable and eventually exploited for financial gain. In other words, the role of the mimic Indian turns out to be very positive for Haroon's personal development within the British society as it enables him to leave the suburbs and reach higher social circles in London. However, Haroon does not use the mimicry purely to make money throughout the whole novel. At the end of *The Buddha of Suburbia* Haroon takes his spiritual career very seriously:

[...] 'I want to discuss how we live our lives, what our values are, what kind of people we've become and what we can be if we want...I want to help others to contemplate the deeper wisdom of themselves which is often concealed in the rush of everyday life.'⁵⁶

Therefore, it is possible to argue that Haroon is more spiritual than most of other Kureishi's characters that belong to the first generation immigrants in his books and his spirituality is honest and true. The Indian mimicry seems to serve Haroon to an extent as an activity which helps him to define himself and he genuinely starts to believe his teachings towards the end of the novel when he claims: 'this [the Buddhist occupation] is the meaning of my life'.⁵⁷ As a result of the long process during which Haroon started to market his Indianness in the novel he comes to the conclusion about his identity when he says: 'I have lived in the West for most of my life, and I will die here, yet I remain to all intents and purposes an Indian man. I will never be anything but an Indian.'⁵⁸

Up until this point in the discussion of Haroon, the immigrant's mimicry was considered as an instrument that can lead to subversion of the white British who are the representatives of the dominant culture in Kureishi's works. However, this is not the only way of looking at the immigrant's identity and there are critics who hesitate to fully agree with such interpretations. In other words, although it can seem that subversion of the British is exactly the effect of Haroon's Buddha mimicry, in fact there are arguments that the way Haroon's identity is constructed is not that simple and it can be viewed from a completely different perspective. For example, Susheila Nasta draws our attention to the fact that when it comes to hybridity then 'despite the obvious attractiveness for contemporary critics of ... the notion of an intentional subversion of dominant forms', it is possible to be sceptical towards such readings of diasporic

⁵⁶ *The Buddha of Suburbia*, 266.

⁵⁷ *The Buddha of Suburbia*, 266.

⁵⁸ *The Buddha of Suburbia*, 263.

writings.⁵⁹ Nasta's commentary on hybridity and Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* in *Home Truths: Fictions of the South Asian Diaspora in Britain* reminds the readers that characters which we classify as hybrid should not be seen clearly as crossing borders of identities and therefore having the abilities to create and endlessly reconstruct who they are as people and that this may eventually lead to their empowerment. In *The Buddha of Suburbia* in particular, it is possible to look at Haroon as somebody who does not suddenly gain a true freedom of identity by being an immigrant who came to live in Britain. In other words, if we accept Nasta's approach to the novel, hybridity of itself does not necessarily and automatically grant Haroon liberty and he can not play with his identity, freely reinvent it and as a result choose when and who exactly he will become or for what reason. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Haroon has several set options as in who he will be and what sort of role he will play in British society; he can accept to be the lower middle class immigrant who works as a clerk for the government, the role which he really plays at the beginning of the novel soon after his arrival in Britain, he can also take on the role of 'Harry' which his relatives impose on him in order to anglicise him. However, he can favour yet another type of identity and that is the general cultural identity which emerged in British society in the 1960s. This identity is exemplified in the above quote from *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid* and it created, followed and believed the stereotypical notions that whenever someone comes from the East, no matter if the country of their birth is India, Pakistan, Tibet or any other place, it automatically has to mean that this person is some sort of a guru, yogi or Buddha. The only factor that is important for the white British population here is the fact that through the presence of these people they can approach something entirely new that is Eastern and therefore very mystical. As a result, the British may use the immigrant, such as Haroon in *The Buddha of Suburbia*, whom they pay to be their means to a certain kind of personal enlightenment that, as Kureishi's book shows, may be very superficial and pretentious. However, as Susheila Nasta argues, Haroon adopts this 'pose of a fraudulent spiritual guru' and he 'is keen to cash in on the marketability' of his 'prepackaged identity'.⁶⁰

If we think of Haroon as an immigrant with a ready-made identity, it works in the novel mostly as great means for Haroon's mistress Eva to reach a better social position in London. Eva is skilled at helping to market Haroon's exoticism and otherness and by marrying him in the end of the novel she also reinvents her own identity and changes from a suburban lower middle class

⁵⁹ Nasta, 180.

⁶⁰ Nasta, 191.

woman to a designer in the city where she surrounds herself with people from higher middle class.⁶¹ As it has been suggested earlier in the discussion, the spatial movement from the margins to the centre is crucial for Haroon's conception of who he is; in Bromley he works as a clerk but in the city he fully embraces his guru occupation and his change of locations is also connected with his vertical movement up the social ladder. In other words, Haroon as an Indian from a high class in Bombay becomes a lower middle class employee of the government in the suburbs and eventually turns into a higher middle class Buddhist in London. Therefore, it is possible to claim that Eva basically mirrors Haroon's development. Furthermore, Eva is the character that is responsible for changing Haroon's suburban values and taking him away from his family. She especially minimises his contact with his working class wife Margaret who is 'a plump and unphysical woman with a pale round face and kind brown eyes' that wears 'an apron with flowers' and wipes her hands 'on a tea towel, a souvenir from Woburn Abbey', which makes her the epitome of Englishness and therefore absolutely uninteresting for the pretentious white British like Eva and the group of people for whom Haroon dresses as a Buddha to talk to them and educate them about Oriental philosophy and who look for anything exotic to make their suburban lives more interesting and exciting.⁶² Furthermore, already on the first couple of pages of the novel the reader can find a passage in which Karim overhears his father Haroon with Eva in the garden and says that he wonders if he was conceived 'to the wailing of Christian curses from the mouth of a renegade Muslim masquerading as a Buddhist'.⁶³ This statement shows that even the protagonist of the novel who belongs to Haroon's family is sceptical towards the honesty of the identity of his father and as a result he is very ironic towards Haroon's Buddhism. Indeed, Karim sees his father's guru business as a simple mask that Haroon gradually takes on and wonders about his shift of religions and keen interest in Eastern philosophy that he witnesses at home and during the evenings at Eva's house. If we then focus on one of the last statements of Haroon at the end of the novel in terms of Nasta's criticism, when he proclaims that he finally found himself and the meaning of his existence in his job as a guru and helping people with their problems, we can question this self-definition and acquisition of identity. In other words, even though Haroon claims that he considers his guru way of life to be a kind of

⁶¹ Nasta, 191.

⁶² N. Hale and Thabish Khair, *Unhinging Hinglish: The Languages and Politics of Fiction in English from the Indian Subcontinent* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2001)129.

⁶³ *The Buddha of Suburbia*, 16.

accomplishment, ironically he finds fulfilment in nothing else but masquerading himself as a Buddhist, personifying the deep-rooted Western stereotypes and basically serving as an attraction for the white British. Therefore, in conclusion of the discussion of Haroon, it is necessary to stress that one possibility of looking at Haroon's character in *The Buddha of Suburbia* is that he defines himself and intentionally constructs the Buddha figure which works in the novel as a subversion of the hegemonic culture. In contrast, the second way of interpreting Haroon is that he simply accepts the ready-made, stereotypical identity which is pre-packaged for him by his Orientalising surroundings because, after all, he only becomes a guru for the suburbanites with certain notions of what a man from the East should be like and all his knowledge and wisdom is not gained from his previous experiences in Bombay but from a number of books 'on Buddhism, Sufism, Confucianism and Zen' which he buys 'at the Oriental bookshop in Cecil Court, off Charing Cross Road'.⁶⁴

The above quotation about Haroon's desire to teach people about themselves, reflects a conversation between Haroon and Anwar that they had at the beginning of *The Buddha of Suburbia* where Haroon says: 'Look, Anwar, don't you ever feel you want to know yourself? That you are an enigma to yourself completely?'⁶⁵ At this point of the novel the reader begins to see the immense differences between Anwar and Haroon as people and their varying approaches to life in Britain despite the fact that they both belong to the first generation immigrants and have a common past. Anwar's answer to Haroon's question about whether he sometimes wants to understand himself is very negative and he does not seem to think about his personality in the same terms that Haroon does. In consequence, Anwar does not spend his time contemplating his life situation and overanalysing himself as a person. The reader is informed that Anwar arrived in England after marrying an Indian princess called Jeeta whose family carried weapons, which made Anwar anxious to leave to England. While Haroon was sent to England to study, i.e. acquire a better knowledge and opportunity than India's education system could offer him, and spent a lot of time living on money provided for him by his family living in Bombay, Anwar tried to settle very fast in Brixton and found a way of starting his own business that would guarantee him some sort of an income. Therefore, he ended up being an owner of a little toy shop in South London. This illustrates how possessive Anwar is from the very beginning of the novel and how determined he is to become successful in Britain at the point when his friend

⁶⁴ *The Buddha of Suburbia*, 5.

⁶⁵ *The Buddha of Suburbia*, 28.

Haroon only wanders around without any higher purpose. Nevertheless, when Anwar's plans do not turn out the way he expects them to, he is forced by the circumstances and also by his wife Jeeta to open a grocery shop in order to be able to make enough money to live on in Britain. Either way, his life immediately after his arrival in the new country revolves around work and he devotes all his time to his shop and possible ways in which he can prosper. In other words, Anwar's life is more money-centered than Haroon's: he is a lot more careful when it comes to his finances and wants to have economic security which seems to be one of his major priorities in life. Consequently, Anwar as a character is very similar to the community of first generation immigrants that appear in Kureishi's *My Beautiful Laundrette*, especially the business oriented Nasser who is very active in terms of work and whose major concerns are money that come to him from the laundrettes and his garage. However, Anwar also shares characteristics with Parvez from *My Son the Fanatic*: Parvez drives around in his taxi all night in order to gain an income with which he can ensure the well being of his child and wife whom he expects to obey him in return just like Anwar expects Jeeta and Jamila to fulfil his wishes. Furthermore, the contrasting values of Anwar and Haroon result in Anwar's bitter criticism of his friend's way of life and the way he treats and cares about his son Karim and wife Margaret. Such behaviour of Anwar's triggers a number of conflicts throughout the first half of the novel, for example in one of the scenes in chapter two when Haroon voices his disinterest towards anything material, Anwar says: 'You [Haroon] bloody Chinese fool. How are you reading rubbish when I'm making money! I've paid off my bastard mortgage! ... I haven't got time to dream! ... Nor should you be dreaming. Wake up!'⁶⁶ This passage brings up the differences between the men very strongly and confirms the major characteristics of the two immigrants after their arrival: Haroon as the spiritual man and Anwar as the materialistic one that seems to perceive the world more realistically and possibly thinks about life more practically.

Nevertheless, it is not possible to say that Anwar stays the same throughout the novel while his friend Haroon undergoes several transformations of identity; Anwar's character is definitely not static and he also changes as Kureishi's story develops. In other words, while in the first half of the novel Anwar does not dream of returning to India and he is focused on the present moment as well as the possible future life that he might lead in Britain, the second half of *The Buddha of Suburbia* shows a different side of Anwar. This reformed Anwar then begins to be frustrated by the way his life and relationships develop and he experiences severe longing to

⁶⁶ *The Buddha of Suburbia*, 27.

return to the old way of life in India which he left many years ago. Anwar's sudden change of perception of the surroundings, London, British culture and the possibility that it provides for the immigrant becomes obvious especially when the generational differences in his family start to appear and put pressure on all the characters involved. Due to the tensions between Anwar and his relatives, the reader learns about Anwar's violent behaviour through the character of Jamila who tells Karim that her father takes his frustrations out on her mother. Therefore, Jeeta experiences physical violence from her husband and once it stops he finds different ways to make everything unpleasant for her and he makes sure her life is miserable. In consequence, both Jeeta and Jamila are bound to stay at home and live with Anwar because of their cultural upbringing and their fear of the consequences that their flight away from him might have. As Nahem Yousaf argues, in Anwar 'Kureishi demonstrates that the 'old ways' first generation immigrants are prone to cling to outside their country of birth are outmoded and redundant.'⁶⁷ In other words, in this often violent behaviour of Anwar, *The Buddha of Suburbia* illustrates the ultimate patriarchy that is even nowadays still perceived to be rather typical of all Muslim countries: women do not have much freedom to live the way they want to and they are used to living in an environment in which it is not always desirable to speak up for themselves, voice their opinions or disagree with their husbands however degrading the situation at home might be for them. Therefore, after the journey to Britain and settling there, the male immigrants like Anwar may strongly persist with some of their old practices that they learned from their culture in India and as a result of that they behave in ways which are not acceptable in Britain and looked down upon by the Western society in general. Furthermore, Anwar is not the only character who seems to have such possessive tendencies and who strives for patriarchal power over his wife. Indeed, such conflicts appear and are very common in most of Kureishi's works of fiction and they will be discussed later in connection to the character of Jeeta.

Anwar's behaviour that reflects the Eastern way of life however reaches beyond his obsession with patriarchal authority that results in physical violence and what may be labelled as continuous psychological oppression of his wife. As Haroon goes through the long process during which he searches for his identity and as a result of which he becomes the Buddha of *The Buddha of Suburbia*, Anwar also undergoes a major personality change during his life in Britain and begins to devote himself to spirituality. Through his transition to the 'Muslim' behaviour, or more precisely through his reinvention of the Muslim customs that he was raised with in South

⁶⁷ Yousaf, 44.

Asia and that are therefore rooted deeply within him and now simply brought into the foreground, Anwar also displays a longing to return to a more Indian way of life. By this he supports Haroon's statement that 'old Indians come to like this England less and less' throughout their stay in Britain and that they 'return to the imagined India' as a result of their unflagging dissatisfaction.⁶⁸ As Davis Huddart argues, 'to imagine a homeland is actually to imagine something very solid that will ground and guarantee your identity' and this imagined homeland is a product of the typical immigrants' thoughts that their home is not where they find themselves at the present moment but somewhere else and that their return to this homeland could provide them with a 'place to start again'.⁶⁹ Therefore, Anwar's inner return to India is, in general terms, similar to that of Haroon and other first generation immigrants' as it is nothing else than a desire to find a secure location where he can live his life and feel firmly rooted at the same time. However, the India Anwar comes back to in thoughts and dreams is now the imaginary homeland of no return and the inner 'revisitation' of the homeland that the book talks about clashes with some of the statements about the country within the narrative. As Anwar himself says: 'India's a rotten place ... Why would I want to go there again? It's filthy and hot ... If I went anywhere it would be to Florida and Las Vegas for gambling.'⁷⁰ Therefore, Anwar exemplifies the complexity of the hybrid character; although an actual return to India is physically feasible for him and he thinks about his past in the East all the time, he does not consider returning to live there. Therefore, Anwar's hybridity enables him to refuse India itself and prefer the Western countries to live in and yet to stick to the religion of the country he originally comes from. Throughout the book, the reader learns that Anwar begins to take the religion of his homeland very seriously and the major example of Anwar's religious extremism is his treatment of his daughter Jamila. Obsessed with the vision of having his daughter married to an Indian, Anwar decides to proceed to organise her future and arranges her marriage. Therefore, yet another difference between him and Haroon comes to the surface in this part of the book. While Haroon openly discourages his son Karim from seeing and socialising with Indians whom he sees as people who could only bring trouble into his life, Anwar is scared that his only daughter might meet white British boys during her karate lessons and that she could have 'mixed-race' children in the future, which is something he does not agree with and dreads the possibility that it could

⁶⁸ *The Buddha of Suburbia*, 74.

⁶⁹ David Huddart, *Homi K. Bhabha* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006) 47.

⁷⁰ *The Buddha of Suburbia*, 64.

ever happen. As a result of such growing agitations, Anwar decides to select a man for Jamila with help from his brother in India and announces to her that she is to marry an Indian and that ‘he would come over, slip on his overcoat and wife and live happily ever after’.⁷¹ However, Jamila, due to the fact that she belongs to the second generation immigrants, holds the modern and, most importantly Western beliefs that she can marry anyone she wants. In other words, she is not pleased with her father’s strong Eastern habits that fuel his false ideas that he has the right to organise her life. In consequence, Jamila rebels against her father and refuses to fulfil his wish. The generational conflict between father and daughter that is exemplified in these characters will be further discussed in the following chapter in connection to Jamila’s character. However, its mention is of immediate importance because it results in Anwar’s hunger strike, one of the crucial events that appear in *The Buddha of Suburbia*:

[...] It was certainly bizarre, Uncle Anwar behaving like a Muslim. I’d never known him believe in anything before, so it was an amazing novelty to find him literally staking his life on the principle of absolute patriarchal authority.⁷²

In other words, Anwar’s hunger strike is, in essence, a way of blackmailing his own daughter as a result of which he hopes she will marry the Indian man, Changez, that he chose for her. Therefore, Anwar uses his religion as an excuse for his increasingly irrational behaviour and, as Naham Yousaf argues, by evoking Islam he ‘represents himself as having ‘fixed identity’ that originates in his ‘motherland’.⁷³ In contrast, when Haroon becomes the Buddha of suburbia he does not use his newly gained identity as means to force his family or anybody else to perform certain actions and fulfil his wishes. On the contrary, it is possible to argue that on a larger scale, despite its possible pretentiousness and occasional capacity to make him a subject of mockery among his family members, Haroon uses the spiritual beliefs only positively to provide comfort to others and does not initiate any larger generational or general conflicts within the novel.

Furthermore, in discussion of Anwar’s spirituality, a question must be asked about its honesty. After all, as the above quote suggests, Anwar is the man who never showed any beliefs in anything and suddenly finds a strong need to adjust and change his identity by submitting himself to an extreme version of Eastern religion. The comparison of Anwar’s behaviour at the

⁷¹ *The Buddha of Suburbia*, 57.

⁷² *The Buddha of Suburbia*, 64.

⁷³ Yousaf, 44.

beginning of the novel and later after he reinvents his 'Muslim identity' raises reasonable suspicions that the faith he claims to have is false. In consequence, Anwar's beliefs become an easy object of satire in *The Buddha of Suburbia*. Indeed, as Susheila Nasta argues, Anwar is satirised by Kureishi 'for the hypocrisy his position represents': while he plans out his daughter's life he also oppresses his own wife and does not avoid alcohol, the consumption of which is prohibited by Islam.⁷⁴ Furthermore, while he tells his friend Haroon that his way of life is not correct and intervenes into his family issues and relationship with Eva, Anwar himself is described as a man who does not live in a pure marriage and the reader is told that he has been involved with prostitutes in Britain. Anwar also criticises Haroon for his keen interest in Western pop music, however he himself eats pork. Therefore, there are more factors than purely the falsity of his adopted 'Muslim' religion that make Anwar the real hypocrite in *The Buddha of Suburbia*. In addition, Anwar's indulgence in alcohol is yet another factor which makes his character similar to Parvez in Kureishi's film *My Son the Fanatic*. Parvez does not practise religion like Anwar but the reader learns during one of Parvez's conversations with his son that he knows that drinking alcohol is not allowed in his culture and that due to his upbringing in the East he should not drink it. However, he does not avoid it and consumes alcoholic drinks anyway, which results in his need to invent excuses for such behaviour. As he confidently says to his wife after she hides his bottles: 'What am I working for if I can't even wet my mouth?'⁷⁵ In other words, his most common argument is that he deserves to be able to drink alcohol because he works very hard and does not even go on holiday to enjoy himself. However, the difference between him and Anwar is that Parvez does not lecture others about the negative influence of the West on their behaviour which makes him slightly less hypocritical. Furthermore, Anwar and Parvez also notably differ in other matters, such as their contrasting conceptions of who one is as an immigrant and what their role is in British society. It is possible to claim that Parvez's behaviour throughout *My Son the Fanatic* indicates that he is more open to the habits and culture of the Western civilisation than Anwar and does not dream of returning to India. In other words, he appreciates the liberties that the West offers and, accordingly, he seems to be more willing to support, for instance, the adoption of the customs of the prevailing culture but also general openness to various kinds of identities rather than any kind of fundamentalism. In consequence, Parvez finds himself in a generational conflict with his son Farid, a young boy who gets involved

⁷⁴ Nasta, 201.

⁷⁵ Hanif Kureishi, *My Son the Fanatic* (London: Faber & Faber, 1997) 85.

in Islamic fundamentalism to gain a social identity in Britain, because he wishes his child could be more open to other types of identities like him. In comparison, Anwar's outlook on identity is very limited. That is to say, he sticks to his one-sided version of ideological constructs of who one is. Not only does Anwar limit his own identity throughout *The Buddha of Suburbia* in comparison to his friend Haroon who is more open to various kinds of identities, he also tries to severely limit the range of self-identification for others around him, especially his daughter Jamila whose Western beliefs, way of life and rising interest in feminism Anwar does not want to accept.

Unlike Parvez, Anwar continues to stick to his moralising monologues and religion as means of persuasion despite his obvious corruption and dishonesty. After years of eating prohibited meals, smoking, drinking and yet going to the mosque regularly, he proclaims: 'I won't eat. I will die. If Gandhi could shove out the English from India by not eating, I can get my family to obey me by exactly the same.'⁷⁶ Drawing on this quote, it is possible to discuss the true character of Anwar's religion itself and if it really is simply Islamic as it has been referred to in this discussion so far and as it is also most commonly interpreted by critics. Indeed, from the moment his hunger strike begins, Anwar starts to behave in the eyes of the readers but also of the other characters in the novel as a 'Muslim' because according to the narrator he behaves as if Allah is accountable for everything, and 'Muslim' is also the word that is used in the novel to talk about Anwar's behaviour. However, his religious hypocrisy aside, if all the statements within the novel about Anwar along with the characteristics of his religion are looked into more deeply, it is possible to say that the faith of the homeland that he returns to in order to fix his identity is incredibly complex and might not be defined as pure Islam. If we consider the above quotation and Anwar's comparison of his hunger strike to that performed by Gandhi, it is important to realise that by identifying his actions with Gandhi's deeds he is not comparing himself to a Muslim but a Hindu.⁷⁷ Furthermore, the narrator's remarks that Jeeta and Anwar lived their life as if it 'was of no consequence' and 'it was merely the first of many hundreds to come in which they could relish existence' also echoes Hinduism and its beliefs in the eternal spirit of the human soul.⁷⁸ It is Wendy O'Shea-Meddour who draws our attention to the fact that we might

⁷⁶ *The Buddha of Suburbia*, 60.

⁷⁷ Wendy O'Shea-Meddour, 'The Politics of Imagining the Other in Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia*,' *Asian Fiction: Framing the Contemporary*, ed. N. Murphy and W. Sim (Amhers: Cambria Press, 2008) 33-55.

⁷⁸ O'Shea-Meddour, 37.

look at Anwar from a different point of view and that although the novel might seem to describe him as a man who returns to ‘a stable ‘Muslim’ subjectivity’, there are passages in which ‘the narrative destabilises it’ and the reader should be aware that seemingly “‘pure’ or ‘authentic’ premigration identities are always already complex and hybrid’ - in other words, Anwar can also be seen as someone who does not simply achieve a single subjectivity, the role of a hypocritical ‘Muslim’, but as a man who continues ‘his journey through an array of conflicting and coexisting subjectivities: liberal, hedonist, patriarchal, prostitute loving, gambling, capitalist, womanising, pork eating, anti-Muslim, Hindu, alcoholic, and Muslim’.⁷⁹

Eventually, Anwar ends his hunger strike and goes back to his previous lifestyle because he succeeds: Jamila agrees with his plan to marry her to an Indian. However, even the protagonist, Karim, is on Jamila’s side and exactly like her he can not understand the persistence of her father on the arranged marriage, which again emphasises the generational conflicts in the novel: the first generation that believes they can dictate to their children how to live their lives and the second generation that is more influenced by the West and strives for personal freedom and less conventional ways of living. It is exactly while looking for answers to such irrational behaviour of the first generation immigrant in his family and uncle Anwar when Karim says:

[...] Maybe there were similarities between what was happening to Dad [Haroon], with his discovery of Eastern philosophy, and Anwar’s last stand. Perhaps it was the immigrant condition living itself out through them.⁸⁰

In other words, even in the novel itself we can find a commentary on the connection between what happens to Anwar and Haroon. Indeed, Karim comes to recognise their hybridity and the way it might be the factor which leads to the strong resistance to the English way of life. Furthermore, when Anwar’s future son-in-law Changez arrives in Britain, Anwar hopes that the situation with his daughter Jamila will change dramatically and that she will raise children with her new husband that would make his life in Britain a little bit more peaceful: Anwar dreams that he will help to provide cultural upbringing to his grandchildren and take them regularly to the mosque for prayers - in other words, he wants his grandchildren to grow up in an environment full of strong Indian customs that he himself was brought up with in the East but that Jamila would not want her children to take on. Therefore, it is possible to claim that Anwar longs to

⁷⁹ O’Shea-Meddour, 37.

⁸⁰ *The Buddha of Suburbia*, 64.

have an extended family in Britain which adheres to the exactly same traditions which he himself visits in his nostalgic memories of the imaginary homeland and that he also performs on the outside through his rather keen interest in Eastern religion.⁸¹ However, his plans do not become reality and the arrival of the young Changez brings a lot of disillusion into Anwar's already complicated life.

In fact, Changez as a character creates another great contrast to Anwar besides Haroon and therefore must play a part in the discussion of the conflicts that Anwar experiences throughout *The Buddha of Suburbia*. Despite their age difference, Anwar and Changez were both brought up in India and therefore should have similar cultural values but as Kenneth C. Kaleta argues, 'their attitudes are antipodal'.⁸² In other words, Changez travels willingly to Britain when he is told about the arranged marriage but once he arrives he begins to see the possibilities of the country in a different light than Anwar. It comes across very strongly in *The Buddha of Suburbia* that Changez wants to experience the liberty and the casual life that he knows the West can offer. This is also later encouraged by Karim who feels partly responsible for the trouble he brings into Anwar's life by providing Changez with the books of Harold Robbins that stimulate 'Changez in a way that Conan Doyle never did' and help him to see Britain as 'the goldmine of sexual opportunity'.⁸³ In other words, Changez does not care about achieving better education in the West and gaining money and fortune which were the original interests of Anwar after his arrival but he seems to care only about things that provide him with a sense of pleasure. Therefore, since material property is of no interest for Changez, he gets into many conflicts with Anwar who wants him to take care of Paradise Stores, the work in which constitutes most of Anwar's life in Britain. Changez says that he is 'the intellectual type, not the one of those uneducated immigrant types who come here [Britain] to slave all day and night and look dirty' by which he ridicules people like Anwar and their life choices.⁸⁴ Therefore, it is possible to argue that Anwar's desperate desire to resurrect the traditions of the homeland through the marriage of his daughter to an Indian man turns against him and even makes his life in Britain much worse. In this way, Kureishi emphasises the difficulties in changing the migrant condition.

⁸¹ Silvia Mergenthal, 'Acculturation and Family Structure: Mo's *Sour Sweet*, Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia*, Ishiguro's *A Pale View of Hills*,' *Defining New Idioms and Alternative Forms of Expression*, ed. Eckhard Breitingner (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1996). 119-131.

⁸² Kaleta, 198.

⁸³ *The Buddha of Suburbia*, 96.

⁸⁴ *The Buddha of Suburbia*, 107.

The disputes within Anwar's family are supplemented in the novel by examples of other conflicts that he has to face, such as racism. While his wife Jeeta slowly grows 'tired of scrubbing off the racist graffiti which reappeared on the walls every time you removed it', she pleads with Karim to stop his uncle from 'going out with his walking stick' as Anwar begins to stroll around the city and shouts at the white British to physically hurt him if they want to because he is startled and angry as a result of the attacks targeted at his grocery shop.⁸⁵ Furthermore, when Jeeta tells Karim that 'some thugs' came to Paradise Stores and that 'they threw a pig's head through the shop window' from which she suffered a couple of cuts, the reader notices that the first generation immigrants in the novel experience different degrees of racism and that they also react to these attacks in various ways.⁸⁶ While Haroon is a victim of racism in *The Buddha of Suburbia*, he is not as endangered as Anwar and that allows him to be more in control of his emotions, stay passive and to never show any desire to avenge himself or hurt his attackers and people who verbally abuse him during his life in the suburbs. In contrast, Anwar lives in a more dangerous area closer to central London that is 'full of neo-fascist groups' which walk the streets at night 'beating Asians and shoving shit and burning rags through their letter-boxes' - as a result of their surroundings Anwar and Jeeta are 'more pervaded by fear of violence' so much that they keep buckets of water ready in the bedroom 'in case the shop was fire-bombed in the night'.⁸⁷ Therefore, Anwar is more exposed to racism and physical racially motivated attacks than his friend Haroon and in consequence, his reaction is also much stronger. Eventually he overcomes his fear and becomes unafraid to go outside and actively defend himself and his property. Nevertheless, despite all of Anwar's troubles with his hybrid identity that haunt him throughout Kureishi's story, e.g. Jamila's Indian husband Changez who severely disappoints him, rebellious wife Jeeta and the racially motivated abuse that he faces, he still firmly sticks to his religion until the very end of his life. The narrator says that Anwar 'died mumbling about Bombay, about the beach, about the boys at the Cathedral school, and calling for his mother', then his 'body was washed by his friends at the nearby mosque, and five Indians in bright and clashing clothing brought the coffin to the graveside' and 'murmured verses from the Koran' as some of them 'announced that the hole hadn't been dug facing in the right

⁸⁵ *The Buddha of Suburbia*, 171.

⁸⁶ B. Korte and Claudia Sternberg, *Bidding for the Mainstream?: Black and Asian British Film Since the 1990s* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004) 187.

⁸⁷ *The Buddha of Suburbia*, 56.

direction, towards Mecca'.⁸⁸ Therefore, Anwar receives a funeral which does partly follow the Muslim traditions because some of its rules are executed after his death, yet the final resting place is incorrectly positioned, which might be interpreted as a reminder of the dishonesty of Anwar's religion in the novel. It is possible to argue that in the same way that Haroon embraces his guru business in the city at the end of *The Buddha of Suburbia*, Anwar has his Eastern religion which along with his memories of the homeland becomes the only thing he has left to fall back on at the end of his life in Britain.

The last first generation immigrant figure that must be discussed in this chapter is the character of Jeeta who is the only female representative of her generation in the novel. While Jeeta does not play a part as large as Haroon or Anwar in *The Buddha of Suburbia*, her character is also very complex since she performs several roles: she is Jamila's mother, Anwar's wife, Karim's Auntie and originally also an Indian princess. Jeeta comes to England soon after her husband's arrival in order to be with him, therefore it is important to stress that Jeeta, in comparison to her husband and Haroon, does not have any special plans or a higher purpose of her own that would motivate her to start a new life in the West. The reader is informed that Jeeta was a princess in India, which means that she had a high status in society in her homeland. Furthermore, the narrator says that she spent her life in the company of her rich family and therefore it is logical to assume that she was used to living in comfort and luxury during her years in Bombay probably surrounded by many servants and people who took care of her. In contrast, her position in England is very difficult because the quality of her life dramatically worsens after her arrival and she lives in a dangerous neighbourhood in Brixton where she can only rely on herself and has to take care of everything on her own. As the protagonist of *The Buddha of Suburbia* says when he visits the grocery shop owned by Jeeta and Anwar:

[...] Jamila was not acknowledging me at all, so I waited by Auntie Jeeta, whose miserable face must, I was sure, have driven away thousands of customers over the years, none of them realizing she was a princess whose brothers carried guns.'⁸⁹

Indeed, everybody in Britain sees Jeeta only as one of the many immigrants that arrived during the 1950s as she stacks the shelves or resides behind the till in Paradise Stores. Instead of finding

⁸⁸ *The Buddha of Suburbia*, 212.

⁸⁹ *The Buddha of Suburbia*, 53.

a country of better opportunities, Jeeta takes care of a shop and nobody in the West recognises her real status. Therefore, though not too explicitly commented on by Kureishi's narrator, Jeeta's initial shock after arrival in Britain must be as difficult for her as it is for the male characters of her generation.

Moreover, Jeeta's life is very isolated from the outside world. The reader knows that she can not speak English very well and that she does not show any interest in British culture and politics because when Karim asks her about the 'Foreign Secretary of Great Britain' or 'the name of the Chancellor of the Exchequer' she never knows who these people are and does 'not regret her ignorance'.⁹⁰ On one hand, this can be said to illustrate the carelessness of some of the members of the first generation immigrants who in comparison to the second generation did not always show much interest in their surroundings and were not anglicised enough to connect with the British culture. On the other hand, Jeeta's missing knowledge could also be a result of her position at home. Drawing on one of the previous arguments mentioned in this chapter about patriarchy in the immigrant families and the difference between male and female power in Anwar's family, it can be argued that Kureishi's characters often illustrate the opposite of Western notions of female and male relationships, marriage and married life. In his books, the readers often encounter men who are free to go anywhere they want, perform any deeds they wish and express the opinions they have. The men enjoy their freedom as much as possible, execute their power and at the same time they have certain expectations of the women that they are married to; they mostly expect the female characters to be obedient and to be always there behind them and for them. The women's feelings and desires are never of primary concern and when she expresses her unhappiness, opinion about a certain situation or simply wants to achieve something on her own, the man usually becomes angry with her as a result of her strife for self-expression. Therefore, Jeeta's ignorance may purely reflect the fact that she is a female stuck in a marriage with a man who believes in absolute patriarchy and as a result of that she does not meet enough people to improve her English and to learn new information from people outside her home. The male perspective on the worth of women is very interesting in Kureishi's writing and in most cases expressed indirectly through actions. Nevertheless, one of the passages in *The Buddha of Suburbia* has a direct approach to the theme of gender equality when Haroon and Anwar engage in a discussion about their children: 'Dad was very proud that he had two sons. He was convinced it meant he had 'good seed'. As Anwar had only produced one daughter it

⁹⁰ *The Buddha of Suburbia*, 51.

meant that he had ‘weak seed’.⁹¹ Furthermore, Anwar blames his wife Jeeta for the fact that they do not have more children and possibly a boy. Altogether this conversation manifests the way the Eastern culture of the immigrants looks upon gender and explains what the motivation is behind Anwar’s patriarchal treatment of Jeeta and Jamila. In this sense, Jeeta recalls the character of Bilquis in *My Beautiful Laundrette* because her marriage exemplifies similar balance of power. Although in the case of Builquis and her husband Nasser there is no mention of physical violence, Nasser does resemble Anwar in a way that he seems to live his life and make decisions independently as if he was not married at all. As a result of that, Builquis is in the background and exactly like Jeeta she is isolated, spends most of her time at home and takes care of the household, children and her disrespectful husband who spends more time with his British lover than he does with his own wife. As the narrator says, Builquis is ‘a shy, middle-aged Pakistani woman’ who is ‘warm and friendly’ and speaks and understands English but is ‘uncertain in the language’, which mirrors Jeeta’s insufficient knowledge of English in *The Buddha of Suburbia*.⁹²

Nevertheless, Jeeta as a character is not static and she does develop throughout the novel. In other words, she does not stay the obedient wife to her husband in the dirty little room in Brixton but she searches for more personal freedom and independence which her normal life with Anwar does not allow her. It is during Anwar’s hunger strike, whose attempt to reach his goals through starving himself to death she considers unreasonable, that the reader begins to see a different side of Jeeta and what she is really capable of achieving. As the narrator says: ‘Princess Jeeta was becoming stronger and more wilful as Anwar declined; she appeared to be growing an iron nose like a hook with which she could lift heavy boxes of corned beef.’⁹³ In other words, Jeeta decides to take advantage of Anwar’s foolishness and uses his weakness to show abilities that she has never had a chance to demonstrate. She leaves him ‘drunk on the floor now, maybe wiping her feet on him’ and decides to starve her husband - she provides him ‘only plain food, the same everyday, and long after the expected time’ as she brings it to him when he is ‘asleep or about to pray’.⁹⁴ However, she does not ignore Anwar’s presence completely, she still sometimes asks him for his opinion about certain things concerning the shop but in fact she

⁹¹ *The Buddha of Suburbia*, 57.

⁹² *My Beautiful Laundrette and The Rainbow Sign*, 96.

⁹³ *The Buddha of Suburbia*, 208.

⁹⁴ *The Buddha of Suburbia*, 208

does not care about what he has to say or carries out the exact opposite of what he tells her to do. This new and for a woman who lives with a man who believes in the importance of patriarchy absolutely disrespectful behaviour that Jeeta adopts is then reinforced by her increasing loss of affection for Anwar as she plays with his emotions and exchanges her warmth and kindness for complete indifference. Therefore, Jeeta rebels and no longer accepts the position in the family which she had in the first part of the novel before Anwar's rediscovery of Eastern religion. In this sense, Jeeta's behaviour in *The Buddha of Suburbia* echoes Amitava Kumar's statement that 'in Kureishi's writings, although women do not necessarily step into public spaces of empowerment, lesbian as well as straight South Asian women often become the locus of resistance'.⁹⁵ Indeed, Jeeta is not the only female character among the first generation immigrants in Kureishi's novels and screenplays that begins to openly show dissatisfaction with her role in marriage. The aforementioned illiterate Bilquis in *My Beautiful Laundrette* is not only similar to Jeeta in her position as a disrespected wife but also an example of female resistance in the immigrant families. Towards the end of the script, Bilquis who does not have a large role throughout the film is suddenly shown in a crucial scene during which the audience learns that the seemingly passive woman devotes her time to an activity which her husband does not respect: she makes magical potions with the help of her daughter Tania. As Julia Keller argues, the interest in magic is Bilquis' way of fighting back because as she 'uses the traditional female functions of gathering and cooking to fashion some sort of charm or potion against her husband's mistress' she basically employs 'the only weapons available to the displaced, illiterate, uneducated Pakistani woman in England'.⁹⁷ Indeed, although Bilquis' method of opposing her husband is not by far as hurtful as Jeeta's treatment of Anwar, she changes and becomes less passive at the end of the script. In other words, she decides to finally act and show that she knows about her husband's infidelity and that she is not happy with her life and the way her husband treats her. Furthermore, Bilquis continues to show her distress when she asks her daughter to help her with writing a letter to her sister because she wants to leave Britain and return 'home' after years of enduring her husband's affair. In this sense, Bilquis differs from

⁹⁵ Amitava Kumar, 'Modernity in a Suitcase: An Essay on Immigrant Indian Writing,' *Regional Modernities: The Cultural Politics of Development in India*, ed. K. Sivaramakrishnan and Arun Agrawal (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003) 368.

⁹⁶ *My Beautiful Laundrette and The Rainbow Sign*, 96.

⁹⁷ Julia Keller, 'Getting Serious: Women at the Anchor Desk,' *Delights, Desires and Dilemmas: Essays on Women and the Media*, ed. Ann C. Hall (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 1998) 70.

Jeeta's character because Anwar's wife does not manifest any desire to return to India and does not talk about the past. Instead of dreaming of the imaginary homeland, Jeeta becomes a woman of great initiative in Britain and she decides to take the family business, Paradise Stores, into her own hands and to innovate it. Therefore over time, a woman takes completely over the shop, which is something the patriarchal Anwar would never agree with because after all, it was him who felt the need to bring a man from India to be a husband to his daughter and mainly manage the grocery shop after his retirement. Therefore, instead of mourning the death of Anwar to whom Jeeta at the end of his life refers to as 'that black man' she liberates herself as much as her position allows her and becomes active in business which is commonly in Kureishi's writings the role of men.⁹⁸ In the script to *My Beautiful Laundrette*, Bilquis verbally attacks her husband in a similar way when 'Nasser appears at the door and starts abusing' her 'in loud Urdu, telling her that the magic business is stupid', she 'has a rougher and louder tongue' as 'she says, among other things, in Urdu, that Nasser is a big fat black man who should get out of her sight for ever' and throws the remaining amount of her spilled potion that was meant to be used against his lover at him.⁹⁹ However, Bilquis is not the only woman besides Jeeta who rebels against her husband and openly shows her dissatisfaction. Kureishi's 1994 script and film *My Son the Fanatic* depicts yet another bold female figure who undergoes a transformation of character that might partly remind the audience of Jeeta in *The Buddha of Suburbia*. It is Parvez's wife Minoo who similarly to Jeeta and Bilquis does not have any particular aims behind her journey to Britain. In other words, like the previously discussed women, Minoo moves to England because of her husband who unquestionably comes to the West with hopes for a better future and whom she simply follows. As Parvez lives a life full of freedom that is similar to Anwar and Nasser's, he spends most of his time outside home in his job as a taxi driver thanks to which he presumably meets and communicates with a lot of new people every day. In contrast, Minoo seems to be almost completely secluded from society. Laura Copier argues that 'Minoo is quite literally trapped in private space' and 'apart from the first scene of the film, the visit to the Fingerhut mansion, Minoo is strictly confined to the privacy of domestic space'.¹⁰⁰ Indeed, as Parvez becomes friends with Bettina, one of the prostitutes that he drives around the city and

⁹⁸ *The Buddha of Suburbia*, 211.

⁹⁹ *My Beautiful Laundrette and The Rainbow Sign*, 96.

¹⁰⁰ Laura Copier, 'Radicalism Begins at Home: Fundamentalism and the Family in My Son the Fanatic,' *Shooting the Family: Transnational Media and Intercultural Values*, ed. P. Pisters and W. Staat (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2005) 89-103.

who later becomes his lover, the reader begins to see that Minoo is the complete opposite of her.¹⁰¹ In other words, while Bettina lives her life and works mostly on the streets of the city, Minoo is still closed at home and exactly like Jeeta in *The Buddha of Suburbia* she does not socialise and talk to new people outside the house. However, even though Minoo's character, as with other first generation immigrant women in Kureishi's writings, does not appear in *My Son the Fanatic* too frequently and the space for her self-expression within the film is therefore limited, it is possible to argue that in comparison to Jeeta, Minoo's character displays a certain amount of resistance throughout the whole script. This means that Minoo is very honest and outspoken in terms of how she feels about her position in England from the very beginning of the film and unlike Jeeta and *My Beautiful Laundrette's* Bilquis she does not seem to be quiet, obedient and overlook her husband's actions until the very end of the story. Already one third into the script the reader witnesses one of several Bilquis's complaints and her astounding courage to speak up openly about the inequality in her long-standing marriage with Parvez. Indeed, she feels that living together with her patriarchal husband in Britain deprives her of all possibilities to lead a richer life:

[...] MINOO: If I'd been given your freedom ... think what I would have done ...
 MINOO: I would have studied. I would have gone everywhere. And talked ... talked.
 PARVEZ: Talked - who the hell to?
 MINOO: Anyone. And not stood here day after day washing filthy trousers.¹⁰²

In other words, Minoo resembles Jeeta because she is also financially dependent on her husband and lives on his income but as it has been discussed earlier in this chapter, it can be claimed that Jeeta is granted an opportunity to become more active and work in Paradise Stores when her husband declines while, in contrast, Minoo continues to be stuck in a patriarchal marriage with her role of a housewife and can only dream of obtaining more authority and possibly independence. Nevertheless, Minoo's resistance grows throughout *My Son the Fanatic*; in one of the scenes of the film, Parvez attempts to secure his power by telling her that he is the one 'who earns the money' in the household and she only spends it or sends it to her 'lazy relatives' in

¹⁰¹ Copier, 93.

¹⁰² *My Son the Fanatic*, 23.

India to which Minoo replies: 'I wish I was with them'.¹⁰³ Therefore, Minoo's final decision in *My Son the Fanatic* may be foreseen during one of her earlier arguments with her husband. Indeed, at the end of the script she reflects Bilquis' decision to leave the oppressive husband Nasser and travel back to India:

[...] *Minoo is going through her cupboards, sorting her clothes out. Suitcases on the bed.*
... MINOO: I will see everyone who loves me, my brothers and sisters and all! ...
MINOO: I hate this dirty place! The men brought us here and then left us alone!¹⁰⁴

In other words, like all the women in Kureishi's works, Minoo is caught between two cultures, the way she lived in India and the seclusion she now experiences in Britain caused by her husband who abuses her. Exactly like Bilquis, she pronounces a wish to return to what has become over the years the imaginary homeland to her and where she believes she could find more love and happiness. Therefore, Minoo carries out the complete opposite of *The Buddha of Suburbia*'s Jeeta who progresses as if her feminist daughter 'educated her in possibility, the child being an example to the parent' leaving her the most inventive and also the only female character who actively rebels against her husband through not only words but actions and tries to empower herself on the British soil instead of escaping to India.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ *My Son the Fanatic*, 38.

¹⁰⁴ *My Son the Fanatic*, 121.

¹⁰⁵ *The Buddha of Suburbia*, 172.

3. Conflicts of the second generation immigrants

The second generation immigrants, the young sons and daughters of the first generation characters that were discussed in the previous chapter are, just as their parents, people who share a similar life experience and yet they often differ extremely as individuals. In other words, Kureishi's young heroes are not all the same types of people and they lead various lifestyles. Furthermore, despite the fact that the second generation characters have no personal recollections of the life in the East because they have never been there and the information they have about South Asia comes exclusively from their parents, they are stuck between two different cultures and they are regularly exposed to racism. Therefore, living in Britain since their childhood, the second generation characters show a lot of discontent with their position in British society as a result of which they are anxious, full of various types of desires and they strive to find a better way of life. Such second generation immigrants that are of great importance for the discussion are Karim and Jamila from *The Buddha of Suburbia* but also Shahid from *The Black Album*, Omar and Tania from *My Beautiful Laundrette* and Farid from *My Son the Fanatic*.

It is the well-known opening passage of *The Buddha of Suburbia* which gives the reader a great sense of what it means to be a second generation immigrant in Britain and how those people feel among the white British when the protagonist, Haroon's teenage son, says:

[...] My name is Karim Amir, and I am an Englishman born and bred, almost. I am often considered to be a funny kind of Englishman, a new breed as it were, having emerged from two old histories. But I don't care - Englishman I am (though not proud of it), from the South London suburbs and going somewhere. Perhaps it is the odd mixture of continents and blood, of here and there, of belonging and not, that makes me restless and easily bored.¹⁰⁶

In other words, Karim who epitomises the connection of 'two old histories' is a boy who grows up as a mixed-race child in Britain where he lives with his English mother and Indian father. Living in the London suburbs, Karim spends most of his life in contact with the dominant culture as he is surrounded mostly by white Britons everywhere he goes. Furthermore, even though Karim is undeniably 'an Englishman born and bred', he is still seen as an immigrant and also a

¹⁰⁶ *The Buddha of Suburbia*, 3.

member of a minority group within society, which leaves him in a difficult position because he is constantly reminded of the fact that he is not like the majority of people in the country he was born in. In consequence, Karim is unsure about who he really is as a person and feels confused: it is the treatment which he receives from the people in his surroundings that triggers his feelings of 'belonging and not', eventually leading to his struggles to define his identity. The condition of feeling as if one is a part of two different cultures was discussed in the previous chapter, for example, in connection to the first generation immigrant Haroon and almost the same feelings are then mirrored by his own son Karim throughout the novel. Yet, there is a dissimilarity between the condition of Karim and his father because they belong to different generations: Haroon is stuck between his past in India and his present experiences in Britain while Karim oscillates between his Indian heritage and his British upbringing. Nevertheless, both of these characters have hybrid identities and find themselves stranded between two contrasting cultures. As John McLeod argues, 'hybrid identities are never total and complete in themselves' but 'instead, they remain perpetually in motion, pursuing errant and unpredictable routes, open to change and reinscription'.¹⁰⁷ Therefore, there can not be a straightforward definition of Karim's identity because, just as in the case of Haroon, his identity is complex, never singular but multiple and ever changing.

It is the very opening paragraph of the novel quoted above which stresses Karim's hybridity but this condition is even reinforced when he leaves for Eva's gathering in the same chapter.¹⁰⁸ In this part of *The Buddha of Suburbia*, the reader witnesses the born and bred Englishman as he chooses to wear a 'headband', 'turquoise flared trousers, a blue and white flower-patterned see-through shirt, blue suede boots with Cuban heels, and a scarlet Indian waistcoat with gold stitching around the edges', which is a rather exotic outfit for a boy who considers himself to be English and neither of his parents is particularly pleased with his fashion choice when they see him wearing the clothes.¹⁰⁹ As Nahem Yousaf claims, Karim is 'a hybrid embodiment of two cultures' and in the clothes he picks for Eva's evening he represents 'the stereotyped image of many Asian young men in the 1970s', which is something his parents would prefer to be hidden rather than paraded on the streets as they have, at this point of the novel, the 'suburbanite desire for conformity, anything to stop the twitching of the neighbours'

¹⁰⁷ McLeod, 219.

¹⁰⁸ Yousaf, 75.

¹⁰⁹ *The Buddha of Suburbia*, 6.

curtains and their condemning this mixed-race family to being somehow-less-than-normal'.¹¹⁰ Nevertheless, Karim himself soon decides to dress differently and conform to the British fashion of the time because of Eva's son Charlie, a white British boy who tells him he needs to wear different outfits and whom Karim happily listens to because he looks up to him in every possible way, admiring his 'talents, face, style', even to the point that he does not only want to be like him but 'to be him'.¹¹¹ Indeed, if we perceive Karim's initial choice of clothes as exotic and in the eyes of the British as the stereotypical fashion of Asian men in which, according to Karim's mother, one shows oneself up, it is possible to argue that the change of personal style to jeans and plain T-shirts is not only an urgent desire to be fashionable but also an example of Karim's incredible ability to constantly transform himself and even his style in order to meet the fashion trends of the time 'in ways that first-generation immigrants such as his father and Nasser of *My Beautiful Laundrette* could scarcely imagine'.¹¹² Furthermore, although the admiration of Charlie makes the hybrid Karim desire to be completely accepted by the dominant white culture, his obsession with him is not purely about learning from him how to conform. In other words, in the beginning of the novel, Charlie represents a different type of Englishness than the one Karim is used to from his family and he also epitomises a certain type of unrestrained lifestyle, full of drugs and music, which Karim becomes infatuated with and wishes his life could also be that way.

The major factor that affects Karim and strengthens his wish to be less conspicuous and get lost in the crowd is the racism that he experiences on an everyday basis when he lives in the suburbs, the place where the colour of his skin is viewed negatively and does not provide him with any opportunities but only brings him down because it fuels his feelings of hybridity and constantly reminds Karim of his 'otherness'. Indeed, the attacks on Karim are undeniably based on his race and they are very common in the novel. While his brother Amar calls himself Allie in order to hide his Indian heritage and appear as a white British boy at least when it comes to his name, Karim never even tries to avoid racial trouble in similar ways and is a victim of verbal forms of abuse and threats. One of the strongest examples of racism in Kureishi's novel can be found in the passage where Karim meets Hairy Back, father of the white British girl he likes. Hairy Back tells Karim, who is so afraid he goes 'white, but obviously not white enough', that

¹¹⁰ Yousaf, 76.

¹¹¹ *The Buddha of Suburbia*, 15.

¹¹² John J. Su, *Imagination and the Contemporary Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011) 99.

his daughter does not go out ‘with wogs’, that they do not want any ‘blackies coming to the house’ and that if he touches her with his hands he will hurt her, finally leaving Karim alone with a dangerous dog careless of what the dog might do to him.¹¹³ This aspect of *The Buddha of Suburbia*, i.e. a mixed-race teenager who desires to be accepted because he is abused on the grounds of his skin colour, echoes Kureishi’s own experiences from the 1970s London that he describes in *The Rainbow Sign*:

[...] From the start I tried to deny my Pakistani self. I was ashamed. It was a curse and I wanted to be rid of it. I wanted to be like everyone else... At school, one teacher always spoke to me in a ‘Peter Sellers’ Indian accent. Another refused to call me by my name, calling me Pakistani Pete instead.¹¹⁴

Undeniably like Kureishi, who due to the unflagging disrespectful behaviour of the white British that the above quote describes ‘read with understanding a story in a newspaper about a black boy who, when he noticed that burnt skin turned white, jumped into a bath of boiling water’, the young Karim from the suburbs would possibly also prefer to have white skin because it would make his life in Britain much easier, calmer and most importantly devoid of any racial conflicts.¹¹⁵ Yet, such a wish is never pronounced in the novel. Of course, Karim is not the only second generation immigrant who deals with racist attacks in Kureishi’s writing: one of the most memorable examples of racism can be found in the film *My Beautiful Laundrette* where the second generation immigrant Omar, a boy who lives with his father and manages a laundrette for his uncle, experiences verbal abuse while driving through the city with his relative Salim and his wife Cherry, but he is saved from any violence thanks to his acquaintance with a white British boy, Johnny, who belongs to the group of the potential attackers. However, the abuse in the film escalates very quickly towards the end when Salim, who says that ‘all over England’ people like him are called ‘Asians’ and ‘beaten up and burnt to death’, unintentionally drives over a white boy’s foot in an attempt to only frighten but not hurt his racist gang, which provokes a revenge attack during which the immigrants are beaten up and badly hurt.¹¹⁶ Therefore, it is possible to claim that Kureishi’s second generation immigrants experience different types of racist attacks: while, for instance, the incidents in *My Beautiful Laundrette* are more severe and brutal as the

¹¹³ *The Buddha of Suburbia*, 40.

¹¹⁴ *My Beautiful Laundrette and The Rainbow Sign*, 9.

¹¹⁵ *My Beautiful Laundrette and The Rainbow Sign*, 9.

¹¹⁶ *My Beautiful Laundrette and The Rainbow Sign*, 102.

script includes a lot of merciless physical violence, *The Buddha of Suburbia* concentrates on verbal abuse of the young immigrant figures including the protagonist.

Yet despite the number of attacks, the reader may gather that in the case of *The Buddha of Suburbia*'s Karim, it is mostly his social position and hybridity, the constant feeling of belonging 'here' but also 'there' that worries him more than the different colour of his skin itself which causes him a lot of trouble. This can be understood from the previously mentioned fact that he never voices a wish to have white skin as well as from the statement that Jamila and he often pretend to be Black American, while they are 'supposed to be English' but to the English they are 'always wogs and nigs and Pakis and the rest of it', the labels which they want to desperately escape during their life in Bromley but are not able to.¹¹⁷ The obvious hostility of the suburbs is the reason that Karim does not understand why his dad who had had 'an idyllic childhood' in India and experienced a lot of animosity after his arrival in Britain basically 'condemned his own son to a dreary suburb of London of which it was said that when people drowned they saw not their lives but their double-glazing flashing before them'.¹¹⁸ With such a rightfully negative attitude to the suburbs that Karim exemplifies within the novel, it is not surprising that he considers Bromley to be a place in which he does not want to live forever. When he moves out of home and spends some time with Eva and then subsequently returns to visit his mother with whom he keeps regular contact, Karim says: 'I knew it did me good to be reminded of how much I loathed the suburbs, and that I had to continue my journey into London and a new life, ensuring I got away from people and streets like this.'¹¹⁹ In other words, Karim feels like he is stuck in a location that treats him unfairly as well as a phase of his life during which he is a victim and dreams of living in the city where he thinks he could finally be happy and accepted:

[...] In bed before I went to sleep I fantasized about London and what I'd do there when the city belonged to me. There was a sound that London had ... There were kids dressed in velvet cloaks who lived free lives; there were thousands of black people everywhere, so I wouldn't feel exposed ... I was twenty. I was ready for anything.¹²⁰

Indeed, in *The Buddha of Suburbia* the city presents for Karim a place where he can finally be

¹¹⁷ *The Buddha of Suburbia*, 53.

¹¹⁸ *The Buddha of Suburbia*, 23.

¹¹⁹ *The Buddha of Suburbia*, 101.

¹²⁰ *The Buddha of Suburbia*, 121.

someone else, a place of great opportunity, freedom, multiculturalism, more acceptance and a location where everything is radically different compared to Bromley where the immigrants are only attacked and judged. These are the very same sentiments that Kureishi touches upon in his later novel *The Buddha of Suburbia* as its main protagonist, a second generation immigrant boy Shahid who originally comes from the English countryside, also moves to London with a number of expectations and hopes that his life in the city will be more peaceful, interesting and exciting. It is Karim's statement about the city quoted above that brings the reader back to the concept of a journey that is very strong in the novel and was discussed in the previous chapter in connection to Haroon. The movement of Karim's father from the geographical and cultural margins to the centre of the city and away from his family to engage with people of a higher class than his own, is very important for the analysis because, as mentioned in the discussion earlier, Karim basically reflects the journey of Haroon and they are 'growing up together'.¹²¹ In other words, as Nahem Yousaf claims, while Haroon decides to leave 'his wife and children, his life as an employee in the Civil Service, and finally the suburbs', 'concomitantly' his son leaves 'his mother and brother, his life as an adolescent, and the suburbs'; furthermore, Haroon and Karim then also 'utilize different but similar vehicles to escape their previous identities' because Haroon transforms as a person into the Buddha figure as he starts his guru business during which he acts like the English stereotype of an Indian and Karim finds a job as an actor for a theatre where he also works with certain stereotypical images as will be discussed later in this chapter.¹²²

Before discussing his acting career, it is important to stress that Karim's journey to the centre is not as tranquil as his father's. In other words, both Karim and Haroon consider moving away from the suburbs to be a good idea and see the city as a place to start something new but Karim becomes gradually depressed during his early days in West Kensington. It is possible to argue that this difference arises because Karim's father simply follows Eva's plans and, although he becomes slightly sad over abandoning his wife, he already has an idea of where his life in London is going while Karim, who wants to be a journalist, a photographer, and an actor as well as a rhythm guitarist, is still 'directionless and lost in the crowd'.¹²³ As Alaa Alghamdi argues, Karim 'actively explores and seeks to form an identity that will fit him fully' as he roams the streets of the 1970s London and it takes him some time until he finds what to do with his life in

¹²¹ *The Buddha of Suburbia*, 22.

¹²² Yousaf, 47.

¹²³ *The Buddha of Suburbia*, 126.

this new location.¹²⁴ Furthermore, in the process of searching for his identity in the city, Karim starts a mild generational conflict between himself and his father as it is exactly before moving to Kensington when he completely gives up on his studies and pursuing any sort of formal education. The fact that Karim leaves college is a great disappointment for Haroon who, like most first generation immigrants, wants his child to be educated and highly successful and yet it is another aspect in which Karim mirrors his father who also dropped out of university when he was young and disappointed his parents.

Nevertheless, changing locations for Karim does not only mean to move away from his old way of life, gradually give up on education or explore new possibilities - living in the heart of the metropolis also takes him away from his family and former friends. As Karim says: ‘I hadn’t been to see Jeeta or Anwar for a long time, what with the moving and my depression and everything, and wanting to start a new life in London and know the city’, which means that Karim begins to move forward, socialise with new mostly white people who belong to higher social classes than him and, as Changez indicates, he also seems to ‘leave his own people behind’.¹²⁵ This is one of the instances in the book which confirms that *The Buddha of Suburbia* belongs to the Bildungsroman genre and draws on its traditional elements: it mirrors the well-known format of the young hero who is going through an identity formation and a maturation process and has many social aspirations, which eventually results in him leaving his background and family of low social standing. Therefore, the reader witnesses Karim as he grows up, leaves his relatives and embarks on a journey during which he struggles with his identity, ethnicity and moral values. Nevertheless, at this point of the novel when Changez comments on his friend’s transformation, Karim who epitomises ‘the odd mixture of continents and blood’ does not recognise the Indians as his ‘own people’ because he is stuck in his fundamentally hybrid condition. It is much later in the novel that Karim comes to a more objective ‘recognition’ of his identity when he realises he can not deny his heritage and says:

[...] But I did feel, looking at these strange creatures now - the Indians - that in some way these were my people, and that I’d spent my life denying or avoiding the fact. I felt ashamed and incomplete at the same time, as if half of me were missing, and as if I’d been colluding with my enemies, those whites who wanted Indians to be like them ... So if I wanted the additional personality bonus of an Indian past, I would have to create

¹²⁴ Alaa Alghamdi, *Transformations of the Liminal Self: Configurations of Home and Identity for Muslim Characters in British Postcolonial Fiction* (Bloomington: iUniverse, Inc., 2011) 76.

¹²⁵ *The Buddha of Suburbia*, 136.

Indeed, this passage which follows Anwar's funeral in *The Buddha of Suburbia* and strikingly reflects Kureishi's own feelings at the beginning of *The Rainbow Sign* quoted earlier in this chapter, is an important turning point in the story. Karim, who considers himself to be an Englishman and spends most of his life trying to deny his Pakistani self, attempting to distance himself from it by conforming to the dominant culture finally acknowledges that he can not change his self by changing locations, friends and leaving family - this is what Roger Bromley calls a 'recognition effect' within the narrative, the moment of realisation that when Karim creates his self, he should not only ask himself who he is at the present time but should realise it is also a matter of 'a cultural analysis of the proscriptions and prescriptions belonging, historically and politically, to being at one and the same time, English, Indian, white and black'.¹²⁷ However, it is important to stress that this recognition of historical roots does not mean that Karim discovers and defines his identity. As stated in the introduction, the sense of 'home' is at the base of all diasporic writing and the second generation immigrants use the idea of the homeland in constructions of their identities despite the fact that the homeland is purely imaginary for them. In other words, Karim who has never been to India knows that if he wants 'an Indian past' he has to create it, which he partly does when he performs the roles based on his uncle Anwar and later his friend Changez on stage. Yet, although he begins to see the Indians as 'his people', he does not identify himself as an Indian and immigrant. In fact, Karim does not come to any definite conclusions about who he is as a person and he keeps searching for his identity until the end of the novel. The very last page of the novel informs the reader that despite the fact that Karim is surrounded by a loving family in the centre of London, he is located at the very bottom of Great Britain, therefore he still finds himself on the margins and without any self-definition. This ending is also discussed by Susheila Nasta according to whose previously mentioned reading of the novel hybrid characters never experience true freedom of identity; Nasta claims that Karim is unable 'to bring the narrative or the questions it raises to a resolution' because he does not really progress 'in dealing with the anxieties expressed at the opening concerning the ambivalence of his cultural location' but instead he ends up 'sitting on the fence,

¹²⁶ *The Buddha of Suburbia*, 212.

¹²⁷ Roger Bromley, *Narratives for a New Belonging: Diasporic Cultural Fictions* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000) 154.

caught between a number of conflicting discourses'.¹²⁸ Furthermore, this 'sitting on the fence' typical for Karim might be claimed to contribute to his personality traits, in particular his lack of any sort of commitment to anything in life, which is also mirrored in his job as an actor during which he becomes involved in several acting experiments and is constantly pushed by other people to change his characters and aspects of their portrayal.

Karim and his approach to living in Britain creates a great contrast to some other second generation immigrants in Kureishi's works. While Karim in *The Buddha of Suburbia* is drawn to the allegedly liberal space of the city and theatre full of educated people, some second generation immigrants try to find their identities in different environments. For example, as the discussion touched upon in the previous chapter, Karim never understands the attractiveness of religion and when he observes his uncle Anwar who spends a lot of his free time practising his faith in the mosque or even his own father masquerading as a Buddhist, he is doubtful and finds their behaviour strange. Karim never shows any desire to follow the first generation immigrants in this sense or join a group of people who practice religion, because possibly due to his lack of commitment, he simply does not see the appeal of devoting oneself to a system of beliefs. Therefore, it is possible to claim that faith in divinity or any type of religion does not play any role in Karim's constructions of identity within the novel. In contrast, Kureishi's film *My Son the Fanatic* shows a second generation immigrant character for whom religion is of great importance and plays a large part in his conception of identity in England. Indeed, Parvez's son Farid is an example of a young boy who never experienced what it is like to live in an Islamic country because he was born and raised in Britain and yet he turns to Islamic fundamentalism and it becomes his main preoccupation in life. In other words, Farid goes to the mosque, socialises with people like him who are also young believers and exactly by this practising of faith he gains a cultural identity because it makes him feel like he finally belongs somewhere. This sort of religious fundamentalism easily becomes the cause of generational conflicts because, as Kenan Malik argues, 'the first generation desires material prosperity' while the second generation 'seeks to fill a spiritual void'.¹²⁹ Indeed, Farid and his father have several disputes throughout the film because they often do not share each other's opinions. While Parvez works really hard and is not

¹²⁸ Nasta, 203.

¹²⁹ 'Kureishi on the Rushdie Affair,' 19 July 2013 <http://www.kenanmalik.com/essays/prospect_kureishi.html>.

concerned with religion, his son is very strict when it comes to traditional religious practices and begins to pray at home. In consequence, Farid often leads moralising monologues in front of his father as he wants to convince him that the lifestyle he leads is wrong, according to him 'too Western', and Parvez does not understand his son because when he came to England he hoped his child would lead a completely different life and would not become more conservative than his parents. In other words, he perceives his father as becoming similar to the white British people who Farid sees as hypocrites because they tell immigrants that they are 'backward' due to their culture while they themselves live in 'pornography and filth'.¹³⁰ Kureishi himself, like Karim in *The Buddha of Suburbia*, never found any interest in religious faith and talks about Eastern religion in *The Rainbow Sign* where he describes 'taking up of Islam' during the 1960s as 'an aberration, a desperate fantasy of world-wide black brotherhood', 'a symptom of extreme alienation' and 'an inability to seek a wider political view or cooperation with other oppressed groups'.¹³¹ Shahid from Kureishi's *The Black Album* is also a very interesting character in terms of his search for identity and it is possible to claim that he can be compared to both Karim from *The Buddha of Suburbia* and Farid from *My Son the Fanatic* because, in fact, the major focus of the novel is his condition of being stuck between different beliefs: in other words, the reader observes the protagonist as he oscillates between his English lover Dee Dee Osgood who epitomises liberalism and his friends who represent Islamic fundamentalism. In consequence, as Shahid switches between his two options, liberalism and Islamic fundamentalism, he symbolises the capacity of the immigrant's identity to change and its openness to constant reinscription. Islamic fundamentalism seems to be an interesting and attractive concept for Shahid for a certain period of time in the novel because some of the second generation immigrants are disillusioned and do not believe in the 'immigrant dream' of finding a better place to live and prosper that their parents moved to England with - they are the victims of racism, poor education and as Kureishi adds, these people can be described as 'right at the bottom of everything' looking for something that would be 'their own'.¹³² Yet, unlike Farid in *My Son the Fanatic* who sticks to one type of identity and for whom following Islamic fundamentalism seems to be the only right way of life throughout the whole film, Shahid resembles Karim at the end of *The Buddha of Suburbia* in a sense that he recognises himself as English and at the same time realises he is

¹³⁰ *My Son the Fanatic*, 64.

¹³¹ *My Beautiful Laundrette and The Rainbow Sign*, 15.

¹³² K. Sivaramakrishnan and A. Agrawal, *Regional Modernities: The Cultural Politics of Development in India* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003) 368.

historically connected to Indians and therefore, in a way, they are his own people. In other words, the hybrid second generation immigrant Shahid concludes that it is possible to confine 'to one system or creed' for a period of time but there is no reason to, since he does not believe that there is any sort of 'fixed self' - according to him, there have to be 'innumerable ways of being in the world' as he himself exemplifies in the novel.¹³³

Coming back to the previously mentioned acting career of Karim, it is possible to claim that it is undeniably one of the most interesting parts of *The Buddha of Suburbia* because it shows a shift of the perception of the second generation immigrant in the novel. Karim is very keen on getting a job as an actor because he would not be able to 'face going back to that flat in West Kensington not knowing what to do' with his life and 'not being respected by anyone'.¹³⁴ Therefore, Karim does everything he can to get the job once Eva arranges his meeting with a local director called Shadwell but, in fact, he does not have to try very hard because the director intends to cast someone who physically fits the image for the play, in this case Mowgli from *The Jungle Book*, and by giving the role to the inexperienced Karim he confirms that acting skills are indeed not his main interest. Therefore, as it was discussed earlier in this chapter in connection to the topic of racism, Karim's skin colour and Indian heritage are highly disadvantageous characteristics in Bromley and only bring problems and conflicts into his life. However, once Karim meets up with Shadwell who gives him the role of Mowgli from *The Jungle Book*, his race and cultural background suddenly become desirable for the British because they are highly exploitable for them and they can gain money by using Karim's characteristics. However, it is important to stress that although the perception of the second generation immigrant changes in the sense that he is more accepted, if exploited, he is not suddenly free of any kind of prejudice and racism in the space of the city and theatre - as Barbara Korte and Claudia Sternberg argue, in general, by the directors' casting of Karim for the roles he is given, Kureishi emphasises 'physically harmless but ideologically pernicious form of racism' because during his acting career in the theatre companies, Karim is given roles that are always limited in their definition; he is always 'an 'ethnic' character', even if he is cast by directors who 'consider themselves progressive'.¹³⁵ In fact, the educated men that Karim works with, Pyke and Shadwell, are very similar to some of the characters from the lower classes that abuse him throughout the novel,

¹³³ Hanif Kureishi, *The Black Album* (London: Faber & Faber, 1995) 274.

¹³⁴ *The Buddha of Suburbia*, 139.

¹³⁵ B. Korte and Claudia Sternberg, 187.

including Hairy Back. Yet the form of racism and treatment of Karim these characters present makes them, in contrast to Hairy Back, very hypocritical.

Considering the first role Karim is given in the theatre he works for, the previously mentioned Mowgli in Shadwell's adaptation of Kipling's book, it is possible to claim that when he is given the part he is not expected to have to act because of the stereotypical ideas the white British have about people like him and what their background is.¹³⁶ Shadwell shows surprise and almost a sense of disappointment when he finds out during a conversation with Karim that he, despite having the looks of an Indian, does not speak Urdu or Punjabi and tells him he has never been to India:

[...] '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 from him. And you're from Orpington.' ... 'Oh God, what a strange world. The immigrant is the Everyman of the twentieth century. Yes?'¹³⁷

In other words, as the discussion pointed out earlier, the white British do not really perceive Karim as a purely British boy. In consequence, they expect him to be able to speak the first language of his parents as well as to have some personal experience with the life in the East. To the members of the dominant culture in England the immigrant is someone who they always expect to be 'markedly different' from themselves and this 'capacity to disappoint' which Shadwell perceives in Karim when he finds out he is basically ordinary makes him in his eyes the 'everyman of the twentieth century'.¹³⁸ Therefore, as Karim is not Indian and does not have the characteristics Shadwell imagines he should have for the part, he has to be severely changed: first of all, he is given a costume which consists only of a loin cloth, he is covered in a brown cream and he is forced to speak with an Eastern accent which he naturally does not have in order to be successfully reduced to the English stereotype of the 'oriental Other'. In other words, the identity that Karim shows during the time he plays Mowgli is forced onto him by his surroundings because, as Nahem Yousaf claims, 'the majority of the white characters the reader encounters' in *The Buddha of Suburbia* have 'preconceived notions of identity' and believe that 'as 'foreigners' Haroon and Karim should act and behave in authentic ways'.¹³⁹ Yet this

¹³⁶ Bromley, 155.

¹³⁷ *The Buddha of Suburbia*, 140.

¹³⁸ Amitava Kumar, *Passport Photos* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000) 64.

¹³⁹ Yousaf, 48.

presentation of Karim as Mowgli on stage can not be called a case of mimicry as he only shows 'the itself that is behind' while he passively, with no activity of his own, accepts Shadwell's instructions.¹⁴⁰ Furthermore, Karim's performance is then judged by his family and an interesting difference occurs between his white British mother and Indian father. While Margaret is very proud of her son's acting and along with Jean finds the loin cloth amusing, Haroon, who himself fulfils the British stereotyping about the East through his Buddha figure, is angry to see his son on stage confirming to the English their stereotypical visions. In other words, Haroon finds the whole performance awful, describing the look of his son as a Black and White Minstrel, therefore comparing him to a character from a controversial British television show in which white people were 'blacked-up' to appear as black artists and then depicted as trying to be white in return.¹⁴¹ Furthermore, a very similar sense of shock and disagreement is witnessed by the reader during Karim's conversation with Anwar's daughter Jamila, a girl that belongs to the same generation as him, who comes to see the play to the theatre and openly tells him after his performance that the role of Mowgli supports a lot of the prejudices the white people have against people like them.

Nevertheless, Karim does not only play Mowgli during his career as an actor and he moves on to work with a different director called Pyke. When he is offered his second role, this time in a play about class, Karim is asked to come up with his own idea of who he wants to portray on stage. However, when he suggests to the director that he would like to base his character on his friend Charlie, he is discouraged and informed that he must play someone from his 'own background', 'someone black'.¹⁴² In other words, Karim is not really granted absolute artistic freedom because he is forced to play an 'ethnic' character again, exactly like in Shadwell's play. Yet this time, Karim is given the opportunity to create his role himself, i.e. he is allowed to decide exactly how the character will be portrayed and this active approach to the role is the reason why during the time he works for Pyke's company his acting becomes an example of mimicry.¹⁴³ Karim's first idea, which is to base the character on his uncle Anwar and his recent blackmailing of Jamila, is not met with much success as he is accused by a black girl, Tracey, of showing 'black people' as 'being irrational, ridiculous, as being hysterical' and

¹⁴⁰ Bromley, 155.

¹⁴¹ Susanne Reichl and M. Stein, *Cheeky Fictions: Laughter and the Postcolonial* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005) 230.

¹⁴² *The Buddha of Suburbia*, 170.

¹⁴³ Bromley, 157.

therefore confirming and also contributing to the negative stereotypical ideas the white British population has about immigrants, such as that they are ‘people without humanity’ with ‘strange habits and weird customs’.¹⁴⁴ As Susheila Nasta argues, this scene exemplifies how easily Karim can be both celebrated for ‘his ‘immigrant’ credentials’ during his career as an actor as well as become ‘the subject of a political attack’, in this case for his ‘exploitative use of his uncle Anwar’s story for his own ends’.¹⁴⁵ Once he is told that he should forget about his uncle and has to come up with a new idea, Karim decides to mimic Jamila’s husband Changez, despite the fact that Changez himself does not agree with being Karim’s model for the part that he is going to play. As Roger Bromley argues, in creating Tariq, the fictional character secretly based on Changez, Karim simply manages to reproduce ‘the characteristics Tracey had objected to earlier’ and yet he is allowed to perform this role for which he is eventually labelled by the critics ‘as ‘hilarious and honest’, true, that is, to *their* knowledge of the ‘native other’’.¹⁴⁶ Therefore, during his career as an actor, Karim begins to exemplify mimicry as he performs Indian characters according to the stereotypical ideas of Indianness that the dominant culture has and furthermore, because this mimicry is his job, it is possible to argue that, exactly like his father, he finds a way of embracing his identity in a creative manner and makes it successfully marketable to the white British. The last mention of Karim’s acting career is at the very end of the novel when the narrator says that he is very excited about being given a role in ‘a new soap opera which would tangle with the latest contemporary issues’, such as ‘abortions and racist attacks, the stuff that people lived through but that never got on TV’.¹⁴⁷ Karim sees this role as a great opportunity to move forward, maybe finally find some order in his life and find answers to the problems with his identity that he has not resolved up until this point. However, the reader may observe that the part which Karim will be given in the soap opera is ‘the rebellious student son of an Indian shopkeeper’ and therefore, it can be presumed that this role will again limit him to an ‘ethnic’ character and force him to continue the same kind of mimicry he performed when he worked for Pyke.¹⁴⁸ In other words, Karim’s past experiences will, in essence, only repeat themselves and the novel ends with the same sentiments that it started with because he hopes that

¹⁴⁴ *The Buddha of Suburbia*, 180.

¹⁴⁵ Nasta, 201.

¹⁴⁶ Bromley, 157.

¹⁴⁷ *The Buddha of Suburbia*, 259.

¹⁴⁸ *The Buddha of Suburbia*, 259.

now he is 'going somewhere' and his life is finally going to change.

The last second generation immigrant left for discussion is Anwar's daughter Jamila. Exactly like Karim, Jamila has a difficult position in the British society because she is stuck between the condition of being brought up in Britain and the Indian heritage of her parents, which is the reason behind her hybridity. Yet Jamila's constructions of identity radically differ from Karim's. As the narrator says about Jamila in the end of the novel:

[...] Her feminism, her sense of self and fight it engendered, the schemes and plans she had, the relationships - which she desired to take this form and not that form - the things she had made herself know, and all the understanding this gave, seemed to illuminate her tonight as she went forward, an Indian woman, to live a useful life in white England.¹⁴⁹

In other words, Jamila contrasts with Karim because while he is not able to commit himself to anything, she finds herself in more control of her life: in comparison to Karim who for a long time does not know who he wants to become, never pays much attention to studies and leaves school, Jamila finds ways to educate herself, fulfils her needs and finds her identity in feminist movements and helping disadvantaged groups in society. While Karim is influenced by people around him, lacks any strong conviction and often only wants to conform, Jamila strongly rejects definitions of herself that her surroundings try to impose on her and she follows her own beliefs. As will be discussed below, Jamila is disadvantaged because of her gender in her patriarchal family and yet, exactly like Karim, she leaves home, matures throughout the novel and her identity formation is more successful than his because she breaks away from all kinds of orders and the expectations of others and learns who and what she wants to be.

Like most second generation immigrants, Jamila is also a subject of verbal racist attacks; yet, Jamila finds a different way of dealing with the abuse she receives daily on the streets of the London suburbs than Karim. While he is afraid of defending himself, 'a real shaker and trembler' who is capable of thanking an attacker for not making him 'chew the moss between the paving stones', Jamila is brave and defends herself actively when faced with similar conflicts, i.e. not only verbally but she is also capable of physically punishing the abusers as the novel indicates when she is described as someone who has no problems with sprinting 'through the traffic' before throwing a racist man off his bike 'and tugging out some of his hair, like someone

¹⁴⁹ *The Buddha of Suburbia*, 216.

weeding an overgrown garden'.¹⁵⁰ Furthermore, Jamila finds a role model for herself in the deeds of the American feminist and political activist Angela Davis. Due to such influence, Jamila gradually becomes more radical and changes her lifestyle as she starts 'exercising every day', learns 'karate and judo', gets up early 'to stretch and run and do press-ups', does the sort of activities that she knows would be necessary in case 'the whites finally turned on the blacks and Asians' and which her mother would never think of doing.¹⁵¹ Therefore, Jamila is portrayed as a very brave female character and it is undeniably her unfair position in the English society that does not see her as equal to the white British as well as her dissatisfaction with the situation at home where her life is dictated by her father that teach Jamila to be a strong modern woman rather than a passive victim. In other words, due to both of these factors, society and her father, Jamila decides to search for personal independence and freedom which she observes as essential: she avoids her father's orders and blackmailing tactics for as long as she can as the patriarchy that he epitomises is an unacceptable concept for the feminist Jamila who believes in equality and her disagreement with having her life ruled by a man is one of the reasons which make her, exactly like her mother, a female character which shows resistance in *The Buddha of Suburbia*. The educated Jamila rejects the gender roles her father believes in along with a lot of values of her parents' generation and rebels by which she echoes another young second generation woman that can be found in Kureishi's writing - Tania from *My Beautiful Laundrette*. It is possible to argue that although Tania is not portrayed as an active feminist like Jamila, she also realises that she is constrained by her gender and ready to do something about it. One of the examples of Tania's bad position at home due to her being a female comes in the film when the audience is informed that her father adores Omar and wants him to take over the family business, while he would not even consider asking Tania, his own child. In other words, she is not given the opportunities or chances a boy in her position would be arguably granted. Furthermore, it can be claimed that, like Jamila only without the same type of coercion, Tania is expected to marry whoever her father chooses for her, regardless of her own opinion and feelings. This is illustrated when Papa asks Nasser at the end of the film about Omar's marriage because he wants Nasser not to only fix Omar up with a great career but he also asks him to find a wife for his son. When confronted with this question, Nasser 'confidently' nods in agreement that Tania is a 'a possibility' when it comes to Omar's planned marriage despite the fact that she tells him earlier

¹⁵⁰ *The Buddha of Suburbia*, 53.

¹⁵¹ *The Buddha of Suburbia*, 56.

in the script that there is no way she would ever get married to Omar.¹⁵² Therefore, similarly like Jamila who eventually, after her father's death, leaves for the city to live a communal life according to her own beliefs and engages in activities of her choice, Tania feels she needs to run away from her family in order to escape such limitations and oppression. Indeed, as Ruvani Ranasinha argues, 'Tania and Jamila find they cannot explore intellectual and sexual independence, while remaining within the family' and by portraying the young Tania as running away, Kureishi might suggest that leaving home can be the 'solution' for her while at the same time by showing a female character in this way, he 'fails to promote change or present alternative possibilities for circumventing cultural and sexual positioning'.¹⁵³ Therefore, both of the second generation female characters that the reader can witness in Kureishi's writing are strong women that do realise what their heritage is and do not reject it completely because like Karim, they are stuck in the condition of 'belonging and not'. However, they are forced to leave their families to pursue individualism and find independence.

¹⁵² *My Beautiful Laundrette and The Rainbow Sign*, 109.

¹⁵³ Ruvani Ranasinha, *South Asian Writers in Twentieth-Century Britain: Culture in Translation* (Oxford: University of Oxford Press, 2007) 151.

4. Conclusion

The novels and films discussed throughout this work deal with the ways in which immigrants try to find their place in British society. They show in realistic ways, from the point of view of the insider Kureishi, how hard the process of finding one's identity is once a person is confronted with a culture that is hostile and does not want to accept people on the basis of their background and foreign appearance. As the discussion demonstrates, diaspora and migration are not only movements in space but also in time, which is visible in the fact that despite many shared elements, migrant experience necessarily differs for the first and second generation. In his writing Kureishi rehearses a range of coping strategies that the immigrants cling to during their life in Britain in order to be accepted or simply to find their identity and who they really are as people.

The major conflict within the minds of the first generation immigrants is the one that arises due to their comparisons of the present and the past. In other words, all of the first generation immigrants constantly go back in their thoughts and remember South Asia and what their life in their home country used to be like. It is the place which they still refer to as 'home' and often contrast it with Britain where they decided to settle. However, as Kureishi voices through one of his characters in *My Son the Fanatic*, it is not possible for the immigrants to go back because while they dream of this imaginary homeland, in reality the things and people have changed and there is 'nothing' for them in India anymore.¹⁵⁴ In consequence, all of the characters stay in Britain and continue to shape their identities. While some of the immigrants find a creative way of embracing their identity, such as Haroon in *The Buddha of Suburbia*, and begin to profit from epitomising English prejudices about South Asia that allows them to reach new places and higher social circles, there are also characters like Anwar that do not move up the social ladder, and over time begin to cling to the practices of the homeland. As for the female characters of the first generation, they all undergo an identity change as they begin to rebel against their husbands and become less passive. In contrast, the members of the second generation immigrants in Kureishi's writings are people who are more modern than their parents and their biggest inner conflict is finding themselves stuck between the Indian heritage gained from their families and the British culture and the Western way of life which they see everywhere around them and in which they are brought up. Like their parents, the second

¹⁵⁴ *My Son the Fanatic*, 121.

generation immigrants develop different strategies how to embrace their identity in Britain. While the protagonist of *The Buddha of Suburbia* escapes from the suburbs to the city, a type of journey undergone by several young characters in Kureishi's writing in the hope of finding a better place to live, resolve their inner conflict and finally belong and reach individualism, other characters such as Farid in *My Son the Fanatic* choose a different path, i.e. distance themselves from the British way of life completely and become involved in Islamic fundamentalism to gain cultural identity. Therefore, Kureishi's characters, whether from the first or the second generation, face inner conflicts because there is no such thing as fixed identity for the immigrant figures. The characters try to form their identities while they oscillate between cultures and changes of location, reaching new accomplishments and social circles which might seemingly offer new levels of acceptance can not help to construct their identities in themselves - in fact, it is what Alaa Alghamdi calls the 'flexibility' of 'the liminal figure' that is crucial for the construction of immigrant identities, i.e. their ability to change, adapt and perform certain roles within society.¹⁵⁵ Moreover, the generational conflicts between the immigrants are mostly based on different values, such as materialism that is more typical for the first generation and the spiritual void of the second generation. However, the second generation's modernity also becomes a reason for conflict with their parents and often results in the young characters leaving their homes in order to be able to live according to their own beliefs. Furthermore, the racial conflicts, attacks based on the ethnicity of the immigrants and their skin colour, differ in Kureishi's writing; all of the characters are victims of racism and experience racially motivated abuse throughout their life but while some immigrants are attacked only verbally or through actions that are physically harmless, other characters experience physical attacks as a result of which they receive injuries. In other words, the violence described in Kureishi's works varies and it is possible to conclude that the type and intensity of racism that a character experiences is not defined necessarily by the generation they belong to but rather by the location they live in and the people they socialise with. Therefore, in Kureishi's writing, the inner conflicts and looking for one's identity in British society are inseparable from racial conflicts and the views of the white British on race because such prejudice and stereotyping that the dominant culture exemplifies have an impact on the immigrants and influence their identity formations.

¹⁵⁵ Alghamdi, 82.

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