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The Buddha of Suburbia:
Cultural Identity in a Multicultural Society

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1. Abstract in English

This paper explores the problems pertaining to the formation of identity within an immigrant context on the basis of Hanif Kureishi’s *The Buddha of Suburbia* and seeks to conclude whether or not these could be considered part of a more general immigrant condition. The analysis of the novel’s genre and characters reveal themes that are coloured by postmodern traits of fragmentation and rootlessness, which are then discussed on a theoretical basis with a focus on the themes of identity, alienation, multiculturalism, belonging and the immigrant experience. The conclusion holds that a lack of a sense of belonging can be considered a universal trait of the modern immigrant condition.

1.1. Abstract in Danish

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2. Introduction and Motivation

The aim of this project is to investigate the issues concerning immigrants’ creation of identity in a multicultural society, as illustrated in the British novel *The Buddha of Suburbia*. In this process, we want to examine the universality of the issues raised by Kureishi, and investigate how they are perceived and dealt with by different theorists working with identity.

Hanif Kureishi’s *The Buddha of Suburbia* primarily follows the coming of age of Karim Amir, a British Indian teenager, in 1970s Britain. Set in a politically and ideologically turbulent period during which Britain experiences a rapid demographic shift to a multicultural society, the novel is as much about Britain’s struggle with its own identity as a postcolonial power as it is about the protagonist’s personal journey to find out who he really is. Through Karim’s strikingly honest and often humorous narrative, *The Buddha of Suburbia* examines the immigrant condition and explores the multi-faceted theme of identity from cultural and social perspectives.

Kureishi paints colourful and incisive portraits of the immigrant experience, the struggles of class, the clash of cultures, the elitism of art and the generation gap all on the canvas of 1970s’ London with its kaleidoscopic landscape of fashion, music and politics.

While the historical context is significant to the plot, we feel that this novel aptly describes the universal and timeless problems of identity and alienation that are experienced by first and second generation immigrants from non-Western backgrounds. As such, we believe that this text provides many good and relevant examples of, and a useful platform upon which to further investigate, the problems of cultural identity in a multicultural society that are no less resonant in today’s increasingly globalized world.

In order to obtain a thorough and deep understanding of the novel, we have taken a literary approach, and commenced the project within the frames of Text and Sign. Through genre and character analysis, we are going to uncover several themes of the novel that seem to be of great importance and influence for
the immigrant condition and identity, namely coming-of-age, class, belonging, ethnicity, and multiculturalism. To grasp these themes further, it then seems relevant to move into the dimension of Subjectivity and Learning and investigate the subject and its relation to society by looking into the concepts, the history, and the relevant theories linked to these themes. These investigations are finally going to lead us to a discussion on identity and the immigrant condition within a postmodern, multicultural society.

2.1. Background to Author

The writer Hanif Kureishi was born in 1954 in the Greater London suburb of Bromley in Kent. Since 1976, he has written plays for theatre and television, which include *Soaking the Heat* in 1976 and *My Beautiful Launderette* in 1985. His first novel *The Buddha of Suburbia* was published in 1990 and its reception was a success; it won the Whitbread First Novel Award, has been translated to over 20 languages and was also dramatised by the BBC as a four-part television series in 1993. It is still today a widely analysed and studied novel. After *The Buddha of Suburbia*, Kureishi has published several other novels, short stories and screenplays such as *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid* (1987), *The Black Album* (1995) and *Gabriel’s Gift* (2001).1

*The Buddha of Suburbia’s* first chapter was first published as a short story in *Harper’s* magazine in 1987, upon which Kureishi rewrote and completed the story before publishing the final version.2 In interviews, Kureishi indicates his interest in exploring different conceptions of Britishness, class, racial and sexual relations, desire, familial dynamics and in challenging traditional notions of these themes.3 His later works also deal with the same topics; such as *The Black Album* (1995), which is about the Muslim community in 1980’s Britain, *Midnight All Day* (1999), which handles human relationships and sexual desire, and *Gabriel’s Gift* (2001), which is a story about a fifteen-year-old

1 Uncited. Hanif Kureishi Biography. Undated. Web: Contemporary Writers/The British Council
3 Yousaf, Nahem. *Hanif Kureishi’s The Buddha of Suburbia: Readers Guide*, pp. 8-26
schoolboy using his artistic skills in order to survive the trauma of his parents' separation.\(^4\)

Kureishi is often compared to writers such as Salman Rushdie, Zadie Smith and Sam Selvon, but his perspective as the fully Westernised middle class son of an immigrant father was unique when his first works were published. He has essentially adopted Western traditions and theories that have influenced his own life and uses them in his writings bringing a new aspect to British literature.\(^5\) We consider the issues raised by Kureishi in *The Buddha of Suburbia* still relevant today.

### 2.1.1. Autobiographical Context

*The Buddha of Suburbia* is said to be a semi-autobiographical novel, and when reading it and learning about the author, some noticeable comparisons can be made. The novel’s plot is briefly presented in the introduction to this project. Kureishi’s father arrived in England following the partition of India and Pakistan in 1947 and, like Karim’s father, he came from a wealthy family, married an English woman from the lower middle class and worked as a civil servant. His ambition to become a writer was never realised, though he did encourage his son to do so. When Kureishi realised that he wanted to be a playwright himself, he left the suburbs of London at a young age and moved to the city. Like Karim, he worked in the theatre in various positions in order to establish himself as a playwright, until he became a novelist. Kureishi has written about his family background and his early personal encounters with racism. Having grown up in a lower middle class Anglo-Asian family in the suburbs of London, it can be reasonably assumed that Kureishi has drawn upon his personal experiences when writing this novel.\(^6\) Nevertheless, it needs to be borne in mind that *The Buddha of Suburbia* is a fictive novel, as Kureishi points out here:


\(^5\) Buchanan, Bradley. *Hanif Kureishi*, p. 13

\(^6\) Idem pp. 31-40 & 111
“The Buddha was kind of autobiographical but it was revved up autobiography [...] The relation between autobiography and your writing is a complicated one [...] It came out of my experiences in that sense, but it’s not one-on-one thing where something happens and you go and write it down. It’s not like that [...] You mix all that stuff up together and then you get a good chapter”.

2.2. Problem Definition

- To what extent do the experiences of the main characters in The Buddha of Suburbia reflect the immigrant condition in the real world, and can their experiences be considered universal today?

2.2.1. Research Questions

- Which key elements of the Bildungsroman are present in The Buddha of Suburbia and what do they symbolise?
- What are the central themes exemplified by the experiences of Karim and Haroon?
- How do the conditions of postmodern society affect the way in which the individual shapes and negotiates identity?
- What bearing does the social, cultural and ethnic background of an individual have on the process of identity formation, and how does this contribute to or impede a sense of belonging?
- Can the conditions of The Buddha of Suburbia’s main characters be considered representative of the immigrant experience in a Western postmodern society, and if so, how?

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2.3. Delimitations

It is always compelling to go in depth with the areas handled in a project, but in order to arrive at anything useful it is necessary to delimit ourselves. We have therefore chosen to delimit ourselves on several areas that would all have been interesting to investigate further in a larger project or perhaps in smaller more specialised projects dedicated to those.

As the project took shape around the book *The Buddha of Suburbia*, we have chosen not to do any empirical work such as interviews, observations or experiments in the field. Instead we have chosen to work with a fictional novel albeit conscious that this is a subjective medium. If we were to do empirical work, it would be necessary for our problem definition to have a different aim and focus where for instance we would investigate how Danish second generation immigrants experience the process of identity formation in modern Denmark.

The historical context of our chosen novel is significant to the plot. However, the problems of identity and alienation experienced by first and second generation immigrants that Kureishi describes are considered by this project group to be universal and timeless. We therefore felt that we could reasonably delimit ourselves on this front too.

In our project, we could also have chosen to apply the dimension of History and Culture as some of the novel’s themes definitely fall within this domain. However, we felt that by studying the novel with theories that fall within the field of Subjectivity and Learning, we would gain a wider perspective in the assignment. That is not to say that we will not touch briefly upon this dimension as the project material inevitably deals with relevant themes, such as multiculturalism, that are interdisciplinary in nature.
2.4. Dimensions

This project will cover the dimensions of Text & Sign and Subjectivity & Learning.

**Text & Sign** is quite relevant for our project as the object of study will be a novel. Certain methods of literary analysis will allow us to draw conclusions with regard to the book’s themes. This dimension provides the necessary tools with which to fully understand the genre, context, plot, themes and character development throughout the novel.

**Subjectivity & Learning** will be used in the examination of this novel’s themes, which are relevant to this dimension. Through the protagonist’s experiences and worldview, we are presented with important themes such as the search for identity and belongingness.

2.5. Methodology

We are interested in exploring the aforementioned themes raised in the book *The Buddha of Suburbia*, while working in the dimensions of Text & Sign and Subjectivity & Learning.

We will use literary analysis in order to identify the main themes of the novel. We commenced with a look at the genre of the novel, and explore what features *The Buddha of Suburbia* has that readily identify it with the Bildungsroman (formation novel). In order to ascertain this, we will use the work of two theorists, Franco Moretti and Jerome Hamilton Buckley, both of whom have studied the genre of the Bildungsroman.

In the subsequent character analysis, we will focus mainly on the characters of Karim, the protagonist and Haroon, Karim’s father. We will examine these characters with the concept of identity in mind and through this analysis we will explore the central themes of the novel: Ethnicity, class, belongingness and alienation.
On the basis of this literary analysis, we will look further into how these themes are presented in the novel. This will allow us to interpret Kureishi’s formulations and discuss them in a wider theoretical context. Hereby we should be able to objectively evaluate whether the problems faced by the characters in *The Buddha of Suburbia* can be seen as universal traits of the immigrant condition and experience.

3. Literary Analysis of *The Buddha of Suburbia*

The aim of this project is to investigate the immigrant condition and the process of identity formation in contemporary society. We will therefore start with a literary analysis of *The Buddha of Suburbia* which will help us identify certain themes or issues which Kureishi links to this condition in his novel. As stated earlier, the novel carries many autobiographical traits and must therefore have some roots in reality. Indeed, as Peter Kristensen puts it: "The text is shaped out of the author’s consciousness and experience of reality or parts of it".8

Therefore, even though the story and the characters are fictive, they still possess traits from reality and we therefore believe that they could aptly describe processes and conditions in reality. We will therefore use the novel as a case study upon which we will apply theories of identity formation and multiculturalism. But in order to do this, since the novel’s connection to reality resides in the author’s perception of his own experiences, it is necessary to analyse certain fictional aspects of the novel in order to find and interpret these perceptions and thereby get closer to the real immigrant condition.

For this, we have found it the most relevant first to make an analysis of the structure behind the novel, its genre, since knowing the way in which a story is constructed and developed often helps to understand and thereby interpret for instance the characters’ relationships to each other, the reason behind

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8 Kristensen, Peter. *Litteratursociologi*, p. 7
certain plot developments or the emphasis on certain specific themes.

Since the aim of this paper is to end with a discussion on the immigrant condition, we have chosen to make analyses on two of the novel’s major characters - Karim and Haroon - who represent contrasting aspects of this condition; Karim being a second generation immigrant of mixed race parentage, and his father Haroon a first generation Indian immigrant in Britain.

In this way, we will identify certain themes or issues which play an important role in the life of immigrants as it is pictured in this novel and thereby lay the foundation for further discussion.

3.1. Genre Analysis

In this section, we will examine the literary genre of The Buddha of Suburbia by introducing the key elements of the classical Bildungsroman. We will investigate how these elements are represented in The Buddha of Suburbia and what they symbolise.

In order to identify the typical features of the classical Bildungsroman, we will refer to the work of Jerome Hamilton Buckley and Franco Moretti who both have studied the form of the Bildungsroman, and in particular the English Bildungsroman. First, a general definition and historical background of the classical Bildungsroman will be presented. This will be followed by a closer examination of the key elements identified in The Buddha of Suburbia, which will exemplify how the theme of identity may be explored in the tradition of this genre.

Franco Moretti is a Professor of English and Comparative Literature in Stanford University and his critical study of the Bildungsroman has been the main source of our genre analysis. He has studied this particular genre’s origin along with the way in which it has evolved throughout time. He shows the connection between the appearance of youth as a literary topic and the changes European societies were going through in the turn of the 18th century, by arguing that youth was seen as a...
symbol for modernity, as a break from the traditional societies. He takes a critical perspective by analysing the key elements of the genre as symbols for current values. It is in this sense that he is of the opinion that the radical change in genre occurred when youth became something that was desired to prolong instead of reaching the mature, stable end of one’s journey. 

The late Jerome Hamilton Buckley, who was a Professor of English Literature at Harvard University, has contributed to the clarification of the descriptions of the classical Bildungsroman. He writes that modern young writers began to use the Bildungsroman as a means to explain their personal disillusionment or desolation, and while the form has kept its vitality, it has moved from “the chronicle of self-discovery” to a “sad testament of modern anomie”. Though both theorists agree on the genre’s key elements and the changes it has gone through, Moretti takes a more critical approach to the societal perspective.

The novel’s protagonist, Karim, is a young man, which is characteristic of many other Bildungsromane. We will therefore will refer to the protagonist as he in the general definition

3.1.1. History of the Bildungsroman

The Bildungsroman (Bildungsromane in plural) is a novelistic genre. The word comes from German, meaning ‘novel of formation’, ‘novel of education’ or ‘coming-of-age novel’. The word Bildung is related to Bild and Bildnis, which means ‘portrait’, ‘shaping’ or ‘formation’. This type of novel deals with the development of the mind and character of the protagonist, as he moves from childhood to adulthood, discovering his identity and role in the world through various experiences and spiritual crises.

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10 Moretti, Franco. The Way of the World, pp. 3-7
11 Idem pp. 3-7 and pp. 227-228
13 Buckley, Jerome Hamilton. Season of the Youth. The Bildungsroman from Dickens to Golding, pp. 268-269
The historical context in which the Bildungsroman originally emerged is a significant factor in its development as a genre. During this period, the fundamental changes that Europe underwent undoubtedly influenced other literary movements as well. The origins of this genre can be traced back to eighteenth century Germany. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship* (1795-1796) is widely considered to be the first formation novel.\(^\text{14}\) According to Franco Moretti, the Bildungsroman emerged as a literary genre in its own right during a pivotal period in which Europe was passing into modernity and concepts of youth were evolving. Youthfulness projected the same images as modernity; mobility and inner restlessness. Thus this genre came to symbolise modernity, which was metaphorically represented by the character of youth. Youth is not everlasting, but a transitional period of growth from childhood to adulthood that ends with a final and stable identity.\(^\text{15}\)

The form of the Bildungsroman has naturally changed over time. This is mainly for two reasons. First of all, as Derrida argues in *The Law of Genre*\(^\text{16}\), a novel is seldom faithful to just one genre, but instead draws on a multitude of different approaches at the same time. In other words, the novels which can be identified as Bildungsromane most probably carry traits from other genres as well, and when genres are combined they naturally evolve with time. Kureishi confirms this in a previously quoted interview\(^\text{17}\), where Kureishi states that writing a novel is not a “one-on-one thing (...) you mix all [sorts of] stuff up together and then you get a good chapter”.\(^\text{18}\)

The second reason why the Bildungsroman has changed over time has to do with the authors’ historical contexts, since, as argued earlier, this historical context and the authors’ own

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\(^\text{15}\) Moretti, Franco. *The Way of the World*, pp.5-8


\(^\text{17}\) See 2.1.1.

experiences are highly influential on the novel. According to Buckley, the classic novel of youth is often strongly autobiographical. This is generally the case with the first or second novel, generally written very soon after the experiences that form the basis of the author’s material. With memories of youth so fresh, it is difficult for the writer to maintain objectivity and for this reason the ending of the novel is often ambiguous.

The autobiographical novelist is often a man young enough that his own adolescence is still fresh in mind, and in his writing can retell his formative experiences of youth as honestly as possible. He can choose to utilise some of his own experiences and feelings when creating a character, with the licence to freely invent others in order to complete the dramatic characterisation.

The autobiographical component is both the strength and the weakness of the Bildungsroman. On the one hand, the novel gains authenticity through the author’s own personal knowledge of events, while on the other hand, it requires the reader to obtain some basic knowledge of the author in order to sufficiently understand and evaluate the novel.¹⁹

As seen in the introduction, The Buddha of Suburbia is Kureishi’s first novel and is indeed considered to be semi-autobiographical.

### 3.1.2. Outline of the Classical Bildungsroman

On the background of many of the early Bildungsromane, Buckley has abstracted the “broad outlines of a typical Bildungsroman plot and so determines the principal characteristics of the genre”.²⁰ Buckley stresses, however that no single novel follows the model orthodoxy, but “none that ignores more than two or three of its principal elements—childhood, the conflict of generations, provinciality, the larger society, self-education, alienation, ordeal by love, the search for

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¹⁹ Buckley, Jerome. Season of the Youth, pp. 22-27
²⁰ Idem p. 17
a vocation and a working philosophy - answers the requirements of the Bildungsroman as [Buckley] describes and defines it”. 21

Buckley defines the Bildungsroman in the following way:

“A child of some sensibility grows up in the country or in the provincial town, where he finds constraints, social and intellectual, placed upon the free imagination. His family, especially his father, proves doggedly hostile to his creative instincts or flights of fancy, antagonistic to his ambitions, and quite impervious to the new ideas he has gained from unprescribed reading. His first schooling, even if not totally inadequate, may be frustrating insofar as it may suggest option not available to him in his present settings. He therefore, sometimes at a quite early age, leaves the repressive atmosphere of home (and also the relative innocence), to make his way independently in the city (in the English novels, usually London). There his real ‘education’ begins, not only his preparation for a career but also- and more importantly- his direct experience of urban life. The latter involves at least two love affairs or sexual encounters, one debasing, one exalting, and demands that in this respect and others the hero reappraise his values. By the time he has decided, after painful soul-searching, the sort of accommodation to the modern world he can honestly make, he has left his adolescence behind and entered upon the maturity. His initiation complete, he may then visit his old home, to demonstrate by his presence the degree of his success or the wisdom of his choice”. 22

There has been much discussion whether or not The Buddha of Suburbia can be said to be a Bildungsroman. Although there are very clear similarities with Buckley’s definition and principal elements, The Buddha of Suburbia does not end in maturity, which seems to be the purpose of the Bildungsroman: to move from adolescence and into adulthood. This argumentation has been taken up by several others, but it is also argued that since e.g. Charles Dickens’ Great Expectations, is widely ascribed to be a Bildungsroman even though it does not end with maturity either, in the same way, due to the many similarities The Buddha of Suburbia does, in fact, have with the Bildungsroman, we will continue to analyse the novel as being a Bildungsroman. 23

21 Idem p. 18
22 Idem pp. 17-18
23 Buchanan, Bradley. Hanif Kureishi, pp. 86-90
3.1.3. Key Elements of the Bildungsroman

The following section will introduce the key elements of the Bildungsroman, as seen in *The Buddha of Suburbia*, followed by an analysis about the meanings they hold in this particular novel.

3.1.3.1. The Father

The father is an important figure in the typical Bildungsroman, where the protagonist often loses his father by either death or alienation. This symbolises his loss of faith in the values of his home and family, which leads him to search for substitutes. The father’s repression is often the main force behind the youth’s assertion of his independence.²⁴

In *The Buddha of Suburbia*, Karim’s father Haroon is one of the central characters of the story and their relationship is one of the central themes. As their relationship changes, it becomes the main force behind Karim’s transformation toward independence. Their relationship is a painful one, but Kureishi does not describe this dynamic at length in the novel, thus the emotions they have for each other are not explicitly depicted. Karim describes his father’s changes with sarcasm and contempt, calling him ‘God’, but while he is confused about the situation, he chooses to follow his father’s developing story closely:

“(…) I’d given him the ‘God’ moniker, but with reservations. He wasn’t yet fully entitled to the name. What I wanted to see was whether, as he started to blossom, Dad really did have anything to offer other people, or if he would turn out to be merely another suburban eccentric”.²⁵

Moretti writes that the classic Bildungsroman yields wisdom, but that this has changed with the modern novel:

[W]isdom is the opposite, not only of thoughtlessness, but also of risk, imagination, the yearning for still unclear possibilities (...). The modern novel [therefore] begin[s] when a son no longer heeds his father’s counsel”.²⁶

²⁴ Buckley, Jerome. *Season of the Youth*, p. 19
²⁵ Kureishi, Hanif. *The Buddha of Suburbia* p. 22
The balance of power between father and son shifts at the beginning of our subject novel when Karim sees Haroon committing adultery. Consequently, he no longer needs nor appreciates his father’s counsel and Haroon loses authority over his son. One interpretation could be that he finds substitutes for his father in the form of the directors Shadwell and Pyke, whose guidance Karim seeks in pursuit of an acting career. He also breaks free from these substitutes, when he realises that they have little to offer. A common theme for this genre is for the son to either come to terms with his father or free himself from his grasp, and throughout the novel, Karim’s attitude towards his father changes. Although he behaves sarcastically and contemptuously towards Haroon, he is not indifferent to his opinions and actions. In general, Karim can be seen as a son who feels disappointment when he comes to realise that his father is only human with flaws and weaknesses he never noticed as a child:

“I thought of how, when I was a kid, Dad always out-ran me as we charged across the park towards the swimming pool. When we wrestled on the floor he always pinned me down, sitting on my chest and making me say I’d obey him always. Now he couldn’t move without flinching. I’d become the powerful one; I couldn’t fight him – and I wanted to fight him- without destroying him in one blow. It was a saddening disappointment”.

He eventually comes to accept the latest state of their relationship:

“Maybe you never stop feeling like an eight-year-old in front of your parents. Your resolve to be your mature self, to react in this considered way rather than that elemental way, to breathe evenly from the bottom of your stomach and to see your parents as equals, but within five minutes your intentions are blown to hell, and you’re babbling and screaming in rage like an angry child”.

Haroon’s wishes for Karim’s future do not correspond with Karim’s own plans, so he does not get his father’s approval. Karim first breaks free from his father’s and then from his whole family’s influence after his parents separate. The family break up

27 Buckley, Jerome. *Season of the Youth*, pp. 65-66


29 Idem p. 280
is the catalyst for Karim to leave his home and the suburbs behind in order to realise himself as an actor in the city.

3.1.3.2. The City

The city is a central element in the classical Bildungsroman. This is the place where life really starts, seemingly full of novelty and variety, but it often brings disillusionment more alarming and influential than the dissatisfaction with the narrowness of suburban life. In *The Buddha of Suburbia* the city is described as a place where everything can happen and dreams come true. Karim regards London as the complete opposite of the suburbs:

“In bed before I went to sleep I fantasized about London and what I’d do there when the city belonged to me. (…) There were kids dressed in velvet cloaks who lived free lives; there were thousands of black people everywhere, so I wouldn’t feel exposed; (…) there were parties where girls and boys you didn’t know took you upstairs and fucked you; there were all the drugs you could use.”

In *The Buddha of Suburbia*, we see the city as a place filled with opportunity. Two cities are important in this respect: London and New York. To Karim, London is waiting to be conquered, as he sees it as his ‘possession’ to obtain. It is here Karim receives his new ‘education’ in the theatre world, and also where he finds love - all important aspects in Buckley’s definition of the Bildungsroman. When Karim goes to New York, he is faced with leaving his home and familiar surroundings again. By distancing himself physically from London, he detaches himself from the stereotypes which life in Britain forces upon him. This distance from home gives him space to discover new aspects of himself.

The young protagonist in the Bildungsroman is in his encounter with the city often involved in love and sexual adventure as an integral part of his development. Karim’s relationship with Eleanor is significant. In this passionate relationship with Eleanor, Karim experiences a sexual revelation and ends up

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30 Buckley, Jerome. *Season of the Youth*, p. 20

31 Kureishi, Hanif. *The Buddha of Suburbia*, p. 121
experimenting sexually, e.g. having group sex with Pyke and Marlene. After this experience, Karim has to come to terms with the mix of admiration and mistrust he feels for Pyke. The admiration for Pyke, as a father figure, coupled with the power relationship between them, puts Karim in a submissive and possibly humiliating position: "He had to pursue what he wanted to know and follow his feelings wherever they went, even as far as my arse and my girlfriend’s cunt".32

The cities, London and New York, are places where Karim is able to learn through trial and error how to make his own way in life. His most eye-opening experiences take place in the cities and through his experiences, he comes to discover more about himself and how he wants to continue his journey.

3.1.3.3. Epiphanies

Many of the protagonists in Bildungsromane experience epiphanies.33 In the beginning of the story, Karim realises that in order to find what he longs for, he must leave his family and the suburbs. His biggest epiphanies happen in New York, where Karim escapes the immigrant condition. His love affair with Eleanor and his relationship with Pyke come to an end when he finally comprehends the true manipulative and shallow nature of these relationships and accepts that he does not fit in their world:

"[Pyke] started to read the stuff about me. The faces around him were looking at me and laughing (...) ‘I’ll have a word with [Eleanor], tell her to take care of Karim, maybe get her to feed him, give him a bit of confidence. My prediction is that Eleanor will fuck him, it’ll basically be a mercy fuck, but he’ll fall hard for her and she’ll be too kind to tell him the truth about anything. It will end in tears’."34

He joins Charlie in the anonymity of New York, but soon realises that he has outgrown his teenage love for him:

32 Idem p. 217
33 Buckley, Jerome. Season of the Youth, pp. 22
34 Kureishi, Hanif. The Buddha of Suburbia, pp. 244-245
“And it was at this moment (...) that I realized I didn’t love Charlie any more. I didn’t care either for or about him. He didn’t interest me at all. I’d moved beyond him, discovering myself through what I rejected. He seemed merely foolish to me.”

Karim’s epiphany here makes it clear to him that he no longer desires the things Charlie represents. He leaves this part of his life behind and moves forward. Upon his arrival in London, he comes to understand that what he wants is to gain his family’s acknowledgement and that this is enabled by money and success:

“I began to enjoy my own generosity; I felt the pleasure, especially if they were accompanied by money-power. I was paying for them; they were grateful, they had to be; and they could no longer see me as a failure.”

3.1.3.4. Money and Success

In the Bildungsroman, money does not necessarily equal success, but as Moretti argues “perhaps money cannot buy existence, but its lack, on the other hand, definitely forces one not to be”. In The Buddha of Suburbia, the aspect of having or not having money defines who you are - and who you are not. Very early on in the novel, we get an understanding of the importance of money in Karim and his surroundings. The significance of money is already clear from his first encounters with Eva:

“Unlike mom, who took scarcity for granted, Eva bought whatever she wanted. (...) There was none of the agonizing guilt over the money we all went through (...)”.

Eva introduces him to a whole new life. She introduces him to the world of theatre and parts of society he never imagined, and by it soon realises the significance of class:

35 Idem p. 255
36 Idem p.283
37 Moretti, Franco. The Way of the World, p. 174
38 Kureishi, Hanif. The Buddha of Suburbia, p. 114
“But now I was among people who wrote books as naturally as we played football. What infuriated me – what made me loathe both them and myself – was their confidence and knowledge. The easy talk of art, theatre, architecture, travel; the languages, the vocabulary, knowing their way around a whole culture – it was invaluable and irreplaceable capital”.

While trying to fit into this ‘world of culture’, he forms connections to new people, but slowly comes to appreciate the differences between him and them, and how his background, ethnicity and class would always set him apart from them. It makes it impossible for him to be naturalised in this world. His success in theatre provides him with a similar part on a television show, but even with all his success he realises that although he can fake his belonging in this environment, his background also prevents him of being fluent in the cultural language of his peers. Despite his frustration, Karim uses this to his advantage, embracing their view of him. Rather than let his ethnicity be a handicap to him, he seizes the opportunity that he sees is presented to him and sets out to make a name for himself in the theatre world. His success in the theatre world leads to a realisation and greater understanding of himself and his identity. Moreover, Karim achieves acknowledgement by the higher classes as well as by his own family. This acknowledgement is partly due to the acceptance of his personal development, but more importantly, the economic success and strength he gains, as shown earlier.

In the Bildungsroman, money and success are important elements in the way they define one’s hierarchical position in society. Through them one can obtain the recognition of others and move into a higher social position.

3.1.3.5. The Marriage and the Family

When comparing *The Buddha of Suburbia* to the classical Bildungsroman, the concept of marriage is a rather relevant theme. At the beginning of the novel, Karim discovers his father’s infidelity and witnesses his parents’ separation. He declares to his mother that he will never marry, and she, being

39 Idem p. 177
dissatisfied in her marriage, does not attempt to dissuade him. Different types of marriages and family structures are presented in the novel; conventional marriage, arranged marriage, mixed race families and open marriages, such as swinger couples and uninhibited communal lifestyles. Viewed in this perspective, these types of marriages and families could be seen as a metaphor for the changes in family life that took place especially during 1970’s, the time-setting of the novel. Marriage symbolises the social contract that the individual makes with society; no longer controlled by social rules, it is driven by individualism. In the classical novel, marriage is represented as the antithesis to death and disgrace. Ultimately, one either married or left the social sphere. Divorce is stigmatised and not seen as a real choice, as the failure of a relationship is seen not only as undesirable, but also as the destruction of the very roots that sustain the individual.  

40 Idem pp. 22-24

The Buddha of Suburbia is a modern Bildungsroman. However it still contains some traits of the classical form in that even though Karim keeps his freedom by not getting married, the novel ends with his father’s announcement of marrying the woman he committed adultery with. Haroon receives absolution for his adultery and so the story ends with a closure corresponding to the classical Bildungsroman.

According to Moretti, one trait of the classical Bildungsroman is the pursuit of happiness with marriage as the final outcome. He argues that in Goethe’s novel, marriage is a metaphor for committing oneself, and the end of personal development, thus making happiness the polar opposite of freedom. Marriage constitutes the ending of the uncertainty between the individual and his world, and further transformation is not seen as a necessary desire.  

41 “(...) [H]appiness of the classical Bildungsroman is the subjective symptoms of an objectively completed socialization”. 42 From this perspective, we can

42 Idem p. 24
conclude that Karim, as opposed to his father, keeps his freedom and does not make this social contract with his world. He does not complete his socialisation in a traditional way and the ending stays open for his part. All this highlights how much individualism and personal freedom are valued in modern day society.

The traditional conceptions of marriage and the family are some of the issues Kureishi develops in his novels, but this particular novel has similarities with a classical Bildungsroman in the way that the divorce and adultery have not been considered a suitable ending to the story. However, perceptions of marriage and the family appear to be going through mutations. The ultimate marriage of the Haroon and Eva could in the sense be viewed as a symbol of the generation gap. In the novel, while the older generation holds on to their traditional values, the younger generation seems to lose faith in them and look for new ones.

3.1.4. The Evolution of the Happy Ending

The classical Bildungsroman has a somewhat happy ending as it coincides with the protagonist reaching his goal and finding a meaning for his existence. It emphasises the move from youthful experiments to mature identity with a sense of closure, happiness and meaning. The individual’s development corresponds with the social integration of a protagonist who no longer doubts his role in society but embraces life in a world of shared values. In the nineteenth century, the modern Bildungsroman took another turn with regards to the ending. The novel no longer represents youth as a teleological course that ends with superior maturity. Meaning that is essential to the world cannot be shared with the protagonist and reward him with happiness. The individual’s quest for independence comes into conflict with the imperatives of socialisation which become so contradictory that a happy ending is unthinkable. Meaningless and unhappy endings were an essential part of the modern Bildungsroman in the nineteenth century and as Literary Realism appeared, identification with the real and the rational (which was typical for the classical Bildungsroman) fell apart. The core
of reality was not a representation of the professed values of the society but rather a rejection of any attempt to realise them.\textsuperscript{43}

This change to the original ending happened soon after the first novels appeared. Instead of happiness, the novel form now ended with death, speculations and open questions about the protagonist’s final choice.\textsuperscript{44}

The ending of \textit{The Buddha of Suburbia} leaves the reader with questions about the meaning of the protagonist’s journey. In the end, his choices are not profound in nature and it is uncertain how permanent they are. It leaves us wondering how the story would continue in a world offering endless choice and where maturity, symbolising stability, is not valued by a society more concerned with constant movement and individual freedom. There is a slight sense of closure with Haroon marrying Eva and every character does seem to be moving forward, and at the same time are coming to terms with each other. But even while

\textit{The Buddha of Suburbia} displays clear traits of the classical Bildungsroman, as many of the same elements are still present. The noticeable difference between the classical Bildungsroman and \textit{The Buddha of Suburbia} is the notion of the development of identity as a process. The ending of the novel shows change from a stable final goal to an endless ongoing process. The Bildungsroman was born during a time when Europe was arriving at modernity. Like any other novel, \textit{The Buddha of Suburbia} is a product of its time with regard to the questions of family, marriage, success and money. These are also related to class, because all of them enables or hinders one moving into higher social position. Thus the questioning of values, and how the notion of the ending has changed, we can see the transformation beyond modernity.

\textsuperscript{43} Idem pp. 118-120
\textsuperscript{44} Buckley, Jerome. \textit{Season of the Youth}, pp. 22
The story of the protagonist’s formation, as we have analysed, follows to some extent the classical Bildungsroman, but it can also be seen as a formation novel for other characters such as Haroon. None of the characters stay stable and static; all of them develop and go through some kind of profound transformations that do not seem to be finalised.

*The Buddha of Suburbia* is the story of a son of an Indian immigrant father and an English mother in 1970’s Britain, but through the analysis of the key elements of a formation novel, we can recognise some general features in relation to the development of identity. We can identify the meaning of the family in self-actualisation and how the individual’s intellectual growing process often includes questioning the prevalent values of the surroundings in order to discover what values he might share with others. Acknowledgment from others and personal autonomy are equally important in the real world today as they are for the story’s characters.

In the following two sections, we will examine the major characters of Karim and Haroon, who arguably best exemplify through their narrative the central themes of this project. Individually they both have unique and compelling stories to tell. In addition, their special relationship as father and son, together with their mutual influence on each other, adds a compelling dynamic that is at the core of the Buddha of Suburbia.

### 3.2. Character Analysis of Karim

Karim Amir is the protagonist in Hanif Kureishi’s *The Buddha of Suburbia*. Written in the first person, it is through his eyes and words that we can gain insight into what it is to be the son of an Indian Muslim immigrant and an ordinary Anglo-Saxon British woman in 1970s Britain. Moreover, it is Karim’s trials and tribulations, the observation of his father’s difficulties and the quest for his own identity that can give us an inkling into the unique experience of the immigrant in any time period.
3.2.1. Karim’s Quest for Identity

In the first few lines of The Buddha of Suburbia, Karim articulates who he is and how he defines his own identity and condition:

“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 (...) the odd mixture of continents and blood, of here and there, of belonging and not”.45

He is neither proud nor ashamed of being English, or Indian. He is a teenager more concerned with sex, music and clothes than with his genetic ethnicity. The prejudice he has been subjected so far in life is of the school playground variety – he is still innocent of its wider influence in adult life, which he later discovers in London.

It is not just subtle racism that Karim has to contend with. In many ways, this is the least of his worries. He is from the suburbs, from a lower middle class family, where opportunities to advance up the social ladder are seen, at least by Karim’s father Haroon, in terms of further education, but where in reality there is little institutional expectation to graduate beyond dull lifetime jobs as “a motor-mechanic, or a clerk in an insurance firm, or a junior architect”.46 The material success of Karim’s maternal Uncle Ted and Auntie Jean with their posh suburban address and their lawn parties hosting “all South London and Kent society”47 is the symbol of success for Karim’s peers – “lives...measured by money”.48

For Karim, the suburbs mean predictability, complacency, staidness and boredom, where “it was said that when people drowned they saw not their lives but their double-glazing flashing before their eyes”.49 The city represents hope, discovery, opportunity and excitement, and “thousands of black people everywhere, so [he] wouldn’t feel exposed”.50

45 Idem p. 3
46 Idem p. 68
47 Idem p. 41
48 Idem p. 42
49 Idem p. 23
50 Idem p. 121
What Karim learns in the city and more specifically in the art world is that he will never really be able to be accepted into high society. He is acutely aware of his standing within a short time. It becomes plainly obvious to him that he lacks the cultural capital and currency required for full membership of what proves to be a very elite club. While his "authenticity" is his ticket in, he can never compete with "people who wrote books as naturally as we played football (...) The easy talk of art, theatre, architecture, travel; the languages, the vocabulary, knowing the way round a whole culture - it was invaluable and irreplaceable capital".

Karim does not readily identify with his father’s culture per se because he has never been immersed in it beyond the stories of his father’s and Anwar’s youth. There is no mention of ever going to a mosque as a child, or of Halal food at home or of being part of a larger Indian Muslim community. He does not even speak his father’s native tongue, much to the chagrin of Shadwell, his first theatre director.

For Karim, being the "odd mixture of continents and blood", the product of contrary cultures, he is uniquely able to critically look at both systems more objectively, or rather with equal prejudice as opposed to without prejudice, and finds that he doesn’t really identify wholly with either of them.

Karim’s external cultural identity is just a weighty obstructive legacy to him, something that is thrown in his face again and again, which detracts from his deeper personal identity. This he is forced to examine. He is always being reminded that he is different, that he is not looked upon by the English as being English. Karim’s identity is characterised by his non-Englishness in spite of how English he feels; by what he is not and not by what he is. This is a source of building frustration throughout this novel.

Karim resents the role that he feels society imposes on him through class and race, of having to play Mowgli and do characterisations of Indians in order to advance professionally.

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51 Idem p. 140
52 Idem p. 177
53 Idem p. 3
and socially. Nevertheless, it is through his ambitious willingness to compromise himself that he gains an appreciation of who he really is.

For all of Shadwell’s patronising pomposity, he expresses some pointed observations regarding the protagonist’s contradictory position. While said neither with malice nor sensitivity, Shadwell declares with the ring of truth that it is Karim’s “destination (...) to be a half-caste in England ..... belonging nowhere, wanted nowhere”.54

Karim initially takes offence at Shadwell’s unintended cruel words but later concedes this observation to be the reality in which he must navigate:

“The immigrant is the Everyman of the twentieth century.... What a breed of people two hundred years of imperialism has given birth to. ...... Everyone looks at you, I’m sure, and thinks: an Indian boy, how exotic, how interesting, what stories of aunties and elephants we’ll hear now from him. And you’re from Orpington”. 55

3.2.2. Karim’s Experience of Racism

3.2.2.1. Explicit Forms of Racism

While growing up in the South London suburb of Orpington, Karim is subject to the harsh reality of the school playground, where any non-conformity to norms is attacked. He resents “being affectionately called Shitface and Curryface, and of coming home covered in spit and snot and chalk and wood-shavings”. 56 He considers himself lucky “to get home from school without serious injury”57 and is acutely aware of his cultural differences and shortcomings at an early age, the seeds of alienation having been planted by his peers. It is not that he feels different – it is more that he is made to feel that he is different.

54 Ibid
55 Ibid p. 141
56 Ibid p. 63
57 Ibid
At this tender stage of his personal development, Karim is already disillusioned with the possibilities that life seems to offer him in the small world of his local suburban environment and derides his father’s ambitions for him to become a doctor by exclaiming – “What world was he living in?”.

In Chapter Three, Karim is chased off by ‘Hairy Back’, the father of Helen, a girl who he pursues sexually. At the sight of his Great Dane, Karim “went white, but obviously not white enough” for the racist Hairy Back, who sets the dog on him and exclaims: “However many niggers there are, we don’t like it. We’re with Enoch”.

Here Hairy Back refers to Enoch Powell, a Conservative Member of Parliament, who gained notoriety and huge popularity after his 1968 “Rivers of Blood” speech, which criticised Commonwealth immigration and anti-discrimination legislation. The comic rape by dog inflicted on Karim that follows could arguably be considered a metaphor for the treatment of Commonwealth immigrants - that is immigrants from ex-British Colonies - by their former master.

When Karim visits Jamila, he leaves the relative calmness of the outer suburbs for the ‘far poorer’ inner suburbs of the city which is “full of neo-fascists…. [who] roamed the streets, beating Asians and shoving shit and burning rags through their letter boxes”. Karim’s witness to Jamila’s family’s fear of racist violence, which is “inspired by the possibility that a white group might kill one of us one day”, will have had a definite effect on his psyche albeit that Karim’s family didn’t share the same severity of threat, only “fear of having stones and ice-pops full of piss lobbed at [them] by schoolboys from the secondary modern”.

As a result of their condition, Karim and the more outwardly disaffected Jamila toy with their own identities:

“Yeah, sometimes we were French, Jammie and I, and other times we went black American. The thing was, we were supposed to be English,

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58 Ibid
59 Idem p. 40
60 Powell, Enoch. Enoch Powell’s ‘Rivers of Blood’ Speech (20.04.68), 06.11.07. Web: The Telegraph
61 Idem p. 56
62 Ibid
63 Idem p. 28
but to the English we were always wogs and nigs and pakis and the rest of it”.

3.2.2. 2. Implicit Forms of Racism

This last quotation provides an excellent bridge to this section as it so clearly describes the ‘otherness’ of Karim and Jamila in the eyes of the English. It demonstrates how the discrimination they receive from society at large diminishes their substance as human beings to two-dimensional facades, which understandably results in a feeling of alienation.

One thing is the active differentiation based on race that Karim experiences throughout the novel. Another thing entirely is the latent and implicit generalisation and devaluation of his self that follows Karim, based solely on account of his appearance and what it connotes in the minds of those he meets.

A good example of the enduring effect this discrimination exerts on Karim even after a lifetime of habituation is when he returns to England after six months of anonymity in New York, of neither belonging nor not belonging. Karim gets a nice wake-up call on his first day back in England from a South African dentist, presumably white but more of a foreigner than himself, who asks his nurse: “Does he speak English?”.

These stereotypical presumptions are most clearly expressed in the theatre environment where Karim tries to forge a new identity for himself through hard work and merit.

3.2.2. 2.1. Imposed Identity & Type-casting

Karim’s entrance into the acting world, to which he aspired, is no doubt propelled by the ethnic credentials that make him “fit the part” of Kipling’s Mowgli. Being “dark-skinned, (...) small and

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64 Idem p. 53
65 Idem p. 258
66 Idem p. 140
wiry”\textsuperscript{67}, he is “cast for authenticity and not for experience”\textsuperscript{68}, which on this first occasion is in Karim’s positive interest, humiliation aside, but subsequently becomes a limiting factor professionally.

After being first cast as Mowgli by Shadwell, Karim’s next career move is to the improvised theatre of Pyke, where he develops the character of a newly arrived Indian immigrant, modelled initially on his ‘Uncle’ Anwar and then adapted to that of Changez, Jamila’s imported husband. Towards the end of the novel, Karim succeeds in gaining the part of “a rebellious student son of an Indian shopkeeper”\textsuperscript{69} in a new television soap opera “that tangled with the latest contemporary issues … [such as] … abortions and racist attacks...”\textsuperscript{70}, which is highly suggestive of the BBC ‘Eastenders’ show which did not in fact premiere until 1985, after the time period within which the book is set but before the publication of the book in 1990.

This stereotype-casting can be considered a reflection of the society within which it takes place. In order to endure and prevail in spite of the prejudice, Karim is forced to capitulate to the same prejudice and in so doing, reinforces and perpetuates the myth and stereotype of the immigrant himself.

It is interesting to look at Kurieshi’s choice of Mowgli as Karim’s first acting role. This is the main character in Jungle Book, a children’s story written by the now controversial voice of British Imperialism, Rudyard Kipling. Jamila considers the play to be “completely neo-fascist”\textsuperscript{71}, and accuses Karim of “just pandering to prejudices”.\textsuperscript{72} His father reacts politically and exclaims - “That bloody fucker Mr Kipling pretending to whity he knew something about India!”\textsuperscript{73} and likens Karim’s performance to that of a “Black and White Minstrel!”\textsuperscript{74} Kureishi’s introduction of The Black and White Minstrel Show is significant. This was a hugely popular weekly BBC television light entertainment program that

\textsuperscript{67} Idem p. 142  
\textsuperscript{68} Ibid  
\textsuperscript{69} Idem p. 259  
\textsuperscript{70} Ibid  
\textsuperscript{71} Idem p. 157  
\textsuperscript{72} Ibid  
\textsuperscript{73} Ibid  
\textsuperscript{74} Ibid
ran for twenty years until 1978, but is now considered an embarrassment, offensive and politically very incorrect. This show followed in the tradition of an entertainment genre that has its roots in the American Deep South of the nineteenth century with its stereotypical caricature of Negro plantation workers. This is readily identifiable in the practice of mainly white performers using blackface make-up, much like Karim’s costume as Mowgli. It is a good indicator of the social norms that prevailed in the time-setting of this novel.

The implicitly racist type-casting of Karim is echoed in the experiences of Gene, Eleanor’s “black lover, London’s best mime, who emptied bed-pans in hospital soaps, [who] killed himself because every day, by a look, a remark, an attitude, the English told him they hated him; they never let him forget they thought him a nigger, a slave, a lower being”.77

As a hardworking actor that enjoys success, Karim feels limited by his ethnicity, by the imagined identity projected upon him by those in power (Shadwell and Pyke). Their interest in him, in his character as a person, is only skin-deep. Karim is aware of this, is indeed angered by this, but is forced to accept this reality and compromise his own character in order to fulfil a level of his professional ambition.

At the New York opening night after-party in Chapter Seventeen, Karim is faced with more racial non-white stereotypes, from the subtle “black man [playing] ‘As Time Goes By’ on the piano”78 to the performance of a black Haitian dance troupe in “bright-pink trousers and naked from the waist up”79 that is reminiscent of Haroon’s manufactured Eastern mystic costume of “a red and gold waistcoat and Indian pyjamas”80 and Karim’s “loin-cloth and boot polish”81 as Mowgli. This display puts Karim in the odd

75 Malik, Sarita. The Black and White Minstrel Show. Undated. Web: The Museum of Broadcast Communications
76 Blackface: Makeup for a conventionalized comic travesty of Black people, especially in a minstrel show. Web: The Free Dictionary
78 Idem p. 243
79 Ibid
80 Idem p. 31
81 Idem p. 146
position of the observer of his own condition and makes him “feel like a colonial watching the natives perform”.  

3.2.3. Karim’s Clash with Class

Karim’s struggle with identity is not limited only to race. A very strong theme, secondary only to that of the immigrant condition, is the exclusivity of class in British society. Again, at an early age, Karim is conscious of his disadvantaged position in society and of the low expectations society places on him and his school peers, who consequently have a “combination of miserable expectations and wild hopes” themselves.

He attends a Secondary Modern school\textsuperscript{84} where the emphasis is on the development of practical rather than academic skills, with no expectation of further education. The 11+ examination decided the fate of students at the age of eleven. If you passed, you went to a grammar school, which benefited from better educational resources aimed at qualifying students for university education. If you failed, you went to a Secondary Modern where you were prepared for a life of blue collar work. This selection process within the British public school system produced results largely along class lines, and the majority that didn’t pass the one chance 11+ examination were prescribed limited destinies and forever labelled failures. Karim points to this inequality of opportunity, and thereby draws a comparison between the Britain of 1970s and the Victorian Age, by declaring: “Fuck you, Charles Dickens, nothing’s changed”.  

However, Karim succeeds in breaking the mould with his entrance into the world of theatre and art. At first, he naively imagines that he can gain full membership to this exclusive club through merit rather than novelty value. However, it is also in this arena that he feels like a foreigner:

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{82} Idem p. 244
\item \textsuperscript{83} Idem p. 68
\item \textsuperscript{84} Uncited, \textit{Education in England}. Undated. Web: Know Britain
\item \textsuperscript{85} Idem p. 63
\end{itemize}

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“But now I was among people who wrote books as naturally as we played football. What infuriated me – what made me loathe both them and myself – was their confidence and knowledge. The easy talk of art, theatre, architecture, travel; the languages, the vocabulary, knowing their way around a whole culture – it was invaluable and irreplaceable capital”.  

This cultural capital cannot be bought. Karim’s natural environment – his family home and school - were culturally barren deserts. The “hard words and sophisticated ideas [that] were in the air they breathed from birth….. could only ever be a second language, consciously acquired”.

3.2.4. Karim’s Relationships

We have seen where and how Karim’s struggle with identity is translated and presented in this book. However, one central aspect of this struggle and process of identity formation remains; namely Karim’s (changing) family relations. These family relations in some way seem to act as a springboard to his evolution in the novel. Indeed, Karim seems to have three types of family throughout the novel, each of them playing an important role in his identity formation.

3.2.4.1. Karim’s First Family

First of all, there is the traditional family, which he is part of when the novel begins. This family consists of his father Haroon, his mother Margaret and his younger brother, Allie. They represent the environment in which Karim has grown up and is presented to the reader as being full of routines, and for Karim, boredom: “(…) things were so gloomy, so slow and heavy, in our family (…) Quite frankly, it was all getting me down and I was ready for anything”. The protagonist sees his family as almost a prison, but as the quote suggests, this seems to be his first

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86 Idem p. 177
87 Idem p. 178
88 Idem p. 3
motivation to break out of this protective frame and go discover the world and himself elsewhere, just as one would expect from the protagonist in a Bildungsroman. What’s more, another thing that makes him detach himself from his family, is all the problems that suddenly appear when his father chooses Eva, and the family falls apart. This previously discussed element will be further elaborated on later. For now, what is important to mention is that when his father chooses to leave Margaret for Eva, Karim’s faith in his father’s wisdom and guidance is lost, thereby propelling him towards independence. Even though Karim first follows his father to Eva’s home, he does so not to stay close to his father and his protection, but rather because he sees this as an opportunity for a long awaited change in his life, and an open door to more freedom and independence. This becomes very clear when they move to London, where Karim tries to create a new existence and identity for himself.

3.2.4.2. Karim’s Second Family

These conscious choices, as well as the problems at home, bring us to Karim’s second family: Anwar, Jeeta and Jamila.

The flat above their shop (and later, Changez and Jamila’s various abodes) is Karim’s second home, often used as a place to escape the problems of his family home: “Jamila and her parents were like an alternative family.” In particular, it is his conversations with Jamila where Karim can deposit all of his problems and find comfort, discuss existence in general, and often laugh at it. However, in his evolution, Karim also has to move away from this family. Initially, this is due to growing differences between them. This is coupled with a growing lack of mutual understanding, which starts with Anwar’s rediscovery and reaffirmation of his Muslim identity, as well as the tyrannical way in which he forces his daughter to capitulate to his arranged

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89 See 3.1.3.
90 See 3.1.4.1.
91 See Idem p. 50
92 Kureishi, Hanif. *The Buddha of Suburbia*, p. 52
37

marriage demands. Suddenly, Jamila has problems of her own, and the peace, which he seeks in their home, is suddenly also interrupted. When Changez arrives, even though they rapidly become friends, Karim still very clearly distinguishes Changez as an Indian and himself as not. This is illustrated by his choice to imitate Changez for his role in a play, and the way he perceives him as an experiment. Furthermore, even though he is very close to Jamila, her life decisions and intellect are so different to Karim’s that they are not natural equals. The moment when the reader realises that Karim must move on, and leave them behind too, just like his ‘old’ family, it is at Eva’s party in London, where they complain that he hasn’t visited them for a while, and where he tries to talk to them, but is dragged away and pushed in another direction: the direction of his new world and new life as an actor in London. It is time for him to leave the suburbs and his old life, which they are a big part of, and move into the city, and all that it represents.

3.2.4.3. Karim’s Third Family

The doors to this new world are opened by Karim’s third and last type of family, namely Eva and Charlie.

A more detailed analysis of this family and what it means for Karim (and Haroon) to move into their homes and lives will be made later on in Haroon’s character analysis. We will therefore limit ourselves to saying that Karim has a very ambivalent relationship with this new family. On one side, he likes them very much (Karim’s feelings towards Charlie are often described as love). Karim sees this new family as his chance of escaping the boredom and constraints of his ‘traditional’ family and suburban

93 Idem p. 59
94 Idem p. 189
95 Idem p. 136
96 See 3.1.4.2.
97 See 3.2.3.
98 Kureishi, Hanif. The Buddha of Suburbia, p. 15
environment. They represent mobility, excitement and activity. When Karim feels that he can no longer count upon his father for wisdom and good advice, he assigns this role to Charlie (in the beginning when it comes to fashion, etc) and especially to Eva. However, as the following quote suggests, it is here that the confusion enters the picture:

“The only person I knew who’d be helpful and objective and on my side was Eva. But I wasn’t supposed to like her because her love for my father was buggering up our entire family”. 99

Even though this new family offers the keys to the kingdom he has been dreaming of, Eva is still a party to the breakdown of his real family. Karim does not directly articulate this contradiction of feelings, but this reality still somehow bothers him which can be seen in small comments like: “How could he have done it?”. 100 Nonetheless, he appears to focus on their capacity to lead him onto another life, and accepts their guidance away from the suburbs and into the city (London with Eva, and later New York with Charlie): “For [Charlie] too, it was obviously true that our suburbs were a leaving place, the start of a life”. 101

3.2.5. Karim’s Sexual Identity

At the beginning of the novel, Karim declares that he “was looking for trouble, any kind of movement, action and sexual interest”. 102 Apart from his short relationship with Eleanor, all his sexual relationships have been about conquest, escape and instant gratification, and not love. It is clear that, over the course of the novel, Karim’s sexual interest in both sexes is more than experimental, and this could be seen as an additional aspect that leads him to feel like an outsider. There is an expectation that Haroon’s visual discovery of Karim’s homosexual encounter with Charlie and his assertion that “being a man and denying your

99 Idem p. 63  
100 Idem p. 116  
101 Idem p. 117  
102 Idem p. 3
male sex was perverse and self-destructive\textsuperscript{103} would develop as a valid storyline, especially as a generational inter-cultural clash. However, Kureishi chooses not to explore this. Karim does not agonise over his sexuality, and therefore this unchanging element of Karim’s identity is not considered an integral part of the plot or worthy of further study in the context of this project.

3.2.6. Karim’s Morality

Karim is largely amoral throughout the novel. His character is at times shamelessly selfish and he will do whatever it takes to satisfy his curiosity or desire without heed to the consequences or consideration to morality. Even though Karim’s witness to his father’s illicit liaison with Eva in her Beckenham garden is “an act which was [his] introduction to serious betrayal, lying, deceit and heart following”\textsuperscript{104}, this bad example does not appear to negatively affect Karim’s morality, only reinforce the status quo. Karim has many character traits that do not make him an attractive human being, but he does not deceive himself about his weaknesses. He has no qualms about invading people’s privacy. He is happy to eavesdrop on private conversations and to read other’s personal correspondence. He is happy to steal a tablecloth from the Fish to give as a present to Changez. He will not hesitate to lie or break a promise. He will even sleep with Jamila, when her husband, who is also his friend, is in the same house.

It is only towards the end of the novel that Karim, perhaps as a measure of the growth of his character, comes to a realisation that there is a line between right and wrong:

“If I defied Changez, (...) it meant that I was untrustworthy, a liar (...) it was one of the first times in my life I’d been aware of having a moral dilemma. Before, I’d done exactly what I wanted; desire was my guide and I was inhibited by nothing but fear (...) now I was developing a sense of guilt, a sense not only of how I appeared to others, but of how

\textsuperscript{103} Idem p. 174
\textsuperscript{104} Idem p. 253
Karim’s story can be summarised in one word: movement. That is the movement between different geographical points, between spheres of society, between modes of identity and the all-defining movement between childhood and adult life that is Karim’s coming of age. His ambivalence with regards to himself, his ethnicity, his family and his career in the world of theatre becomes the main impetus of a novel fuelled by his internal struggle to find meaning in his existence.

From the beginning of the novel, Karim’s story is intertwined with the story of his father, Haroon, as they both try to find their identity and place in British society. Therefore the next logical step is to look at the character of the Buddha of suburbia.

### 3.3. Character Analysis of Haroon

Haroon Amir is a first-generation Indian Muslim immigrant, and the father of the main protagonist, Karim. His personality, story and evolution throughout the book seem therefore closely connected to, and highly influential on Karim’s life and fate in this novel. However, some differences remain between the two characters, due to their different backgrounds (first generation immigrant and second generation immigrant). The contrasting and yet parallel qualities of Haroon together with his particular perception and navigation of the problems of belonging, racism and personal identity are therefore considered worthy of further analysis.

Furthermore, the importance of his character is underscored by the title of the book, which is a direct reference to his alternate persona.

First of all, we will examine Haroon’s experience of the immigrant condition, and look at how his evolution during the

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105 Idem p. 186
course of the novel seems to be motivated by a dissatisfaction of this condition and a thirst for belonging.

This will be followed by an analysis of his relationship with his two female partners, Margaret and Eva, and how these changing relationships seem in some sense to represent a social and individual fight for survival in the Western society that is depicted in this book.

Finally, we will look more closely at Haroon’s relationship with his son, and see how this relationship seems to have greatly influenced and to some degree even paralleled Karim’s evolution. Even though they grew up on different continents and Karim only is half-Indian by birth, they both seem to be fixed in the role of the “Indian immigrant coming to England”, and they both have to struggle in order to find just the smallest kind of acceptance in the British society.

3.3.1. An Immigrant’s Quest to Belong

3.3.1.1. From India to the English Suburbs

The character of Haroon is introduced to the reader by the third paragraph of the novel as the protagonist’s father. In the first paragraph, we learn that Karim is of mixed parentage, “the odd mixture of two continents and blood, of here and there, of belonging and not”\(^{106}\), and in the first few pages, it quickly becomes clear to the reader that Karim’s father is Indian, and his mother British. Haroon’s Indian immigrant status seems to play a central role in his life.

Indeed, it is plainly visible that he is Indian: “Like many Indians he was small”.\(^{107}\) Moreover, his Indian background also becomes clear through his clothing, as he starts to wear Indian clothes more and more in his process of becoming a ‘guru’: “He was

\(^{106}\) Idem p.3
\(^{107}\) Idem p.4
certainly exotic, (...) wearing a red and gold waistcoat and Indian pyjamas”. 108

His immigrant identity shines through certain aspects of his behaviour, for example the fact that he still cannot find his way around his local area: “Dad had been in Britain since 1950 – over twenty years (...) Yet still he stumbled around the place like an Indian just off the boat”. 109 Another example is the food that Harron habitually eats. In the first few pages, the narrator mentions “a packet of kebabs and chapatis” 110 and this seems to be the normal fare that Haroon has for dinner every night: “(...) more normally, he handed Mum his supper”. 111 This could be seen as indicative of Haroon’s lack of integration as far as British food culture is concerned, and this aspect contributes to the reader’s perception of Haroon as an immigrant that has not managed to integrate and fully adapt to British society. This situation does not improve over the course of the novel as both Anwar and Haroon seem to become more Indian as they grow older: “Now, as they aged and seemed settled here, Anwar and Dad appeared to be returning internally to India”. 112

This idea of a lack of integration is very much encouraged by the other descriptions of Haroon throughout The Buddha of Suburbia. Indeed, we see a picture of a passive man (gets home from work and just sits in front of the television, waiting for his food), who has somehow given up. He is not only an economic outcast - “Mum and Dad always felt out of place and patronized on these grand occasions, where lives were measured by money” 113 - but also a social outcast. This is evidenced by the many racist incidents he encounters on his way to work but tries to avoid by changing his route “for fear of having stones and icepops full of piss lobbed at him by schoolboys from the secondary modern”. 114

108 Idem p.31  
109 Idem p.7  
110 Idem p.3  
111 Idem p.3  
112 Idem p.64  
113 Idem p. 42  
114 Idem p. 28
The situation is no better at his workplace. He feels barred from promotion on account of his skin colour: “The whites will never promote us. (...) Not an Indian while there is a white man left on the earth”. Even when he takes on the persona of a guru and gains a kind of respect from his fellow commuters and colleagues, he is still an outsider at work: “But the office, where he was an unelevated lazy Indian who had run away from his wife and children, there was disapproval from the clerks he worked with: there was mockery behind his back and in front of his face”.

And to complete the circle, it is made clear early on that his marriage is unhealthy and later that it has failed when he chooses Eva. He therefore seems to be perceived as an outcast and a failure by both his Indian and British family, but also by society in general (ethnically by being an immigrant and geographically and economically by living in the suburbs).

Haroon himself is not content with his lot in life: “[Haroon] had begun to see himself as a failure and his life as a dismal thing”.

### 3.3.1.2. An immigrant with Dreams

Although this feeling of being a failure may have led to the abandonment of real hope for the future, and a great passivity within Haroon as shown above, it was always accompanied with dreams and longings for acceptance, recognition, and thereby a desire for change. This can be seen for example through his habit of bringing a dictionary on the train in order to learn new words because “you never know when you might need a heavyweight word to impress an Englishman” or through his sudden interest in Oriental philosophy. This acquisition of ‘Oriental wisdom’ might for him represent a path out of his role as a ‘failure’: “Beneath all the Chinese bluster was Dad’s loneliness”.

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115 Idem p. 27
116 Idem p. 115
117 For example, see idem p. 27
118 Idem p. 115
119 Idem p. 28
and desire for internal advancement”\textsuperscript{120}, “How happy I feel now that I’m understanding life at last!”\textsuperscript{121}

These dreams for recognition may be linked to his past. Indeed, Haroon comes from a wealthy family in India: “\textit{Dad had had an idyllic childhood (...) He’d never cooked before, never washed up, never cleaned his own shoes or made a bed. Servants did that}”.\textsuperscript{122} He was sent to London in order to study and get a good education. He failed this mission, but keeps longing for this lost recognition: “\textit{We old Indians come to like this England less and less and we return to an imagined India}”.\textsuperscript{123} This lost past and social status make him feel superior to his surroundings even in his new immigrant condition. This feeling of superiority is expressed both physically (e.g. the pride he attributes to his chest) and mentally:

“\textit{Dad always felt superior to the British: this was the legacy of his Indian childhood – political anger turning into scorn and contempt (…)}

\textsuperscript{120}Ibid
\textsuperscript{121}Idem p. 27
\textsuperscript{122}Idem p. 23
\textsuperscript{123}Idem p. 74

he’d made me feel that we couldn’t allow ourselves the shame of failure in front of these people. You couldn’t let the ex-colonialists see you on your knees, for that was where they expected you to be (…) their empire was gone; their day was done and it was our turn”.\textsuperscript{124}

Even when he becomes a guru, he shows how superior he feels towards others, in particular the British, through his teachings. An example of this is given in this advice: “\textit{So, if you punish yourself through self-denial in the puritan way, in the English Christian way, there will only be resentment and more unhappiness}”.\textsuperscript{125}

Haroon’s wealthy past seems to have an enormous impact on his evolution in the novel, as everything he does seems to be driven by this search for a lost respect and recognition. Realising that this can no longer be achieved through money and social status gained through a missed education - “\textit{Dad was going nowhere}”\textsuperscript{126} - he tries to find another path; through wisdom and teaching. “\textit{He wanted to talk of obtaining a quiet mind, of being}

\textsuperscript{124}Idem p. 250
\textsuperscript{125}Idem p. 76
\textsuperscript{126}Idem pp. 25-26
true to yourself, of self-understanding”. For him, it seems that acquiring wisdom and becoming a spiritual teacher could be one way to make up for the image of failure that he represents.

Another way in which he tries to compensate for his own perceived failures is through his son’s education. Haroon keeps insisting on Karim’s future as a doctor or lawyer to a point where Karim’s education almost becomes more important for Haroon than his son’s well-being: “Someone else pissed over my shoes, and all my Dad thought about was me becoming a doctor”. This indicates that there must be some personal motive rather than the simple wish for a good future for his son. However, his son’s education turns out to be a lost cause too, which is very clearly perceived by Haroon as a big failure, not only for his son, but once again for himself. This can be seen in Karim’s fear of announcing his decision to leave education as “it would break his immigrant heart”, and Haroon’s reaction to it: “And then Dad ignored me”. This failure omits the possibility to gain acknowledgement and respect through his children. His wisdom and spiritual guidance are the only tools he feels he has left in his quest to belong, and in this he enjoys some success.

3.3.2. Haroon’s Metamorphosis

When we meet Haroon for the first time in the novel, he has been unsuccessfully trying to fit into British society by different means for about twenty years. However, things only finally seem to change when another method is suddenly adopted. Indeed, with help and guidance from Eva, instead of trying to be English in order to fit in, Haroon starts to exploit the differences that he represents to the British. The stereotypes that are applied to him and the things that make people think of him as a failure are harnessed and transformed into tools that will help

127 Idem p. 28
128 Idem p. 63
129 Idem p. 94

130 Idem p.110
131 For examples, see Idem pp. 6, 25 & 28
him to achieve respect and recognition, instead of being a victim of them.

This creation of a new alternate identity as a guru is in many ways a process of exaggerated authentification. He does not only show people what it means to be Indian, but exaggerates these characteristics: “(... exagerating his Indian accent. He’d spent years trying to be more of an Englishman, to be less risibly conspicuous, and now he was putting it back in spadeloads”).

By exaggerating his accent, his clothes and his skills as a yoga teacher or guru (which are presented to us on page four as only being a very recent and untrained occupation), and playing on the mystery of the Orient, he mystifies himself and thereby attracts English citizens’ interest and attention. People start to believe in him and view his teachings and guidance as a service to the nation (and even to the Queen herself) “You benefit our country with your traditions”.

Karim also seems to admire his father’s new identity for a while. However this admiration is limited by the fact that after twenty years of attempted assimilation, this sudden return to his roots seems inauthentic. This is partly due to the fact that Haroon hasn’t even passed Indian traditions or ways of life onto his children, which for example is seen in Karim’s reflections at the funeral: “(...) looking at these strange creatures now – the Indians (...) I felt ashamed and incomplete at the same time, as if half of me were missing (...) Partly I blamed Dad for this”. In fact, Haroon wants them to have as little to do with India as possible: “He was keen for me to go out with anyone, as long as they were not boys or Indians”.

As we’ve seen, through his teachings and growing number of performances, Haroon manages to find a way into the world of recognition and respect and thereby attains a feeling of belonging. But linked to this wisdom, the possibilities it offers

132 Idem p. 21
133 Idem p. 72
134 Idem p. 74
135 E.g. he calls him “God”
136 Idem p. 73. This can also be seen by the lack of faith Margaret shows in her husband’s new occupation.
137 Idem p. 212
138 Idem p. 73
and the doors it opens, is the character of Eva. She plays a very important role in Haroon’s social evolution, and it seems like the choice to leave Margaret and follow Eva could be seen as a symbol of Haroon’s social and individual dream and struggle for change and better conditions. We will therefore now look further into Haroon’s relationships with his two partners.

3.3.3. Haroon’s Changing Relationships: The Symbol of a Social and Individual Struggle

3.3.3. 1. Haroon and Margaret: A Relationship Based on Traditions and Fixity

From the beginning of the novel, Hanif Kureishi draws a picture of Haroon and Margaret’s relationship as being without passion, dull, troublesome, old, boring, and stuck in daily routines. Once in a while, the reader senses a hint of love between them. But this sense of love is often nostalgic. Much more emphasis is laid on the negative aspects of their relationship. By the time the novel starts, they must have been married for about 17-18 years, and this can be very much sensed in the way their relationship works. Rituals dominate their daily life. This is seen already in the first page, where Karim contrasts his father’s new behaviour to his usual behaviour: “Instead of flopping into a chair to watch television news and wait for Mum to put the warmed-up food on the table, he went into their bedroom (...) He quickly stripped to his vest and underpants”. What’s more, the description of Karim’s mother has changed from ‘pretty’ and worthy of being “laid eyes and hands on” to “Mum was a plump and unphysical woman with a pale round face”. Even though they have been together for many years and Haroon seems to have had a dream of social ascendence from the beginning, they haven’t managed to advance socially. When he met her, Margaret was a lower middle class woman living in the suburbs,

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139 E.g. Idem pp. 26 & 281
140 Idem p. 3
141 Idem p. 25
142 Idem p. 4
and this status quo does not change. In many ways, this life is viewed by Haroon (according to Karim’s descriptions) as being highly dissatisfying:

“His life, once a cool river of balmy distraction, (...) was now a cage of umbrellas and steely regularity. It was all trains and shitting sons, and the bursting of frozen pipes in January, and the lighting of coal fires at seven in the morning: the organization of love into suburban family life in a two-up-two-down semi-detached in South London. Life was trashing him”.143

Margaret’s dissatisfaction on the contrary seems to come rather from his behaviour as a husband, than from their social condition.144 This dissatisfaction therefore seems to be logically growing very quickly in what proves to be the last months of their relationship.

The difference in their causes for dissatisfaction might be due to their different approaches, reactions and responses towards their life conditions, which can be represented in their respective behaviours during Ted and Jeans’ parties: “Mum’s ambition was to be unnoticed, to be like everyone else, whereas Dad liked to stand out like a juggler at a funeral”145(notice here the comparison with a juggler, showing how his family and others viewed him as being a kind of misplaced clown).

Margaret is “timid and compliant”146 and has a very calm personality and way of dealing with things, which often is criticised by Karim as being a sign of weakness.147 The only action linked to her is when she speaks to her sister “Auntie Jean”, who takes action on her behalf. The only way she expresses feelings, and communicates to others and the reader that something is wrong (even though she tries to hide it) is in her place of escape; her drawings: “During this time of Dad’s silence she drew a lot, putting her pad away behind the chair”.148 Although she does not seem happy, she seems to accept her condition and tries to conceal her feelings and thoughts, except of course in her drawings.

143 Idem p. 26
144 Idem p. 45
145 Idem p. 42
146 Idem p. 4
147 Idem p. 104
148 Idem p. 20
In comparison to Margaret, Haroon has a very different way of dealing with his problems. As explained previously, due to his socially elevated background, he does not seem to be able to accept his current social condition. Instead, he nurses a strong longing for a more respectable position in society. Just like Margaret, he also has a place of escape; Oriental literature. However, these readings are not enough for him. He needs people to share them with. He needs attention and recognition for his wisdom: “He wanted [Mum] to be with him, to witness him being respected by others.” But somehow, he cannot get this approval and attention, either from his wife, who is obviously often embarrassed by his behaviour, or from her family and their friends. Therefore, he starts to seek attention elsewhere (e.g. on the train). When he meets Eva, she offers him various possibilities to ‘perform’ and share his wisdom with people that want to listen to him. He grabs these opportunities right away: “Dad spoke quickly (...) his pride in this honour, this proof of his importance, (...)”. This new identity gives new life to Haroon, but conversely kills what is left of Margaret after many years of unhappy marriage: “She was always the world’s sweetest but most miserable woman.” As Haroon gains movement, is thrown into society, and starts to see other people, he does not seem to realise to what extent Margaret feels left outside. In a sense, the situation is turned upside down, and Margaret is indirectly turned into an immigrant of his new world and to contemporary society. The general trend at that moment in British history seems to be about being exotic and different, and suddenly, instead of Haroon, Margaret is the one being perceived as the boring, incomprehensible outsider, as she does not submit to or follow this trend. Suddenly, she is the one who is not ‘Indian’ enough, instead of Haroon, who is not “English” enough: “But it isn’t me

149 Idem p. 6
150 Idem p. 4
151 E.g., Idem p. 42
152 Idem pp. 5-6
153 Idem p. 282
that Eva wants to see, (...) She treats me like dog’s muck, Haroon. I’m not Indian enough for her. I’m only English”’.

However, as soon as postmodernity and its demands for mobility and success155 move into their lives through Haroon’s new activities, it is clear that she cannot and will not follow and adjust to the ways of their evolving contemporary society and is thus rejected and left behind. Here one might notice that all the while Haroon’s life is turned upside down and he advances both socially and geographically (moves to London and mingles with higher classes), Margaret neither leaves the suburbs nor grows in character. Until the moment where she finds another man at the end of the novel and starts to act independently, she is viewed as the weak and defeated one, who cannot live without somebody to take care of her: “I was sad, it was true. How could I not be when I thought of Mum lying there in that bed day after day, completely wrecked by Dad (...) Would she ever recover? (...) would anyone ever appreciate [her qualities] and not hurt her?”156 This aspect is reminiscent of immigrants, who either cannot or will not adapt to the customs and traditions of their host country and who are consequently looked down upon and left to live a life on the periphery of society.157

In this way, Margaret is made into an ‘immigrant’ herself, as an outsider to a lifestyle of flow, movement and dreams of advancement. She represents stability, tradition, rituals, and geographical, psychological and social fixedness. This is linked to negativity throughout the novel, as Karim and apparently society seem to hold movement as being the right and positive road towards a better life full of possibilities.

This new woman seems better suited to meeting these demands. When choosing Eva, Haroon not only chooses a new partner. He chooses a new lifestyle based on movement and social ascendance with the hope that one day he will finally feel acceptance and belonging in British society.

154 Idem p. 5
155 See 4.1.
156 Kureishi, Hanif. The Buddha of Suburbia, p. 108
157 Thomas, Susie. Hanif Kureishi, p. 66
3.3.3.2. Haroon and Eva: The Symbol of a Struggle for Social Survival

3.3.3.3. Eva in Haroon’s Individual Struggle for Survival – a Breeze of Novelty and Freshness

If Margaret represents the old, sadness, and traditions, Eva represents novelty, joy, life, excitement and movement. She is mentioned already for the first time on the third page and one might notice that most of the rest of the first chapter either takes place in her house, or contains indirect or direct references to her. In addition to this idea of the reader thereby being invited into her life and home, the very short time it takes for this character to go from being called by her last name “Mrs. Kay”\(^{158}\) to simply being referred to as “Eva”\(^{159}\) shows how well the family knows her, and thereby also how central she is to the plot, and therefore how well the reader is going to get to know her as well.

In addition to her centrality, she is also right from the outset being presented as an exotic character, who belongs to a universe that seems very distant to Haroon’s family and their life experience.\(^{160}\) It is into her home that Haroon has been invited, and it is there that he will make his first performances and develop his new personality and identity as the *Buddha of Suburbia.*

When comparing Haroon’s longings to Margaret’s and then Eva’s, it does not seem like a big surprise when the father turns to Eva in more than a simple ‘professional’ way. Indeed, Eva stands in sharp contrast to Margaret.

First of all, contrary to Margaret’s very English physical and psychological nature, Eva, although also being English by birth, is described as being *exotic* right from her first appearance:

\(^{158}\) Idem p. 5
\(^{159}\) Ibid
\(^{160}\) Ibid
“The only thing she wore was a full-length, multi-coloured kaftan, and her hair was down, and out, and up. She’d darkened her eyes with kohl so she looked like a panda. Her feet were bare, the toenails painted alternately green and red. (...) She was a kind of human crop-sprayer, pumping out a plume of Oriental aroma.”

On the reader’s first encounter with Eva, the narrator, by the use of several senses (e.g. sight and smell), paints a very expressive picture of her. This makes it easy for the reader to imagine this woman and get a better idea of who she is and what her values are. Already in the first sentence with “the only thing she wore …” and her hair that was “down, and out, and up”, the reader gets an idea of Eva as being a self-confident, sensual, wild and desirable woman, who is not ashamed of her body. The comparison with the panda, and her bare-footedness, gives her the attribute of nature and freedom. Finally, the strong colours on her toenails show life and creativity, and the strong physical contact which follows this description of her (hugs and kisses on the lips) once more indicates sensuality, presence and warmth. All in all, simply through this first glance of her, the reader gets the impression that Eva is a strong, proud, exotic, sensual, free and desirable woman, and this clearly affects both Haroon and Karim: “She kissed me on my lips too. My stomach tightened”.  

All of this can be compared to the first description we have of Margaret: “She wore an apron with flowers on it and wiped her hands repeatedly on a tea towel, a souvenir from Woburn Abbey.” And later “I imagined that she considered her body to be an inconvenient object surrounding her, as if she were stranded on an unexplored desert island.” Here, she is presented as a woman who hides her body under several layers (the apron) and whose potential beauty is masked by work and household chores. Instead of being free, she is locked into her own body and her limited role as a typical hard-working housewife, surrounded by “three selfish men”, whom she even calls “torturers”. There is no charm or mysticism about her. Everything is old and known. She is as British as one can be (symbolised by the apron), and there is nothing sensual, exotic

\[\text{\textsuperscript{161} Idem p. 9}\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{162} Ibid}\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{163} Idem p. 4}\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{164} Idem p. 20}\]
or particularly desirable about her. Adding her timidity to this, the fact that she wants to “be unnoticed”¹⁶⁵, and that she isn’t present at her husband’s performances, gives the reader the impression that Margaret is very absent and leads us back to the idea of passivity. Quite early on, it seems like her weight in the novel will not be as great as Eva’s and that this inequality in presence and attention given by the characters and the narrator indicates future problems in the course of the story (which is true since Haroon and Margaret divorce).

What’s more, the differences in the relationships of Haroon and Margaret, and Haroon and Eva, are already made clear at this stage. Indeed, one can compare the passion, novelty and very expressive free love between Eva and Haroon: “Eva hugged Dad and kissed him all over his face, including his lips. This was the first time I’d seen him kissed with interest.”¹⁶⁶, “but there wasn’t a plan, just passion and strong feeling which had ambushed him”¹⁶⁷ with Haroon’s remark about his marriage: “Your mother upsets me, (...) It’s only my damn effort keeping this whole family together. No wonder I need to keep my mind blank in effortless meditation”.¹⁶⁸

Looking at it in this way, it seems that Eva represents exactly what Haroon has been looking for- his opportunity to act and change his condition. He grabs this chance. Ultimately, this choice does bring about social ascendance and individual progress in that Haroon does find happiness and joy in a relationship, and does finally succeed in becoming a respected person, to whom people listen and look up to.

¹⁶⁵ Idem p. 42
¹⁶⁶ Idem p. 9
¹⁶⁷ Idem p. 66
¹⁶⁸ Idem p. 8
3.3.3.4. Eva in Haroon’s Struggle for Social Ascendence: The Symbol of and a Road to Change and Mobility

Even though Eva and Haroon’s adultery is often referred to (mostly by Karim), it seems that her other personal qualities are depicted as being more important. She is not only central when it comes to the father’s personal love life, but also one of the most important characters in the development of the plot and with regard to the characters of Haroon and Karim.

Even before Eva is introduced to the reader, we sense that she is willing to give Haroon all that he has been longing for until now; social ascendance, recognition and acknowledgement, not to mention love and presence: “Now, though, I suspected that Eva Kay (...) wanted to chuck her arms around him. (...) Eva Kay was forward; she was brazen; she was wicked”.169 She promises to be the door to another very different life, which is actually presented very literally on page eight as she opens the door to her own house which she has transformed into another universe. She is the one who arranges and organizes all the evenings (both in the suburbs and in London) where Haroon can perform and take his first steps towards recognition. She also describes very openly her dreams and plans for Haroon (which seem very close to his own longings): “My dream is to get him to meet with more responsive people – in London”.170

She offers access to another physical, geographical and social world. By choosing her, Haroon chooses to finally take action and change his life. It is a relationship borne of passion, speed and constant movement, attributes which, as we will see later, characterise the society in which they live. She seems to share the same dreams and longings for her life and together, they help each other move upwards in society; her by knowing the ways and trends of the parts of society they aspire to, him by being the answer to these trends and demands of society, being exotic and different.

169 Idem p. 8
170 Idem p. 30
However, when all this is said, and even though Haroon overall seems very satisfied with his new condition and life with Eva, one cannot help noticing the few discreet doubts hidden in the text about life in contemporary British society and the sacrifices that have been made in order to achieve this recognition.

Indeed, even though Eva sees Haroon (and Karim) as being authentic and in their right element when performing or being dressed up in Indian clothes - “Karim Amir, you are so exotic, so original! It’s such a contribution! It’s so you!”171 - the role of guru that Haroon has taken upon himself is in many ways only a mask. This is evidenced by the lack of faith shown by his closest family in his skills, both in the beginning of his ‘career’ and at the end of it. Eva also puts on a mask, which she changes according to the whims of society. For example, Karim does not recognise her at their first meeting in the novel172, or for example, once installed in London, all traces of her past suburban life are systematically erased.

Similarly, Haroon has had to sacrifice all elements of his old life, especially Margaret and all that she represents, in order to fit in. This sacrifice is not easy for him to make: “Mum’s wretchedness was the price Dad had chosen to pay for his happiness. (...) it was a wretchedness that haunted him.”173 During the few encounters between Haroon and Margaret after separation, especially when Haroon learns that Margaret has found another man, it dawns on him that there might be something to be said for the calm and stability Margaret represents than was previously thought. In spite of his choice to follow action, Margaret still represents a certain stability and safety for which he still yearns in his new lifestyle. When interest in his teachings abates174, and he seems tired, outrun and overwhelmed by a society in constant movement175, Haroon starts to doubt his choices. Although Eva and Haroon announce at the end of the novel that they are getting married176, and since they were fighting over Margaret in the last scene in which they appeared, the reader never really

171 Idem p. 9
172 Idem p. 8
173 Idem p. 116
174 Idem p. 264
175 Idem p. 261
176 Idem p. 283
gets to know whether the father does this out of true free will and love, or because he now has no other option and in reality regrets leaving Margaret. What he does discover is that he is never going to get rid of the image of “the other” which British society has of him. The latter is proven during the interview at the end of the novel where the journalists appear to have no interest in his teachings and it becomes clear that the trend towards Eastern mysticism has waned, casting the validity for his previous popularity into doubt.

As discussed, Haroon has had two very opposite partners. One represents passivity, boredom, rituals, work, etc, and the other represents freedom, possibility, change, action, excitement and movement. By choosing Eva, it seems like Haroon finally decides to take a concrete step towards the realisation of his life-long dream for recognition and social ascendance. Still, a few doubts about the positivity of this new life can be detected in a few places in the novel, leaving the question open whether this choice truly led to a higher place and true recognition, freedom and acknowledgment within British society. These longings towards recognition and freedom are also very present in the character of Karim, whose evolution therefore is very much linked to his father’s.

3.3.4. Haroon and Karim’s Father-Son Relationship

3.3.4.1. Parallel Lives

As previously discussed in Section 3.1.4.1., Karim moves away from his father in order to become independent. Nahem Yousaf remarks that one cannot help noticing a certain amount of parallelisms between the lives of Haroon and Karim.

To avoid excessive repetition, this section will contain only a limited number of references to the book since most of the

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177 See Said’s theories in 4.5.
178 Kureishi, Hanif. The Buddha of Suburbia, p. 264
179 Idem p. 264
180 Yousaf, Nahem. Hanif Kureishi’s The Buddha of Suburbia, p. 47
different themes have already been developed and explored in the respective analyses of these characters. Here we will present the most central parallelisms.

First of all, Karim and Haroon seem to have more or less the same desires for change in their own lives. They both dream of leaving their suburban lives, in which they feel stuck and imprisoned, and instead, seek acceptance and recognition in British society. Alongside these shared dreams lie parallel interests. After Haroon embarks on his affair with Eva (and later moves in with her), Karim discovers that “[he] realized that [he] too had been very keen to hear from her again”.\(^{181}\) It is also with her son Charlie with whom he has an ‘affair’ and later moves in with in New York. Both father and son are interested in movement and being part of modern life, but this might be subconsciously motivated by their fear of failure. As we saw with Haroon, perceived failure in all the corners of his life (education, economics, social status, family life and expectations,) weighs heavily on his shoulders.

In the same way, Karim will have to face his father’s disapproval when it comes to his education and later his occupation as an actor. He also wants to show others that he is worthy and valuable, even though he didn’t get the education his family wished for him. This can be seen at the end of the novel when he proudly pays for a family dinner in town: “*I felt the pleasure of pleasing others, especially as this was accompanied by money-power. (...) they could no longer see me as a failure.*”\(^{182}\) These feelings are very reminiscent of Haroon as he wants his wife to be present at his first performance as Eastern mystique so she can see him being given respect, and thereby maybe prove that he is not a failure.

There are also parallels in Haroon’s suburban Buddha role and those of Karim’s acting roles where they both capitulate to society’s demands that they be exotic, both donning caricature masks and exaggerating the image that the British already have of them in order to reach their goals in life.

\(^{181}\) Kureishi, Hanif. *The Buddha of Suburbia*, p.20

\(^{182}\) Idem p. 283
Furthermore, when they both leave the family home to move in with Eva, Haroon exclaims to Karim: “We’re growing up together.”\textsuperscript{183} Karim again follows his father when he moves to London with Eva. They both seek independence, growth and emancipation from their immigrant status. But for both of them, their eventual acceptance and recognition by British society is still slightly questionable in the end.

A final parallel can be found when they both ultimately find some kind of ‘peace’ or acceptance of their lives: Haroon marries Eva, and Karim expresses a newfound hope for his future: “I thought of what a mess everything had been, but that it wouldn’t always be that way”.\textsuperscript{184}

As we have shown, there is a certain parallelism between the lives of Haroon and Karim. This might be indicative of the father’s importance in Karim’s life, pointing to his unique role in the development of the novel’s plot.

\textsuperscript{183} Idem p. 22
\textsuperscript{184} Idem p. 284

3.3.4.2. Freedom through Liberalisation and Search for Recognition

As stated in the introduction to the character analysis of Haroon, the title of the novel refers directly to Haroon, indicating his importance as a pivotal character in \textit{The Buddha of Suburbia}. Indeed, Haroon is the one who brings about the first changes in the novel. He is the one who brings the first real activity, which, according to Karim, there has never been before in the family. The day that Haroon rushed home from work was the day that broke the boredom for Karim: “Then one day everything changed. In the morning things were one way and by bedtime another”.\textsuperscript{185} Rather than spurn his father, Karim follows Haroon out of the family home somewhat fascinated by his curious actions and excited about the future. For this reason, the character of Haroon assumes an important role in the story from the very beginning.

\textsuperscript{185} Kureishi, Hanif. \textit{The Buddha of Suburbia}, p. 3
By following his father, Karim acquires a new life and many new opportunities. It is thanks to him that the major breakthroughs in Karim’s life are made possible: sexually (Charlie), geographically (leaving the suburbs), and socially (exchanging the nuclear family for the more ‘modern’ family). We might quickly note here that this new family life could symbolise the fragmentation characterising his new life and new identity within the postmodern society: “I still had no idea what I was going to do. I felt directionless and lost in the crowd”.\textsuperscript{186}

Nonetheless, it is only by following his father that Haroon has a big impact on Karim’s life. Karim’s personality may also shaped by his father as Haroon is responsible for all the trouble and disturbance in his family’s life, thereby making Karim act on his desire to escape and become independent much more than he might have wanted to in another situation: “(...) this love (...) had been leading to destruction. I could see the erosion in the foundations of our family every day.”\textsuperscript{187} As explained in Section 3.1.3.1., when Haroon chooses Eva, Karim feels that his father has wholly abandoned his familial role and therefore loses his respect. He uses sarcasm and demystifies him by making him human, which can be seen particularly at the end of the novel, when Karim refrains from calling his father ‘God’, and describes all his weaknesses.\textsuperscript{188}

Nevertheless, it is important to reiterate that it is through his father’s association with Eva that all the above-mentioned developments become possible to Karim. Eva makes things happen and enables dreams to be realised. If Haroon had not chosen Eva, we cannot be sure that any of these major changes would have occurred.

On the grounds of the above character analysis, it can be concluded that Haroon’s story and development in the novel represent an immigrant’s struggle for acceptance and recognition in British society. He pulls his son into this struggle,
and thereby justifies his place in the plot. Haroon is driven by his need for a better and happier life. However, whether he entirely succeeds in this mission, is still questionable in the end. All the time he is recognised for being a wise teacher, he is in fact only recognised for his differences and the novelty his ‘mysterious’ skills from the Orient. He does achieve some kind of respect, but as we see in the interview at the end of the novel, he does not fully manage to detach himself from the image of the “Other”. This leads us to question whether it is truly possible for immigrants (whether it be first generation immigrants like Haroon, or second generation immigrants like Karim) to be integrated and perceived as equals in society, and if so, what sacrifices have to be made in this process.

All in all, on the basis of the above three analyses, we can reasonably conclude that the recurrent themes portrayed in *The Buddha of Suburbia* are Identity Formation, Belonging, Class, Ethnicity and Multiculturalism. We will now therefore examine each of these themes further theoretically. This will be carried out with the aim of determining whether Kureishi’s depictions of the immigrant condition are applicable in the real world today and if so, whether they are universal, and can therefore be considered useful in the understanding of identity today.

4. Where the Social Meets the Self – Viewing *The Buddha of Suburbia* From Other Perspectives

4.1. Postmodern Society

Before elaborating on the above-mentioned themes, we consider it necessary to say something about the societal context in which the novel is set, since, as stated previously\(^{189}\), the themes that are dealt with, and the evolution of the storyline in the novel, have their roots in the author’s own society and personal experience. The reason for doing this is also aptly expressed by Anthony Giddens in *Modernity and Self-identity*:

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\(^{189}\) See 3.
“Modernity must be understood on an institutional level; yet at the transmutations introduced by modern institutions interlace in a direct way with individual life and therefore with the self. One of the distinctive features of modernity, in fact, is an increasing interconnection between the two extremes of extensionality and intentionality: globalising influences on the one hand and personal dispositions on the other.”

Since the story takes place in 1970’s Britain, we have chosen to follow Frederic Jameson and Jean-Francois Lyotard’s understanding of Western societies as being postmodern since the 1950’s, and therefore made the assumption that the novel unfolds in a postmodern age.

However, we believe and assume that Giddens’ argument on the necessity of considering both extensionality and intentionality is even more pertinent in postmodern society. We therefore feel it necessary to identify some common traits of this society in order to determine what characterised this particular period and therefore what influenced people on a large scale during the time-setting of this novel.

Although different theorists will be used from time to time, our main source for postmodernism will be Ziauddin Sardar.

Sardar was born in Pakistan in 1951 but grew up in East London. He is a writer, broadcaster and cultural critic, and works in domains ranging from Islamic studies to literary and art criticism. Furthermore, he is the author of over 45 books, including *Postmodernism and the Other* (1998), which is our main source in this section. We have chosen to use him as our main theorist, instead of other perhaps more recognized postmodern theorists (e.g. Jameson and Lyotard), because he attempts to compare, summarise and eliminate the confusion, which is generally associated with the terms “postmodern” and “postmodernism”. We consider his clarity, simplicity and

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190 Giddens, Anthony. *Modernity and Self-Identity*, p. 1
191 Jameson, Frederic. *Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, p. 4
192 Sardar does not distinguish between postmodernity and postmodernism but only uses the latter term in order to describe both at any given time. We will therefore take a similar term in order to describe both at any given time. We will therefore take a similar term in order to describe both at any given time. We will therefore take a similar term in order to describe both at any given time. We will therefore take a similar term in order to describe both at any given time. We will therefore take a similar term in order to describe both at any given time. We will therefore take a similar term in order to describe both at any given time. We will therefore take a similar term in order to describe both at any given time. We will therefore take a similar term in order to describe both at any given time. We will therefore take a similar term in order to describe both at any given time. We will therefore take a similar term in order to describe both at any given time. We will therefore take a similar term in order to describe both at any given time. We will therefore take a similar term in order to describe both at any given time. We will therefore take a similar term in order to describe both at any given time. We will therefore take a similar term in order to describe both at any given time. We will therefore take a similar term in order to describe both at any given time. We will therefore take a similar term in order to describe both at any given time. We will therefore take a similar term in order to describe both at any given time. We will therefore take a similar term in order to describe both at any given time.
conclusions to be the most relevant and useful in relation to our aim with this section, which is to present a brief outline of postmodernism and to provide a few notions about postmodern society, which will later help us understand certain aspects of identity formation as they are presented to us in the novel.

4.1.1. The Creation of Postmodern Society

Before commencing with the analysis, it will be helpful to look briefly at the historical creation of this type of society. To do so, it is necessary to go all the way back to the Enlightenment:

"Trust in and acceptance of social hierarchy and kings, bishops, and aristocracy was bound to erode and be at risk once revolutionary philosophical, scientific, and political thought systems began to invade the general consciousness, questioning the ascendancy of established authority and tradition, and eroding deference for supposed ancient constitutions and law codes as well as the ancient consensus that all legal and institutional legitimacy derives from precedent, religious sanction, and traditional notions about the true character of the community." 193

In other words, what happened when the Enlightenment period began was a deconstruction 194 of the existing belief systems, values and traditions.

The Subject, the Need for Meaning and the Postmodern Society gives the following description:

“One of the philosophers contributing to this deconstruction was the German philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), who later became a great source of inspiration for postmodern psychology. His probably most used and most famous sentence is that “God is dead”. What he meant by this was that the Western society had “killed God” by moving away from him and what had been the fundament of meaning and values throughout a thousand years. But he was concerned about the possibility that the move from God to science might lead to the loss of a universal perspective on things and the loss

193 Israel, Jonathan. Enlightenment Contested, pp. 9 - 10
194 We are aware that the term ‘deconstruction’ has strong connotations to Derrida and his literary deconstruction of text and language but this approach aims to show the fragility of all positive statements, and point at the contradictions and cracks in any text and the assumptions it builds on (according to Alvesson, Martz. Postmodernism and Social Research, p. 178). Although aware of this use of the term ‘deconstruction’ it will be used here more literally, meaning any kind of deconstruction of belief systems, values and traditions. The use of the term is broadened from texts and language only, to being all-inclusive.
of any kind of feeling of an objective, coherent truth which therefore would lead to perspectivism”.\textsuperscript{195}

It goes on to say that:

“Nietzsche is not suggesting that God really existed or that it was wrong to move away from Him in that way. What he meant was that he did not believe in universal truths or the existence of God, but that these universal truths were created by humans in the first place or as he says: “truths are illusions that one has forgotten was illusions.” Here “truths” is in plural because he is not only talking about God, but of all human conventions such as ideology and paradigms which seek to create a coherent notion of the way society is built up. In other words, we build up “truths” about society which in reality are only illusions”\textsuperscript{196}

Ziauddin Sardar sees this deconstruction process as leading to the fourth (of five) ‘principles of postmodernism’\textsuperscript{197}, which will be elaborated further in the next section. What he means by principles of postmodernism is that there are five main (negative) traits that define postmodern society which are all a consequence of “a number of key intellectual and social developments [which have undermined modernity]”.\textsuperscript{198} Among others, these developments include:

“The demystification of scientific objectivity (…); The collapse of Western philosophy (…); The emphasis on indeterminacy in quantum physics and mathematics; The emphasis on discontinuity and difference in history (…); The concern over the ‘Other’ in history, anthropology and politics; The secularisation process of Christianity and its removal from society as a moral force; And the triumph of the market economy and the emergence of the pathological concern with consumer ‘choice’”.\textsuperscript{199}

Sardar argues that “postmodernism has thus penetrated all spheres of disciplinary thought, established deep roots in daily life, while becoming a global cultural force underpinned by [the] free market”.\textsuperscript{200}

In other words, these simultaneous developments have completely deconstructed the modern society and replaced it with the postmodern society. According to Sardar, the consequences of this are:

\textsuperscript{195} Andersen, Hansen, Goloborodov, Sazanauskaite, Katinaite, Tobiasz, Münch & Hansen. The Subject, the Need for Meaning and the Postmodern Society, p. 17. (Perspectivism is when there are many different and individual perspectives on things)
\textsuperscript{196} Ibid
\textsuperscript{197} Sardar, Ziauddin. Postmodernism and the Other, p. 7

\textsuperscript{198} Ibid
\textsuperscript{199} Ibid
\textsuperscript{200} Idem pp. 7-8
1) Old truths are no longer valid
2) Complete denial of reality
3) Creation of simulacrum
4) Total meaninglessness
5) Doubt in everything

4.1.2. The Five Principles of Postmodern Society

I: Problem of truths is the first principle for Sardar. He says that “everything which was valid in modernity is invalid and obsolete in postmodern times”\textsuperscript{201}, and goes on to say:

“Modernity was framed by what are called, in jargon of cultural studies, Grand Narratives: that is, Big Ideas which give sense and direction to life. Such notions as Truth, Reason, Morality, God, Tradition and History, argue postmodernist, do not live up to analytical scrutiny: they are totally meaningless.”\textsuperscript{202}

In other words, the postmodern society believes in nothing as being the truth but rejoices in pluralism and relativism.

II: The Denial of Reality is the second defining principle for Sardar. What he means by this is that there is no Reality behind things.

“We see largely what we want to see, what our position in time and place allows us to see, what our cultural and historic perceptions focus on”.\textsuperscript{203}

In other words, in the postmodern society there can be no Reality, because everything is subjective and therefore never in possession of the objectivity required for stating anything about Reality. This inability to know the difference between true and false leads to the third defining principle.

\textsuperscript{201} Idem p. 8
\textsuperscript{202} Ibid
\textsuperscript{203} Idem p. 9
III: Simulacrum (or simulations) are when images become self-referent, and thereby makes it impossible for the interpreter to tell the difference between true and false anymore:

“Contemporary media and information systems have the capacity to construct images rapidly which replace, more than represent, an outside world (Boorstin 1960). [...] The referent disappears as anything more than another sign: thus signs only reference other signs: images are images of images. Such systems can become purely self-referential, or what Baudrillard calls “simulations”.”

And because of the self-referential process, new simulations are created and “the whole process continues in relentless stream in which the behaviour of individuals and societies bears no relationship to any reality: everything and everyone becomes drowned in pure simulacrum”.

IV: Meaninglessness is the fourth defining principle which is related to Nietzsche’s problem of truths as being nothing but illusions and his deconstruction of these truths. Sardar writes:

“In a world without Truth and Reason, where no knowledge is possible and where language has been drowned in an ocean of images, there is no possibility of meaning. As Umberto Eco seeks to show in ‘Foucault’s Pendulum’ the world is nothing more than an onion: once we have ‘deconstructed’ it layer by layer, we are finally left with – nothing.”

In other words, the deconstruction, which is the new norm in the postmodern society, eventually leaves us with a grand void.

Sardar argues that this grand void with no sense of direction and with no scale to distinguish good from evil, takes us back to the first principle and “reconfirm[s] the arbitrary nature of truth and morality, science and religion, physics and metaphysics.” In this process, the fifth defining principle is created:

V: Doubt in everything becomes the inevitable consequence of this constant process of deconstruction leaving us with neither guidance nor ability to distinguish true from false due to simulacrum. As Sardar argues: “In postmodern theory, [doubt] is

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204 Alvesson, Martz. Postmodernism and Social Research, p. 25
205 Sardar, Ziauddin. Postmodernism and the Other, p. 10
206 Ibid
207 Ibid
extended to include no theory, no absolute, no experience: doubt everything.”  

4.1.3. Further implications

However, not everything in postmodern society is negative. There are indeed a lot of benefits from the processes which created the postmodern society. Sardar writes:

“Postmodernism is concerned with variety, with multiplicities: it emphasises plurality of ethnicities, cultures, gender, truths, realities, sexualities, even reason, and argues that no one type should be privileged over others. In its concern to demolish all privilege, postmodernism seeks a more equal representation of class, gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity and culture.”

In other words, postmodern subjects should enjoy a much greater ‘freedom’ and thereby have increased possibilities for pursuing ‘success’ compared to previous times, where for instance class would determine the level of the individual’s possibilities. But how is freedom perceived in this society, and what does that mean for the perception of success? Sardar writes:

“(…) ‘freedom’ – or more appropriately, (…) individualism, [is] every individual’s potential for fulfilment, the pursuit of endless consumption, [and] withdrawal of all collective, communal and social responsibility”.

In other words, freedom is connected to individualism, and success is therefore strongly tied to e.g. consumerism and being free from social responsibility. But Sardar critiques this individualism:

“[Individualism leads to] denying the basic characteristics of freedom: belonging to a community consciously demands discipline and sacrifice. No community can exist if every individual goes his or her way and defines his or her own morality. But the cultural anarchy of individualism, a hallmark of postmodernism, is (…) a direct route to alienation and the fragmentation of society”.

So, this postmodern perception of the definition of success seems more damaging than conducive for postmodern subjects.

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208 Ibid
209 Idem pp. 10-11
210 Idem p. 144
211 Idem p. 74
It appears empty and may very likely (according to Sardar) lead to alienation and fragmentation, which will be touched upon shortly. For now it is important to stress that this ‘success’ is meaningless unless it is recognized by others. This is seen in the following quotation of Mestrovic:

"[the subject is] characterized by a continuous pursuit of being loved by everybody, avoid conflicts and be nice and positive. [The subject becomes a so-called] hyper-social subject with a tendency to be ripped of character and identity, but always intensively aware of what others believe the subject thinks, does and feels. [...] This affects the human psychology in the form of a narcissistic preoccupation of itself, its own appearance, its own image and its own style".  

Based on this quotation, we will assume that recognition is needed for every subject, and that without this, it is not possible to achieve success as it has been defined above. We can see this in The Buddha of Suburbia, where different characters seek recognition from others in order to raise social status. However, this recognition leads to a need for perfection; since everybody tries to achieve it, competition is inevitable and raises the standards of success to the point where it almost becomes impossible to achieve. This striving for perfection and ‘success’ spreads to all areas of life at once due to the fragmentation of identity:

"In contemporary, heterogeneous, global, tele-connected societies the available discourses expand greatly. They also change rapidly. The variation and dynamics of discourses mean that fragmentation is virtually inevitable. As society becomes more fragmented and hyper-real or virtual (discourse is disconnected from any world reference, images reference images), the identity-stabilizing forces are lost".  

Therefore, in order to achieve success, the postmodern subject has to strive for perfection in all areas of life. Identity is made more and more unstable, rootless and fragmented along with its demands for higher mobility and flexibility. As Sardar states, alienation is inevitable, and this alienation is very dangerous. It is our belief that this is seen easily in urban areas, where anonymity is stronger  

212 Mestrovic, Stjepan G. Quoted in: Jørgersen. Psykologien i Senmoderniteten, p. 91


214 E.g. Kureishi, Hanif. The Buddha of Suburbia, p. 121: “[...]thousands of black people everywhere, so [he] wouldn’t feel exposed”
we see this with Gene, Eleanor’s ‘black lover, London’s best mime, who emptied bed-pans in hospital soaps, [who] killed himself because every day, by a look, a remark, an attitude, the English told him they hated him; they never let him forget they thought him a nigger, a slave, a lower being’. We see here how Gene is alienated from society and how he is unable to tackle the fragmentation he has to deal with, especially the fragmentation resulting from being the ‘Other’.

In summary, the postmodern society is characterized by five defining principles; 1) old truths are no longer valid, 2) there is a complete denial of reality, 3) the creation of simulacrum, 4) total meaninglessness, and 5) doubt in everything. These principles have a huge influence on everybody living in postmodern society and with these notions of rapid societal changes and identity-destabilizing forces in mind, we will now move on to elaborate on how the individual copes with identity formation.

4.2. Identity in Postmodern Society

4.2.1. ‘I’ Need a ‘We’ to Become Truly ‘Me’

The philosopher, sociologist, and psychologist George Herbert Mead was one of the key thinkers of the creation of identity in the postmodern society. With the notion “‘I’ need a ‘we’ to truly become a ‘me’”, he puts forward the idea of an identity created in relations with others. In the postmodern society, the identity of the individual becomes a social phenomenon, as interactional dialogue with others is considered crucial in the creation of the self. Therefore, one can argue that the Cartesian dictum ‘Cogito ergo sum’ could, in this view of the self in postmodern society, be replaced with ‘communicamus ergo

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215 Idem p. 227

216 Mead, George H. quoted In: Dencik, Lars. Mennesket I postmoderniseringen. Om barndøm, familie og identitet I opbrud, p. 133
sum\textsuperscript{217}, as one cannot be a 'self' without interaction with others in today's society.

Furthermore, as the psychologist Lars Dencik argues, due to this social and relational process of identity formation in conjunction with the break in the Grand Narratives in postmodern society, everybody has several concurrent identities, and there is no longer a core identity as it was believed in modern society. People are unique not by nature, but by the composition of different, potential affiliations which creates the foundation for the narrative identity – an identity identical with several other individuals but unique through the unique combination of several social identities.\textsuperscript{218}

In \textit{The Buddha of Suburbia} we see how Karim's identity is highly influenced by his interactional dialogue with the society around him. From his point of departure in the suburbs, he moves away from his social setting to London, where he encounters parts of society that he has never experienced before. In the city, he explores and develops himself, for example through his relationship with Eleanor, his sexual experiences, and his general encounters with others. When entering the theatre world, he comes to realise the differences between him and his new peers, and how he can never be naturalised into this world. Nevertheless he turns the situation to his advantage. As Dencik would argue, he composes his unique combination of several social identities, being the "\textit{Englishman born and bred, almost}"\textsuperscript{219} and coming from the suburbs into the world of culture in London. This ability to combine different affiliations is considered the successful narrative identity of the postmodern society, and constitutes the basis for the psychologist, Kenneth J. Gergen's theory on the \textit{multiphrenic self}.

\textsuperscript{217}Burkitt, Ian, \textit{Social Selves}, p. 166
\textsuperscript{218}Dencik, Lars. \textit{Mennesket i postmoderniseringen. Om barndaom, familie og identitet i opbrud}, p. 136
\textsuperscript{219}Kureishi, Hanif, \textit{The Buddha of Suburbia}, p. 3
4.2.2. The Multiphrenic Self

Gergen argues that our inter-relational dialogue is not merely limited to our immediate experience. As society has developed and the technologies of social saturation have exploded, the number of voices affecting our thoughts or self-dialogues have multiplied. Furthermore, our relations are expanded to people we have never met, as well as both actual and imaginary figures, leaving sometimes no distinction between the two. This can create intimate relations through for instance internet dating or even between celebrities and their fans.220

“As social saturation proceeds we become pastiches, imitative assemblages of each other. In memory we carry others’ patterns of being with us... Selves have become increasingly populated with the character of others. We are not one, or a few, but like Walt Whitman, we ‘contain multitudes’.” 221

Though Gergen argues that the postmodern individual has no core identity, he still rejects the idea of the self being ‘schizophrenic’ as has been posed by the postmodern theorist Fredric Jameson.222 Gergen rather describes the postmodern individual as containing multitudes; as ‘multiphrenic’.

Furthermore, contrary to Jameson, he rejects the idea of the postmodern identity being a clinical state, but rather defines it as a new process of becoming a self.223 The multiphrenic condition and the new conditions posed in the changes of society are a result of, and present a myriad of possibilities for, what the individual wants to be in the future. This multiphrenic condition is very present in The Buddha of Suburbia.

For example, Karim juggles several identities when entering the theatre world. Another example is found in Karim and Jammie’s early teenage years: “Yeah, sometimes we were French, Jammie and I, and other times we went black American”.224 Though we do see traces of the multiphrenic self through the characters in the novel, it can also be argued that some characters are not

220 Burkit, Ian, Social Selves, p. 164
221 Gergen, J. Kenneth. The Saturated Self: Dilemmas of identity in Contemporary Life, p. 71
222 Jameson, Fredric. Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism, p. 75
223 Burkit, Ian. Social Selves, p. 164
224 Kureishi, Hanif, The Buddha of Suburbia, pp. 53
multiphrenic, but rather create, delete and recreate their biographical narratives as suggested by Anthony Giddens. The multiphrenic individual would have several simultaneous identities, but this novel offers several examples of the deletion and recreation of singular identities. Let us look at the examples of Haroon and Charlie.

Haroon further develops his new identity as a Buddhist guru using his relation to Eva to fine tune this identity. He does not juggle several identities, e.g. by keeping the identity of the lazy, Indian clerk (though he does sometimes long for his old marriage), but fully embraces his new identity.

Charlie, who hails from the suburbs with the “mandalas and long-haired heads painted on the sloping walls” of his room, moves to “Bowie’s influence” in the secondary modern, and finally goes punk, wearing a “slashed t-shirt with a red swastika hand-painted on it”, and therefore changes his identity according to the fashion of the time. Charlie does not retain his former identities, nor change identity according to the social arena, but recreates himself, and fully embraces the new self, which he has created.

Karim expresses envy of this exact ability possessed by Charlie, as he does not have the same capacity to discard old identities. In this regard we can argue that Karim, in Gergen’s terms, seems to be multiphrenic, while other characters such as Charlie and partly Haroon, in accordance with Giddens’ theories, create, delete and recreate their identities or their biographical narratives.

In this way, different theories exist on identity formation and the self in postmodern society. Nevertheless, they seem to share common ground in the sense that they agree on the important role of social relations in the shaping of the self. However, this view is fairly recent, so a few traits of previous views also seem to be present in the novel.

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225 Kureishi, Hanif, The Buddha of Suburbia, p. 14
226 Idem p. 68
227 Idem p. 151
4.2.3. The Romantic, the Modern and the Postmodern Self

According to Gergen, the postmodern self is transcending from the prior modern self, which was itself a reaction to the romantic self. So in order to truly comprehend the postmodern self, we must first have a minimal understanding of the two previous perspectives on the self.

The romantic self is the perception of the self as originating from a deep transcendental inner core; a voice within that tells us who we are, which makes the basis for our actions. In comparison, the modern self, which came about in the Age of Enlightenment, is described by philosophers as being rational, mastering its passions and devoted to the narrative truth of science and rationality. From these, the postmodern self transcended as a multiphrenic assemblage created by the relations to others in a world which no longer embraces old truths and narratives.

The categorisation of selves should not be seen as a limitation to the specific period of its origin, but, as Gergen stresses, there exist simply three perspectives which represent different patterns of acting. Though the postmodern self is the most prevalent, the modern pattern of acting is still present in the novel. Margareth is rational, not questioning life, and besides her marriage to an Indian man, she lives more or less the same life as her parents and the generations before her. The same can be said about Auntie Jean and the middle class suburban circles that constitute her surroundings. Moreover, Terry and his passion for the Party can be characterised as modernistic, as he believes in the Grand Narrative of Marxist ideology. If we consider the book to be a representation of reality, these characters could prove Gergen’s point contention that the three patterns of acting are able to exist and interact together in society.

Yet, this novel takes place in what we have assumed to be the postmodern society, and therefore carries many traits of the

228 Burkitt, Ian. Social Selves, p. 163
postmodern view on the self and its identity formation. Furthermore, it mostly deals with first or second generation immigrants and is set in the historical context of a society in transition. This leads us on to the next theory that seems relevant and applicable to this book: the process of creolisation.

4.2.4. The Process of Creolisation

In this section, we will try to examine certain aspects of the novel according to the theory on the process of creolisation by the social anthropologist Ulf Hannerz, but in order to understand his theory we must first look further into the origin of this term. Even though the word was not created until much later, it was coined during the sixteenth-century colonial period. The term comes from the word 'creole' which refers to the offspring of colonists who were born and raised in the new world, namely the Hispanic Americans. The word 'creole' had negative connotations, but up to the independence of many of the prior colonies, the new world societies started to embrace the local identity of the 'creoles', and thereby valorised the process of creolisation, giving the term 'creole' positive connotations. Hannerz uses the term process of creolisation to describe the dynamic processes of continuously negotiating identity and adjusting to the new conditions of the postmodern, globalized world.

The continuously negotiating adjustment of identity is not only present in Karim's identity, but also when Haroon identifies himself as a Buddhist, when Anwar returns to Islam, and in the teenage years of Karim and Jammie, where they negotiate their identities as French and black Americans.

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229 Stewart, Charles. Creolisation – History, Ethnography, Theory, p. 2
230 It is noteworthy to point out that Hannerz have been widely criticised on his universal use of the term ‘process of creolisation’ in connection with globalisation, as it is a specific term from a ‘geographically and chronologically specific New world setting’ for he had given ‘no serious attention to what it meant’ nor ‘to the historical specific processes it stood for.’ (Stewart, Charles, Creolisation – History, Ethnography, Theory. Left Coast Press, 2007. p. 3).
231 Kureishi, Hanif, The Buddha of Suburbia, p. 53
All these characters are affected by their interactional dialogue with society, apparently not allowing them to identify themselves as British. They start to negotiate new identities, as Buddhists, immigrants, Muslims, French and black Americans, as it seems to offer a way to survive and adjust to the conditions.

According to Hannerz, the creolisation process is not only present in the individual’s negotiation of identity, but moreover in the negotiation of identity in culture, states and nations. As expressed previously in the genre analysis, this book could be considered a general metaphor for the changes which Britain was going through. Following decolonization and the fall of empire, Britain underwent rapid demographic change, and the identity of the nation similarly went through negotiations and adjustments. Being 'English' was no longer an ethnic homogenous description, but changed into multiculturalism, a transformation of society that continuously is being depicted in the novel.

4.2.5. The Universality of the Postmodern

Having briefly outlined the theories of Mead, Gergen, Dencik and Giddens, and exemplified them in The Buddha of Suburbia, we will now look into the universality of their theories and see whether they are applicable in the real world.

According to Gergen’s theory, the individual in postmodern society is presented with a myriad of possibilities for what he wants to become in the future. Mead argues that social circumstances have no influence on identity, just as Giddens stresses how biographical trajectories are solely dependent on how the individual chooses to organize biographical time, or in the way that he chooses a lifestyle related to a particular place. This can very well be the case for some characters such as in the case of Charlie creating his own identity.

Nonetheless, it can seem naive and one-dimensional that theorists such as Mead, Gergen, Dencik, Giddens can bluntly create these theories without taking context into consideration and questioning it. It is for this reason Jameson argues that it is
absurd to try to separate capitalism and postmodernism, as postmodernism is nothing but the superstructure of ‘late capitalism’; and that the two cannot exist without one another. Furthermore, as previously mentioned, the changes in society from where postmodernism originates, are partly based on the technological development and saturation which has occurred over the past 50 years. Technology is, however, the result of the development of capital, rather than some primal cause in its own right, Jameson argues.

From Jameson’s Marxist stance, we can then argue that despite more and more people in the Western world detaching themselves from their social conditions and creating their own identity, it is far from universal. Late capitalism might have changed life for the privileged, but it has left the losers in “Poverty-stricken ghettos (...) almost like distant islands in a sea of wealth creation, ones that the well-off members of society don’t have to see or to visit” as described by the Marxist geographer David Harvey.

Moreover one can say that the flexibility and short-term employment which defines the postmodern society is but a consequence of the outsourcing of labour by multinational companies in late capitalism. Consequently the hierarchical division of classes has not disappeared - the lower classes have merely moved to third world countries and remote ghettos concealed from the rest of society. These individuals are therefore products of the postmodern society, victims of the same uncertainty and risk as postmodern individuals, but without the economical capital to obtain the freedom that the postmodern individual enjoys in the West.

This calls for a further analysis of class, especially as Sardar states that one of the positive sides of postmodernism is that everyone

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232 ‘Late Capitalism’ meaning the last fundamental moment in capitalism. First was the Industrial Revolution of the 19th century; then the machine production of electronic and nuclear-powered apparatuses ongoing from the 1920’s, and lastly the ‘postindustrial’ / ‘late capitalism’ or as Jameson calls it ‘multinational or consumer capitalism’. (Jameson, Fredric Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism, Verso, 1991. p 85)

233 Jameson, Fredric. Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism, p. 77

234 Harvey, David in Burkitt, Ian. Social Selves, p. 167

235 Idem. p. 162
is equal and therefore the postmodern society should be classless. But is this in fact the case?

4.3. Identity and Identification through Class

The class condition in British society is a prevalent theme that is depicted throughout *The Buddha of Suburbia*. All of Kureishi’s characters are affected by it in one way or another. This depiction reflects the real pervasive power of the social pecking order: “Its importance, even still today, derives from the belief that a person’s class-belonging affects one’s opportunities in society”.\(^\text{236}\) The significance of the British class system is underscored by the theatre director Pyke when he finally concedes to Karim what subject his play will deal with: ”I think it may revolve around the only subject there is in England... ...Class”.\(^\text{237}\)

Although this important element of the novel is not central to this project’s considerations, it is felt that this theme should be briefly examined, as social class structure plays such a significant role in the formation of self identity, particularly in Britain. In parallel with the immigrant experience, the class system also has the capacity to engender feelings of belonging and not belonging, identification and alienation, inclusion and exclusion, privilege and prejudice.

Even within the last century, our social standing, our position and thereby our function in society was very clearly delineated by the class system. And this position with its allotted roles formed a major part of our identity. Today, these lines are more blurred, but the power and influence of the social class we are born into still shapes people’s biographical narratives. There is the illusion of a classless society, where ostensibly all citizens of any background enjoy equal opportunities. This is arguably a myth. In the time period of this novel and forming the backdrop to the main plot, the class struggle both on the macro level of British society and the micro level of the protagonist’s lack of identification and genuine inclusion into the elite world of art is a

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\(^\text{236}\) Reid, Ivan. *Class in Britain*, p.33
\(^\text{237}\) Kureishi, Hanif. *The Buddha of Suburbia*, p. 164
prominent parallel theme and an additional aspect concerning identity in *The Buddha of Suburbia*.

### 4.3.1. Social Stratification

In order to properly understand the concept of class differentiation in the context of *The Buddha of Suburbia*, it is necessary to provide the reader with a brief overview of the British class system and define the main social groups in British society.

The social class structure can be divided into three main groups: Working Class, Middle Class and Upper Class.

The **Working Class** is defined as a “social class of industrial societies broadly composed of people involved in manual occupation. The bulk of these jobs are unskilled, poorly paid and provide few benefits or job security” and as “the social class whose members do not have much money or power and are usually employed to do manual work”.\(^{239}\)

The **Middle Class** is defined as a “social class broadly defined occupationally as those working in white-collar and lower managerial occupations; is sometimes defined by reference to income levels or subjective identification of the participants in the study”\(^{240}\) and as “the social class between the working class and the upper class. It consists of people who are generally regarded as having an average status, education, income, etc. in society”.\(^{241}\)

The **Upper Class** is defined as a ‘social class roughly composed of the more affluent members of society, especially those who have great wealth, control over businesses or hold large numbers of

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\(^{240}\) Uncited. *Dictionary definition of Middle Class*. 2008. Web: Social Science Dictionary

stocks and shares” and as “the groups of people that are considered to have the highest social status and that have more money and/or power than other people in society”.

In British society, it is also commonly perceived that the upper class have aristocratic roots, with their wealth and status gained through inheritance – a small and very exclusive club.

Since the Industrial Revolution, the middle class of Britain has been growing, as is evidenced in the sprawl of Victorian satellite colonies that are the suburbs described by Kureishi. Since the Second World War and the establishment of the Welfare State, and with increased economic prosperity and educational opportunities, the middle class has flourished to become the largest social class. On a simplistic level, this class can be further divided into the lower and upper middle classes. *The Buddha of Suburbia* exemplifies the internal struggles within the very broad socio-economic spectrum of this particular stratum of British society.

The **Lower Middle Class** is defined as “the class of people in British society, especially in the past, between working class and middle class, such as office workers or shopkeepers, but not professional people.” It is also described as “a category usually applied from outside, by those of higher social status, or retrospectively, by those who once belonged to the lower middle class and have since moved beyond it.”

The **Upper Middle Class** is defined as “the class of people in British society between the middle class and the upper class. Its members include people such as company directors, professors or barristers, who have a high social status and may earn a lot of money.”

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245 Felski, Rita. *Nothing to Declare: Identity, Shame, and the Lower Middle Class*, p. 41
It would be fair to say that most people from the ‘lower’ classes aspire to ascend the social ladder to the upper ranks of the middle class. There is very little traffic in the opposite direction. Upward social mobility is equated with success. However, material prosperity does not necessarily provide the credentials to gain acceptance or full membership.

Karim’s immediate and extended family all hail from the non-descript suburbs characterised as a “leaving place”.247 The same can be said for their lower middle class as this is described as “the social class with the lowest reputation in the entire history of class theory [...] the class for whom it seems hardest [...] to claim pride of membership”.248 Indeed, it seems that “lower middle classness is understood as a non-identity”.249

It could be argued that the class system of Karim’s Britain is reflected in the caste system of Haroon’s India, albeit with more subtlety. As an upper caste Indian, Haroon must automatically pay the price of downward social mobility when he comes to Britain. (This could be said to be the natural course for all immigrants arriving in the Bourgeois West from the proletarian East). He tries to redress this social fall from grace and bolster his self-identity by becoming the Buddha of Suburbia and forming an alliance with the social-climbing Eva.

4.3.2. Class and Identity

As Ian Burkitt pointedly observes, when the ubiquitous question “What do you do?” is posed when meeting someone for the first time, we unconsciously seek information that will lead to an appraisal of the subject’s level of value and prestige in society.250

By simply posing the question, we show ourselves placing value on a person’s occupation:

“Someone’s relation to the job market tells us about the activities they engage in for the majority of their life, their skills and capacities –

247 Kureishi, Hanif. The Buddha of Suburbia, p. 117
248 Hartley, John. Popular Reality: Journalism, Modernity, Popular Culture, p. 161
249 Felski, Rita. Nothing to Declare: Identity, Shame, and the Lower Middle Class, p. 34
perhaps even their interests – how much a person might earn, their social class and status, and their lifestyle. In other words, it tells us important things about that person’s identity and the ways that others view, judge and value them”. 251

Whatever social class one belongs to – even though you may deny the reality and inevitability of this categorisation – it is highly likely that one will attribute positive and negative values to the subject in this appraisal of their social status. Winners or losers, we are all victims of the system and equally guilty of perpetuating it.

This process through social interaction establishes the pecking order. It is not just what we do and how much money we make, but how we judge and value other people and how we ourselves are judged and valued by others. It is also an expression of what we desire and covet, and how we imagine others perceive us. As class is so linked to economic power, the social class system as it is presented above affects individuals in fundamental ways with regard to what is and what is not possible to achieve in one’s life - access to education, material support, moral support, material opportunities, the chance to escape, the ratio of work to play and the general quality of life.

As most people have to work for a living and thereby spend a large proportion of their time at work, “the activities we are employed in determine to a large degree our capacities, skills, abilities, knowledge and self-identities (...) it is mainly the scope for self-development (or the lack of it) afforded by a person’s work that is important’. 252

The French Marxist Lucien Sève points out that “the time of most workers will be devoted to ‘abstract activity’, which is activity that is performed for the sole purpose of the accumulation of capital, rather than on ‘concrete activity’ that develops or uses capacities which are meaningful for the individual, enhancing their own development”. 253

251 Ibid
252 Ibid
253 Ibid
It is not only people’s occupations but maybe more importantly their extra-curricular activities that determine their general quality of life and give solidity to self-identity. This will depend on the degree of opportunity for ‘concrete activity’, and will be a question of how much time and money is available after the necessary ‘abstract activity’ has been completed, which of course is determined by one’s socio-economic position.

4.3.3. Marxist Perspectives

Sève is opposed to the presumption of traditional psychology that various components of the self are biological, neither environmental nor sociological. He believes that personal development is wholly dependent on our individual inherited social heritage, which is assimilated through work, the type of which is designated by our class. We gain identity through our work – what we do.

Karl Marx also connects identity with production roles within a collective work force, identity differentiation coming about through different labour roles and responsibility. Marx contends that identity is achieved through practical activity, not through reflection:

“Men make their own history, but they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given, and transmitted from the past”.  

In the same vein, Sève talks about individuals having a “juxtastructural” relation to society, which means that while humans are directly affected by the social relations which they invariably have as individuals and members of society, they are not merely the products of this social context.  

Burkitt argues that “capitalist social relations will continue to structure the biographies of individual selves”. Socio-economic imbalances in society exist in large part due to the class system. They also form its structure and in so doing reinforce social stratification in a self-perpetuating cycle.

256 Idem p. 141
4.3.4. Sociological Perspectives

Human beings do not exist in isolation. We are inevitably in our nature part of social groupings, driven some might say by the biological imperative of the herding instinct. Our need to belong is very much connected to our feeling of worth, and our identity and identification self with specific social groups.

French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu argues that it is not solely socio-economic factors that determine life experience and identity, but also “the possession of cultural, social and symbolic capital”. Cultural capital includes language, accent, educational background, qualifications and the possession of cultural goods such as books, art etc. that hint at class identity. Social capital includes access to social networks that provide opportunities and advantage. Symbolic capital is the level of value attributed to cultural and social capital that attract prestige and respect by and within particular social realms respectively.

Bourdieu introduces the term habitus to describe how dispositions structure us:

“The structures constitutive of a particular type of environment (e.g. the material conditions of existence characteristic of a class condition) produce ‘habitus’, systems of durable, transposable ‘dispositions’, structured structures predisposed to functioning as structuring structures, that is, as principles of the generation and structuring of practices and representations.”

Bourdieu’s habitus theorises how the economic disparity of class, and also how the cultural capital of an individual predetermine one’s future.

With regards to The Buddha of Suburbia, we follow not only the personal development of Karim but also the improvement of his social condition. His rise up the social ladder is nevertheless dependant on Haroon’s partnership with Eva, and her social contacts and economic capital. Had Haroon not met Eva, it is unlikely that Karim would have had the chance to meet Shadwell and Pyke who provided his entrance to the stage.

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257 Idem p. 148

258 Bourdieu, Pierre. Outline of a Theory of Practice, p.72
Moreover, we can ask ourselves whether Karim's success is sustainable at all. Indeed, how can it be certain that his success is nothing more than a fad of its time, ready to be discarded as soon as the fashion changes, as seemed to be the case with his father? In the uncertainty and flexibility of the ever-changing postmodern society, none of this is unlikely. Karim himself experiences a lack of *capital* in his encounter with the world of theatre:

“(...) people who wrote books as naturally as we played football (...) The easy talk of art, theatre, architecture, travel; the languages, the vocabulary, knowing the way round a whole culture - it was invaluable and irreplaceable capital”.\(^{259}\)

These cultural assets cannot be measured by scale, but nonetheless should neither be ignored nor underestimated. In the case of Karim, we see how he socially and economically moves up the social ladder with his new family. He moves to London, attends dinner parties, is welcomed into the world of theatre and dates Eleanor. But still, he possesses a different set of cultural assets; the vocabulary, the body language, the manners and the knowledge – everything which defines him makes him different.

The distribution of these cultural, social and symbolic assets dictates the power relationship between various groups in society. The ‘*haves*’ will inevitably dominate the ‘*have nots*’, setting the social and cultural agenda for all society. This binary opposition leads us to another - belonging vs. not belonging - which is the theme we will examine next.

### 4.4. Belonging and Alienation

As mentioned previously, one of the major themes in *The Buddha of Suburbia* is the struggle for identity. In this regard, this section will focus on the theme of ‘belongingness’ as it is closely connected to the formation of individual identity in a societal context.

\(^{259}\) Kureishi, Hanif, *The Buddha of Suburbia*, p. 14
Although the need to belong is manifested in many of the characters in *The Buddha of Suburbia*, we will mainly focus on how these issues affect Karim and Haroon, as easy reference can be made to their character analyses for exemplification and clarification.

A theoretical explanation of the need to belong will form the basis for a discussion on how these issues are expressed through the these two characters. This section will also offer a discussion on some of the issues connected to the shaping of identity and the need to belong in relation to immigrants in general.

### 4.4.1. The Need to Belong

When investigating the concept of ‘belonging’, it is relevant to ask why humans have a need to belong.

According to the American psychologist Abraham Maslow, belonging is a very basic human need. In his *hierarchy of needs*, he argues that the need for social relations, appreciation by others and belongingness is stronger than physical needs such as food and safety.\(^{260}\)

Similarly, in developmental psychology, it is accepted that physical and psychological contact between an infant and its carer is vital for the development of the child’s personality.\(^{261}\) Interaction with other humans and the care they provide are essential elements in the life of the individual.

Put more simply, based on these theories, the need to belong can be translated into the need for interpersonal relations.\(^{262}\) Human beings construct their identities within their social contexts such as institutions, groups and especially social relations. These relations function as a mirror wherein humans can define their values, personality features, morals and so on by (indirectly) considering “*what am I?*” and “*what am I not?*”.\(^{263}\)

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\(^{261}\) Uncited. *Attachment Theory*. Undated. Web: Psychologist World -


The formation of identity is considered to be a lifelong process, and the specific need for social relations thus changes over time. As an infant, the primary social relation is with the parents and caregivers, but later it might be with classmates, friends, co-workers or a romantic partner.

In other words, identification with other social beings is necessary in the process of forming an identity and this is where the need to belong begins.

This need to belong has taken different forms over time. In traditional societies, social affiliations were characterised very differently than today. As Dencik argues “[affiliations were] more often inherited than acquired [and were] determined by social status.”264 At this time, main affiliations were formed within the family and local community. It was in these relations that people sought to be accepted and belong.

In today’s society, these affiliations have, to a great degree, been replaced by the necessity for other types of affiliation. As one consequence of postmodernism, an intense focus has been put on the individual, and the sense of belonging in social contexts has also changed. Where social groups in earlier times could be seen as a unit, individuals are now viewed as separate units within a social frame.265

However, in this process of individuation, individuals feel an increasing need for socialisation and the feeling of belongingness.266 But with the fragmentation that followed postmodernism, the demands on the individual with regard to belongingness have become much higher, making it harder for the individual to achieve this goal. It is now important to belong to many different groups instead of just belonging to a few and it is in the attempt to do so that the individual ends up with a split-

264 Dencik, Lars. Mennesket I postmoderniseringen. Om barndaom, familie og identitet I opbrud, p. 257
265 Dencik, Lars. Mennesket I postmoderniseringen. Om barndaom, familie og identitet I opbrud, p. 259
266 Idem p. 258
focused identity or, as previously expressed, a multiphrenic identity.\textsuperscript{267}

\subsection*{4.4.2. Belonging in The Buddha of Suburbia}

One of the main issues in the book is the shaping of identity, especially in relation to the main character Karim. In his search for identity he seeks many different affiliations and social relations.

In the beginning of the book, Karim is very fascinated with the environment surrounding the middle class woman Eva. This fascination partly derives from Karim’s sexual and emotional interest in Eva’s son, Charlie. He tries to fit into Charlie’s world by copying his clothes, style and character. Linking this to the above-mentioned theories, as Karim is taking on Charlie’s personality features, he is mirroring himself in order to come closer to identifying his own personality and identity.

Through Karim’s relationships, he moves a little further along in the process of shaping his identity. In his relationship with the actress Eleanor he express that he “\textit{never had such strong emotional and physical feeling before}”.\textsuperscript{268}

Through his childhood friend Jamila, Karim is to some degree confronted with his own cultural roots, especially when Anwar forces his daughter into an arranged marriage ostensibly for cultural and religious reasons. Throughout the whole book, Karim nevertheless finds a great deal of comfort in his friendship with Jamila.\textsuperscript{269} Perhaps this is because she represents the balance between being English and being Indian, which he seems to be searching for. She seems to have found a way to live her life as an English person, while still maintaining and defending her Indian roots without contradiction.

When it comes to Karim’s direct relation to his own cultural roots, there seems to be a conflict. He cannot really identify with

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{267} See 4.3.1.
\textsuperscript{268} Kureishi, Hanif. \textit{The Buddha of Suburbia}, p. 187
\textsuperscript{269} Idem p. 52
\end{flushright}
his father’s cultural background, although he still feels connected to it in some way:

“(…) 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 that fact. I felt ashamed and incomplete at the same time (...).”

Conflicts of belongingness are also seen in many different contexts when it comes to the character of Haroon. Most apparent is the clash that occurs when he arrives in England from India, and is faced with dramatic changes in class and culture. Coming from a wealthy family, he suddenly has to adjust to a new culture and a new social status. Furthermore, he is met with prejudice and racism from the British who, at the same time, find him exotic and exciting.

As we can see from the Karim’s and Haroon’s experiences, the immigrant will probably encounter enhanced difficulties in satisfying the inherent need to belong as the task of being accepted as a stranger in a new community is invariably beset with natural obstacles and resistance, especially if the newcomer does not share the same culture. The need to belong is no less urgent for an immigrant as for his host countrymen, but the sense of belonging desired is infinitely harder to attain.

4.4.3. Cultural Identity and Belonging

This section will contain a discussion of some of the difficulties connected with the search for identity as an immigrant. It is important to note that the following will treat the term ‘identity’ as commonly understood by the individual, though the concept of identity should really be viewed as something fluid and changeable, being influenced by different factors such as time and context.

The struggle to define one’s identity is familiar to most people regardless of nationality, gender, cultural roots and so on.

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270 Idem p. 212

271 Pataki, Eva. Caught Between Two Worlds, p. 4
However, as an immigrant, there are several other factors that inhibit this process further.

Identity is defined by more than nationality or ethnicity. Factors such as gender, sexuality, religion and history must also be taken into consideration. When an immigrant experiences a new culture where these factors contravene their cultural norms, it may result in a major culture shock. A consequence of this may be a feeling of cultural confusion, where it may seem a natural reaction to maintain one’s traditional way of living instead of adjusting to the new environment. This again may result in a hostile attitude towards immigrants as they are then perceived as reserved and unwilling to integrate in society.

In the particular case of Britain, Asian immigrants may experience a fundamental change in the cultural structure of society when they move from a collectivist society, where ‘the family’ and ‘togetherness’ are central, to an individualistic one, where the emphasis is on the individual and their needs. This shift contributes to a further gap between immigrants and their host nation as they, in this process, become subjected to postmodern notions of individual success while simultaneously becoming more fragmented than the British themselves.

This only increases the need for belonging amidst the alienation and therefore the question of belonging or more accurately for the immigrants, of not belonging, becomes even more central.

To sum up, in the process of creating and (re)constructing an identity, the influence of other human beings is essential. Through these interactions we can mirror ourselves and thereby form an identity, a self. However, in contemporary society, this process has become more difficult as postmodernism has resulted in a fragmentation of identity, which means that the rules of socialisation have changed. The outcome of these changes is the individual’s constant attempt to accommodate and respond to many different social relations.

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272 Idem p. 3
273 Ibid
In *The Buddha of Suburbia*, the protagonist Karim engages in many different social relations as he is trying to come closer to a definition of his identity. Though he does not deliberately search for these relations in his cultural roots, he is still connected to them through his father Haroon and his childhood friend Jamila, who both have very different ways of handling the issues of immigrant identity.

The concept of identity is a rather abstract notion and depends on many factors besides culture and nationality. However, there are specific issues connected with the shaping of identity for an immigrant (not least as an Asian immigrant in England). The differences between the individualist West and the collectivist East result in a culture clash. Because of this gap between the two groups, the need to belong becomes even more distinct for immigrants and, for that reason, they are forced to deal with additional problems in the process of constructing and shaping their identity.

In this section, we have introduced a few of the issues encountered by immigrants when faced with the challenge of finding acceptance and achieving a sense of belonging within their host society. These issues of multiculturalism and acceptance between peoples of different ethnicity and nationality are highly topical subjects that have been widely debated and studied in the current climate of postmodernism and globalisation. It therefore seems relevant to delve deeper into these different issues and related theories, as they undoubtedly play an important role in the novel and may provide us with a better understanding of the immigrant condition in general.

### 4.5. Ethnicity, Multiculturalism & Orientalism

"(...) neither the term Orient nor the concept of the West has any ontological stability; each is made up of human effort, partly affirmation, partly identification of the Other." \(^{274}\)

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Before we elaborate on the theme of multiculturalism, it seems pertinent to define the concept of culture as it is understood today. Edward Taylor wrote:

“Culture, or civilization, taken in its broad, ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society”.  

Although formulated more than a hundred years ago, this holistic view of culture is still widely accepted and useful with regard to examining the notion of the multicultural; that is, the notion of culture that we have today have settings in which different cultures meet, co-exist and influence each other in the myriad of areas identified by Taylor. However, we must move on from this basic definition to Kureishi’s views on culture in order to understand the difficulties of the immigrant experience as presented in the novel.

The American scholar Samuel Huntington wrote *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* in the wake of the dissolution of the Soviet Bloc. In it, he describes how he believes future conflicts will be shaped by the culture of a society rather than by its ideology, as the identities of individuals living in a specific society are now shifting towards being shaped by the cultural properties of their indigenous society. He initially proposes this thesis in response to the scholar Francis Fukuyama’s *The End of History and the Last Man*, which champions the victory of Western liberal democracy and capitalist market economies as the inception of a universal global culture based on Western ideals. Huntington calls this notion of universal culture the ‘Davos Culture’, named after the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. He criticises it for what he considers a naïve political elitism that blatantly ignores the lack of broad popular support in both Western and non-Western countries, by quoting Hedley Bull: “[this] shared

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275 Tylor, Edward. *Primitive Culture*, p. 1

276 Huntington, Samuel P. *Civilisationernes Sammenstød – Mod en ny verdensorden.*

277 Fukuyama, Francis. *The End of History and the Last Man.*

278 Idem, p. 87
*intellectual culture only exists on the level of the elite*. 279 Even though Fukuyama might actually believe that a universal set of ideals and values exists, they are in reality only recognised by a small technocratic minority. Huntington puts it this way:

“Outside the West it is probably shared by less (...) [than] one percent of the world’s population and maybe even only one tenth of this percent. This is far from being a universal culture”. 280

Having rejected the notion of a universal singular culture spread across the globe, he then proposes the existence of several distinct cultures in the world that will inevitably collide in response to the forces that promote global hegemony.

In order to properly function, all societies must develop their own sets of rules, norms and worldviews. These usually reflect each society’s cultural values. However, when encountering a different system of culture - especially a non-Western one like Haroon’s - an exchange between the two can often result in some form of conflict as, according to Huntington, the differences of values can be considered too great for adaptation and acceptance (not to mention reconciliation in the case of this novel). It could be argued that this has always been the case, as competing belief systems have always existed throughout all human history. However, following the premise of Huntington, this conflict is now accelerating on account of an increasingly globalised world that is becoming ‘smaller’ and more interconnected. This leads inevitably to collision, and shaping or reshaping of these varied systems of culture by each other.

A vehement critique of Huntington’s ideas has been formulated by the Palestinian American literary theorist Edward Said in his lecture at the University of Massachusetts, which is entitled *The Myth of the Clash of Civilizations*. 281 In it he addresses his opposition to Huntington’s thesis, predominantly concerning himself with exposing what he calls “the classic kind of Orientalist gesture”. 282 By this, he refers to “the notion that

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279 Ibid
280 Ibid
282 Idem p. 4
civili
cations are monolithic and homogeneous”283 and
“[Huntington’s assumption on] the unchanging character of the
duality between us and them”.284 It is this division of peoples,
nations and civilisations along clear, constructed lines and
borders with little heed to internal differences, which is the main
focus of Said’s critique. Being a literary theorist, Said’s writings
revolve around his belief that language constitutes the basis of
our understanding of the world around us, and draws upon this
structuralism in his critique of Huntington:

“(…) statements about what ‘our’ culture is, civilisation is, or
ought to be, necessarily involves a contest over the definition.
That’s why I think it’s more accurate to say that the period that
we’re living in is not the clash of civilisations but the clash of
definitions”285

Broadening our view from Huntington, Said has always been a
critic of what he sees as the general implicitness of Western
imperialism still inherent in the language and definitions used in
public and academic discourse – what he terms Orientalism.
Explicit imperialism ended in the middle of the twentieth century
with the break-up of the European colonial empires and the
gaining of independence by their subject states. However,
according to Said, there is still an imperialist outlook within
Western discourse with regard to the non-West, e.g. in the
simplistic use of the terms First, Second and Third Worlds to
denote what is actually a highly complex interrelation between
different regions, states, religions, cultures and subcultures of
the world. It is worth noting here how this division of the world
openly places the Industrialised West at the apex. It is through
these generalisations and the inherent devaluations of the
nature of non-Westerners and their cultures that one can define
Said’s Orientalism. A textbook example could, according to Said,
be found in analysing the Western notion of Islam, exposing
what could be termed as the falseness of the “monolithic view
of the other”, but the existence of similar problems persists in
relation to all non-Western cultural identities:

283 Ibid
284 Ibid
285 Idem p. 7
"My concern [...] is that the mere use of the label «Islam», either to explain or indiscriminately condemn «Islam», actually ends up becoming a form of attack [...] «Islam» defines a relatively small proportion of what actually takes place in the Islamic world, which numbers a billion people, and includes dozens of countries, societies, traditions, languages and, of course, an infinite number of different experiences. It is simply false to try to trace all this back to something called «Islam», no matter how vociferously polemical Orientalists [...] insisted that Islam regulates Islamic societies from top to bottom, that dar al Islam is a single, coherent entity, that church and state are really one in Islam, and so forth".286

We have now illustrated two opposing views regarding different cultures and their interrelation with one another; Huntington with his view on culture as an indivisible homogenous entity that fundamentally cannot coexist peacefully on the grounds of differences too great to reconcile, and Said who completely rejects this notion of culture as an ethnocentric simplification and devaluation of other cultures.

But how do these views reveal themselves in The Buddha of Suburbia? As stated previously, the identities of most of the novel’s characters exhibit postmodern features in their continual process of identity formation, supporting the view of Said. The characters of Jamila, Karim and Haroon all negotiate their identities in the unstable in-between of the Indian and British (Western) cultures. On the other hand, the clash of cultures can be seen in the way British society refuses to accept them as fully equal members of society – not regarding them as multifaceted individuals, but rather as either two-dimensional culturally incompatible immigrants, or as caricatures of their ethnic and cultural backgrounds; as with Karim’s initiation into the theatre world or when Haroon assumes the identity of an Eastern mystic. This latter view on immigrants has become a predominant ‘narrative’ in most of the Western world, as local residents object to the influx of non-Western immigrants mainly on the basis of their alien culture, as evidenced by the growing popularity of xenophobic right-wing political parties in Western democracies today – a point that will be further discussed later.

286 Said, Edward, Covering Islam, p. 16
4.5.1. The Orient and the Other

As explained previously, a base component of negotiating the place of the individual in a postmodern society is found in the comparison and contrast between oneself and others, and this also applies for society as a whole in relation to the dominant form of culture. In this respect, it becomes relevant to elaborate further on Said’s postcolonial notion of the ‘Other’.

In order to maintain their integrity, social groups must differentiate themselves from other groups. On both a micro and a macro level, it then applies that any in-group, meaning the dominant group in any context, will differentiate itself from a defined out-group through the process of Othering; finding differences in others, and forming groups based on these distinctions. This status and condition of ‘otherness’, conferred by in-groups by out-groups, then becomes the chief defining characteristic of the Other – meaning a member of a dominated out-group that will often be subject to discrimination by the in-group:

“Each culture (...) defines its enemies, what stands beyond it and threatens it, an ‘Other’ to be despised and fought against.”

Othering can be seen as essential in the formation of national identities, as this is the sphere within which practices of admittance and segregation form and sustain the boundaries of society, thereby constructing what could be termed as a ‘national character’. The late social anthropologist Ernest Gellner describes the conceptual framework of a ‘nation’ as:

“Two men are of the same nation if and only if they share the same culture [and if] they recognize each other as belonging to the same nation. In other words nations maketh man; nations are the artifacts of men’s convictions and loyalties and solidarities...” and “...It is their recognition of each other as fellows... ...which separate that category from non-members.”

Othering is therefore considered a process of distinction between in-group and out-group based the otherness - characteristic, which is often connected to the mystification or dehumanization of the out-group in order to justify attempts at

287 Ibid  
288 Gellner, Ernest. Nations and Nationalism, pp. 6-7
‘civilising’ these groups in what has historically often become a synonym for exploitation.

In The Buddha of Suburbia – a narrative of Indian immigrant culture working within the confines of its former colonial power - there are many situations in which this process of othering can be recognised. In this case, according to Said and his postcolonial theories, it would be important to acknowledge the Western (English) view on a non-Western (Indian) culture as a narrative construction directly perpetuating the roles established and imposed by the West prior to, during and after the actual period of occupation and colonisation. As explained previously, Said considers the notion of the ‘other’ as a prime component of identity creation, in which the individual constructs his notion of self by contrasting himself with the ‘otherness’ of those immediately identifiable as different by means of e.g. religion, ethnicity, political view etc. This is expressed in the novel by the underlying views of the native English, which become visible through the experiences of both Karim and his father Haroon. They are judged by their Indian looks, which lead their surroundings to project a submissive and monolithic ‘Indian-culture’ unto them through no fault of their own. In order to resist this form of what one, using a Foucaultian term, might dub ‘structural violence’, Haroon chooses to answer the current exotic demands of a society intrigued by Eastern philosophy embracing a sort of faux Indian persona – The Buddha of Suburbia. This is done in order to achieve a higher status in Britain, which he would otherwise never be able to attain as an Indian immigrant acting as much as possible as an Englishman. However, the novelty wears off as the trends of London society move on, and Haroon is eventually disregarded as yet another immigrant of little value. In much the same manner, Karim embraces these stereotypical views on the Indian as a vehicle into the theatrical world, acknowledging that even though he might not himself identify with this Indian stereotype, society as a whole does and this leaves him with little choice but to follow suit if he wants to be part of it.

All in all, as shown in this section, there exist a number of views and perceptions on how different cultures, whether it is national

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289 See 3.3.2.
cultures between countries or dominant and minority cultures within the borders of a country, co-exist and interrelate.
However, Said’s theory on postcolonialism and the Other may help us understand and interpret the processes of belonging in the novel and appreciate the difficulties linked to these when it comes to immigrants seeking to belong, in this case, in a society that seems to consider itself superior to them.

This concludes our analysis of *The Buddha of Suburbia* and we will now proceed with discussion of the explored themes in the following section.

5. Discussion

Through literary analysis, we have identified the central themes present in the novel. These include belongingness, alienation, multiculturalism and ethnicity in relation to the creation of identity by immigrants in postmodern society. These themes were further analysed in a theoretical context. The purpose of this process has been to understand the different areas of study and through them discuss the universality of these issues.

In the literary analysis, we concluded that the novel corresponds well with the traits of the Bildungsroman genre. This enabled us to see the general features of the development of identity; the significance and importance of the family and other social connections.

In the character analysis of Karim Amir, we gained insight into his life as a young second generation immigrant and his search for identity. This involved experiences with racism, a lack of belonging and encounters with different classes.

In the character analysis of Haroon, we concluded that he is an immigrant searching for acceptance and recognition in society. He faces difficulties in this pursuit as he is perceived as the Other and experiences alienation on account of this. Nevertheless he reinforces this image by transforming into the *Buddha* of Suburbia.
Through our literary analysis, we recognised several elements of postmodernism on which we elaborated further in the theoretical chapter: the constantly changing circumstances and the demand to adapt to them, ideals of success, belonging and continual shaping of identity. The effects of class in society are also present in the novel as social status and the desire for upward mobility is what drives many of the novel’s characters in their search of identity. The importance of class and economic or cultural capital is also analysed in a theoretical context.

We introduced the issues immigrants come across when seeking acceptance and belonging in society. We conclude that they may be predisposed to meeting difficulties in feeling accepted in society.

In the section on multiculturalism, we concluded that there exist a number of different perceptions on culture and that Said’s theories and the concepts revolving around the Other would enable us to interpret belonging in the novel, and in reality, on a better theoretical basis, especially when it comes to the condition of immigrants.

5.1. Success in Postmodernism

In order to fully understand the relationship between the subject and postmodern society, it is important to question how the two influence each other. We will argue that one consequence of the postmodern society comes from its ideals of success.

We have argued that we all have a need to belong. Since it is a need, it has to be satisfied. This means that no definition of success can ignore this need, and we will therefore build upon our earlier notions of success in postmodernism to include this need for belonging as well. As shown earlier\(^{290}\), success is dependent on recognition from others in order to be ‘valid’. But with the new notions of belonging, it is not just necessary to receive recognition from others, you also have to belong to that social group.

In addition to this, we have argued that when everybody collectively strives for the same thing, competition is inevitable.

\(^{290}\) See section 4.1.3.
and therefore standards will approach an unattainable perfection. So if we have a need to belong and we need recognition from our social group in order to feel this belongingness, and if at the same time everybody strives to rise upwards due to the high standards, then we are led to look into who gives this recognition to others and who is in control.

We argue that it is those in control of power, i.e. those in possession of most mobility (which is a privilege closely connected to one’s cultural and economic capital), that dictate whether you are successful or not. So in order to satisfy the need for belonging, the subject in search of recognition needs to abide by these notions of success and may therefore be unaware of the later consequences and pursue this success at a great personal cost. This price of mobility includes increased rootlessness, which only further increases the need for recognition as the individual no longer has a natural sense of belonging anywhere. From here the spiral goes on again and we are left with what Mestrovic called the hyper-social individual.

At the end of the novel, Karim manages to break free from this ‘spiral’ of the hyper-social. He starts out by realising that he has to accept his position as being the Other in order to receive recognition from Shadwell and Pyke. By accepting this, he becomes more dependent on the recognition of others, a recognition that he in fact even ends up buying. Still, at the end of the novel, he reaches a state in which he realises that this spiral has to stop at some point, which for example results in him ending his relationships to Charlie and Pyke.

Karim realises that Charlie and Pyke, as those in possession of power, are recognised only as far as the reach of their social mobility, but not further than that. In addition, he realises that the personal price for this mobility is higher than he is prepared to pay: Charlie is in reality very unhappy and more dependent on others’ recognition than ever, and Pyke is himself an Other, since, in spite of all his mobility and capital, he is alienated from those closest to him (Marlene and his son).

291 Kureishi, Hanif. The Buddha of Suburbia, P. 283
Alienation is not only seen in the case of the hyper-social individual, but also in the case of people not able to adapt to the changes in society. As argued in the analysis of Haroon and his relationship with Margaret, Margaret ends up being an immigrant too. She is not, like Haroon, an actual immigrant and therefore does not suffer the same problems of ethnicity as Haroon does. But she is still no longer a citizen of her original country, since this country has become an ever-changing society with constant demands for higher mobility.

In summary, we argue that all people are affected and alienated to some extent by the changes in society, which makes it harder to belong: the postmodern individual becomes hyper-social and is left with no place to naturally belong, while at the same time he is turned into an immigrant, who, in order to be recognized and accepted in society, constantly has to adapt to these societal changes, instead of simply being accepted as he is.

5.2. Belonging in Society

5.2.1. Second Generation Immigrants

When looking at the case of Karim, we see several difficulties arising as he struggles to belong. Throughout the novel, he seeks the acceptance of his primary social group, as seen in his continual yearning to be recognised by his family. At the same time, he is subject to the general rootlessness and alienation that is the condition of the postmodern subject. We can assume that the general confusion and lack of belonging inherent in the postmodern society can manifest itself even more strongly in the case of a second generation immigrant such as Karim. He also has to deal with the challenge of not really belonging to either of his cultures. In other words, Karim is ‘caught between two worlds’, not necessarily because he feels as if he belongs to India, as he almost knows nothing about his father’s culture, but because through the colour of his skin, he is conceived as such. He is thus defined not by what he is, but by what he is not.
In a *Guardian* newspaper article from 2009, ten Britons describe their perceptions of race relations in Britain. Most of the ones with ethnic backgrounds describe the way in which they have been treated, as they see a connection between their ethnicity and the way society treats them. Many of them feel that it is first and foremost their appearance that often defines them in the eyes of others. They talk about their parents’ roots and how their lives are different than theirs. Here we can see clear parallels with Karim’s experiences when he is ascribed only ethnic roles as an actor and how he is constantly reminded about his ethnicity when he cannot even relate to his father’s roots. Karim’s story takes place in 1970’s and Kureishi wrote it at the end of 1980’s. Yet these issues are still apparently evident in today’s society. Kureishi also discusses the redefinition of what it is to be British. It is not only the immigrants who have to adjust to the changing circumstances. The rest of society also has to adjust and therefore, the redefinition of identity not only takes place for the individual but also takes place on the national level.

### 5.2.2. Multicultural Britain and the Reinforcement of Alienation

The redefinition of national identity has become even more relevant as the demographic composition of society has shifted. Today, traditional classifications such as Punjabi and Afro-Caribbean are beginning to blur and mixed marriages are becoming increasingly common. In fact, the ‘mixed race’ has become ‘the fastest-growing ethnic minority of all’. Moreover, the city of London alone boasts 300 languages and 50 non-indigenous communities with populations of over 10,000 with virtually every race, nation, culture and world region represented. From this we can conclude that today, Britain has arguably embraced multiculturalism. We will argue that 1970's

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292 Uncited. All together now? A portrait of race in Britain. 18.01.09. Web: The Guardian


294 Uncited. Embracing Multicultural Britain. 31.10.01. Web: The Guardian

295 Uncited. Diversity Not Segregation. 21.01.05. Web: The Guardian
Britain was far more homogenous, and ethnic minorities, especially of mixed race, were poorly represented in society or in literature, media and politics compared to today. Kureishi was one of the first writers to address this particular group’s difficulties. However, many have since followed. Therefore one would assume that the public representation of British citizens with ethnic backgrounds and the increasing multicultural dimension in British society would have eliminated some of the problems that Karim faces. On reflection however, this would seem to be not the case.

As current British Prime Minister David Cameron in his Immigration Speech calls for “stronger national identity” in order to prevent “radicalism” caused by the “failure of state multiculturalism”, the present public debate would seem to point in the opposite direction. The Prime Minister addresses the dangers of specifically “young Muslim men” being “rootless” and turning towards “Islamist extremism”. As an example of public discourse, Cameron’s speech shows the relevance of The Buddha of Suburbia and the universality of the themes it raises. When Cameron criticises the “lack of collective community”, he reinforces the image of parallel societies, the incoherence of the British identity, and the continuing alienation of immigrants. Furthermore we can question why media and politicians define Muslims and in particular young, male Muslims by their religion. The growing focus on islam in the public debate is often coloured by negative connotations and, as we saw in the speech of Cameron, associated with radicalism and extremism. This has been explored by Edward Said, which brings us to the next section.

5.3. Multiculturalism Today

These broad and sweeping generalisations within public discourse about out-groups are consistent with the formational othering processes of most societies faced with different
cultures that seek to co-exist in their midst. This purist defence of rejecting cultural co-existence utilises the same notions of culture as Huntington; culture seen as something constituting an undifferentiated and often rigid whole. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the onset of the age of globalisation, there has been a steady rise in opposition to immigrants of non-Western origin by European populations, as both personal and societal conflicts have become a widespread narrative.

Like most other Western countries, Great Britain was in a state of transition during 1970’s. The last noticeable remnants of the colonial empire had already gained independence in the previous decade and Britain’s influence as a significant world power was on the wane. At the same time, immigrants from both the former colonies and elsewhere were emigrating to the UK, presenting a challenge to the classic homogenised notion of ‘Englishness’. It is in this society that the novel takes place, and when considering how the characters of The Buddha of Suburbia struggle with the negotiation of their identities, ethnicity plays a great part. Not only from the perspective of the individual immigrant but also in the ‘othering’ of society along ethnic lines. According to Sardar, a positive trait of postmodernism is that it is “concerned with variety, with multiplicities: it emphasizes plurality of ethnicities”. However, even though the world is getting smaller and more interconnected, there seems to be a general discontentment with it – especially in the West.

We hold that many of the issues represented in the novel are still relevant in today’s multi-ethnic and multicultural society. In contrast to Kureishi’s motivation for writing the novel, people with immigrant backgrounds are now being represented and acknowledged in society. But as a group, they are still treated as outsiders, most likely to be considered part of the problem rather than part of the solution - arguably one of the largest

298 Terpstra, Ben-Peter. *European voters reject multiculturalism*. 22.09.10. Web: American Thinker

299 Sardar, Ziauddin. *Postmodernism and the Other*. pp. 10-11
obstacles facing ethnic minorities, and their host societies in the West today.

In the course of our analysis and discussion, we have sought to exemplify the difficulties of the immigrant condition in postmodern society. In conclusion we hold that they exist in two separate, but interconnected spheres; the individual subject negotiating their identity, and society as a whole. Karim, who is neither Anglo-Saxon nor Indian, has immense trouble figuring out his place in society. When considering the development of one’s identity, there are elements that are known to be part of the process, such as for example the feeling of belonging. However what we conclude is that this feeling of belonging - or lack of it - is one of the largest obstacles in the fictional case of Karim, and the prejudices, exclusion and alienation, which he combats, is still present today, and we can therefore see traits of universality in these obstacles. We feel that we have proved the connection between the novel and reality by presenting valid examples from the real world that support the experiences described by Kureishi. These give us a solid argument for contending that there is universality in the central themes of *The Buddha of Suburbia*.

6. Conclusion

The aim of this project was to investigate the universality of the immigrant experience portrayed in *The Buddha of Suburbia*. Literary analysis was carried out in order to identify the central themes of the novel, which we subsequently explored on a theoretical basis.

We found that the novel fulfilled much of the criteria of the Bildungsroman and this then allowed us to use the central elements of the genre in our analysis of Karim and Haroon.

From this analysis we have concluded that the central themes of the novel are identity, class, belonging, alienation, multiculturalism, and the immigrant experience.

These themes have all been analysed from a postmodern perspective on the assumption that a person’s identity is created
both from within and without, and therefore have to be viewed from a broader perspective. It is shown that the setting of the novel is a society in transition to postmodernism, which along with other traits, generates a state of general meaninglessness, doubt and a lack of Grand Narratives. The consequence of this has been a destabilisation of identity, along with increased rootlessness and alienation.

In tandem with these changes in society, identity has become more dependent on interactional dialogue. The view that an identity has a stable core has been replaced by the notion that a person has multiple identities which are in constant change (the multiphrenic self). Nevertheless, it has been argued that economic and cultural capital should not be underestimated as it influences and limits a person’s ability to freely shape and recreate an identity.

As postmodern Britain evolves, a new aspect is added to the mix: multiculturalism. In 1970's, Britain was in a turbulent transition to the postmodern, multicultural society it is today. The societal changes compelled Britain to renegotiate its national identity, as the classical homogenised notion of 'The British' was in a state of erosion. Despite the rapid demographic shift experienced by British society, the debate on nationalism, culture and ethnicity is still ongoing today. First and second generation immigrants still feature heavily in public discourse. Even though not openly acknowledged, these groups are still perceived as the 'others' or the out-group, defined by the in-group not by what they are, but by what they are not. This notion of 'otherness' is fuelled and perpetuated by public debate which constantly reinforces the alienation of individuals who are born and raised in the host country.

We can conclude that the immigrant experience portrayed in The Buddha of Suburbia has universal traits as the related issues are not merely relevant in contemporary British society but reflects the general immigrant experience in the Western world.
7. Group Progress

From the beginning of the project, all members of the group had a very clear idea of where we wanted to go with the project.

With the book as a starting point, we all agreed that our common interest was the immigrant experience and the way it was portrayed in *The Buddha of Suburbia*.

Going further into the project, we discovered some central themes in the book which we decided to investigate further though we were not completely clear how to use these themes in our final problem definition. Feedback received at the Midterm Seminar helped us to give our project more solid structure as we had been unsure about the way we should go forward, although it has to be said that we were actually on the right track. Following our opponent group’s advice, we investigated more thoroughly the themes identified in the novel, making them the core of the second part of the project.

Members of the group have been working very individually due to significant differences in personal schedules. This way of working has shown us both advantages and disadvantages. On the one hand, a large volume of written material was produced in a short period. On the other hand, this also resulted at times in a split focus and subsequent lack of cohesiveness in the group and thereby project.

In a future project, one way to avoid this problem could be to form a consistent structure from the beginning and through the process have more meetings to sum up what the others have been doing and thus make sure that everybody follows the same structure.

Also in relation to our supervisor, we have worked very independently. Feedback has mainly been written except for a few meetings at the beginning and end of the project. The written feedback was particularly useful to us as it was stated very clearly where and what we needed to change or improve.

The communication in the group has worked very well. We have used Facebook, the social networking website, as a forum for questions, updates and arranging meetings. Uploading our
written material on BSCW has proved to be especially useful as we were able to get an overview of the project from the beginning. This has saved us a lot of time as we had a clear structure and set of rules for the layout from the outset.

All in all, this group has worked well together though it has mainly consisted of individual contributions followed by debriefs and discussions. As we all more or less shared the same point of view with regard to the project, the outcome is certainly something corresponding to our expectations.
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