Desirable London, Deplorable England – The Motif of Leaving in Hanif Kureishi's Novels

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List of abbreviations

BA	*The Black Album*
BS	*The Buddha of Suburbia*
BF	"Bradford"
DS	"Dreaming and Scheming"
EA	"Eight Arms to Hold You"
FBP	*Faber Book of Pop*
FTJ	"Finishing the Job"
GG	*Gabriel's Gift*
I	*Intimacy*
MBL	*My Beautiful Laundrette*
SG	"Something Given. Reflections on Writing"
SR	*Sammie and Rosie Get Laid*
STWS	"Some Time with Stephen: A Diary"
TB	*The Body*
TRS	"The Rainbow Sign"

1. Introduction

The following 113 pages embark on an analysis of the art of novel writing of Hanif Kureishi. The paper concentrates on the connection between the setting and the protagonist in *The Buddha of Suburbia, The Black Album, Intimacy, Gabriel's Gift* and *The Body*. It argues that the central motif of these novels is the motif of leaving because their author made these texts centre on the story of an individual leaving an undesired place or condition in search for another, more satisfying one. Leaving is therefore an agency that fundamentally determines the narrative structure of Kureishi's novels. The question explored here is the motivation of this movement - what do the protagonists leave behind and what do they desire? This paper argues that the setting of the novels is characterised by a conflict between disparate social norms and values and that this conflict holds a central function with respect to the story of the protagonist. It tries to show how Hanif Kureishi's stories of individual development are all based upon and function through this interrelationship between the individual and setting.

The following chapter provides the general frame for this analysis by establishing a connection of the author's interest as a novelist, the theme of change and its manifestation in the setting of the novels. It argues that the latter is conceived as a coherent structure which can be abstracted in terms of a model of a conflict, which separates the fictional space into two conflicting spheres. As difference is considered the major characteristic of Kureishi's settings, the following four chapters present specific conflicts which can be said to contribute to the general model. Chapter three presents the class-difference between the petit bourgeoisie and the cultured Londoner. Chapter four is concerned with the different notions of domesticity and their effect on the individual and the family. Chapter five focuses on generational difference and the transformation of notions of identity in general, again dealing with the effect on the individual. Chapter six shows how the novels construct mothers in a negative way. In all cases, the tensions

created by this setting are released through migration into metropolitan London. Chapter seven provides a conclusion to this analysis of Kureishi's novels.

2. Movement, Development and Difference

2.1 The Novel and the Novelist

What is Kureishi's notion of art and consequently, his vision as an artist, as a writer?

> In the end there is only one subject for the artist. What is the nature of human experience? What is it to be alive, suffer and feel? What is it to love or need another person? To what extent can we know anyone else? Or ourselves? ... Literature is concerned with the self-conscious exploration of the lives of men, women and children in society. (SG 8)

Kureishi does not think that literature can answer these questions; like his beloved Chekhov, he holds that they "could only be put not answered." (8) The novel, for him "the subtlest and most flexible form of human expression" (8) is about the "exploration of character," (8) and it should attempt to present an authentic human perspective to the reader. In the representation of human character, context is very important. Kureishi acknowledges in the above quote that the novel cannot accomplish its aim of invoking human beings without showing them "in society." (8) It is because of the combination of subject and social context that the novel can "return the reader to the multifariousness and complication of existence." (8) Here, art is concerned with the communication of human experience to an audience, but, as Raymond Williams has put it, "in such a form that the experience is actively re-created ... actually lived through by those to whom it is offered." (*Long Revolution* 51) In order to achieve this, the novel must appeal to the reader's cultural and social background. This might be the reason why Kureishi's novels are all set in Britain and in a time most of his readers know from their own experience – a period ranging from the seventies to the nineties.

Bart Moore-Gilbert holds that Kureishi is good at representing the subject in this social context: "[O]ne of the strongest themes of his writing is the inextricable connection between 'the personal' and 'the political.'" (Moore-Gilbert, *Hanif Kureishi* 212) The way the protagonist is set into a specific setting and shaped by it is the main interest in this paper. Therefore it is important to turn the attention now to the setting, which in realist novels like Kureishi's is society.

2.2 The Novel, Society and the Setting

A good point of departure is Raymond Williams's characterisation of the relationship between the representation of society and the actual entity in *The Long Revolution*:

> The reality of society is the living organisation of men, women and children, in many ways materialized, in many ways constantly changing. At the same time, our abstract ideas about society, or about any particular society, are both persistent and subject to change. We have to see them as interpretations: as ways of describing the organisation and of conceiving relationships, necessary to establish the reality of social life but also under continual pressure from experience. (120)

On the one hand, society is experienced as something that is constantly changing, as a process of continuous change, but on the other hand, there are "abstractions" of this society that are of a more constant nature. They can be said to constitute the image that a society has of itself, its identity and connected with this, a specific value system and a specific structure of feeling. But the change of society through history produces always different identities that overlap and challenge each other. For example, a generation might have an agreement on what their society is, but there are other generations present that might have different conceptions. Furthermore, interpretations might vary according to class or cultural background. Thus, the constant state of flux on the level of social reality becomes on the abstract level a bundle of diverging images of society. A characteristic of Kureishi's novels is that they address this heterogeneity of society by presenting diverging interpretations of it. Hereby they draw attention to the fact that society is in a constant state of transformation. What Jörg Helbig says of Kureishi's first novel applies for all of them: "It is the theme of change which functions as the leitmotif of *The Buddha of Suburbia*." (82) Kureishi emphasizes the "multifariousness" (SG 8) of life by showing that different interpretations of society exist simultaneously. The society in which the individual subjectivity is explored is therefore a heterogeneous structure in which different versions of society overlap and contest each other. The implication is that the protagonist can easily find himself confronted with a representation of society that he disagrees with. And often, he does.

Returning to Raymond Williams, Kureishi's novels can be considered what the former calls novels of the "social formula" (*Long Revolution* 308) type. In this type of the contemporary novel, the setting is a fictional world based on a specific interpretation of society: "A particular pattern is abstracted, from the sum of social experience, and a society is created from this pattern." (307) Kureishi's novels highlight the heterogeneity of the society in which the individual lives through the reduction of this multiplicity to two contrasting patterns. Society is thus always conceived of as a scenario of conflict, contrasting desirable and deplored interpretations of society. Here, Kureishi especially contrasts urban and suburban culture as two distinct structures of feeling. But he also uses generational difference, mostly represented as a difference between parents and children to show that the world of his protagonists is characterised by conflict.

2.3 The Setting and Conflict

In this setting, the central – always masculine – protagonist of the novel changes his position in society. In all cases, he tries to ease the tension by moving forward, by dissociating himself from a deplored socio-cultural condition and seeking a desired one. In these coming of age plots, leaving is the primary action. The novels always show the protagonist in a transition that is always an escape. The "*bildungsroman*" (Nasta 183) *The Buddha of Suburbia* depicts how Karim flees the stuffiness of the seventies' lower middle class mentality and tries to establish himself in London's art community. In *The Black Album,* Shahid struggles with the identity-conscious eighties and in the end, he comes to a position from which he can detach himself from these essentialist discourses. In the subsequent novels, the scenario of tension is more subdued on the level of society, yet more pronounced on the level of the family. The theme of development dominates here the plot as well. *Intimacy* presents a protagonist struggling for a new life outside domestic patterns that come to resemble that of his parents. He juxtaposes his own unhappiness

with that of his parents and finally escapes into the relationship with Nina. In *Gabriel's Gift* the family of the protagonist is in crisis since his parents split up but this is only the background of the story of an adolescent's maturation as an artist. In *The Body,* old age and desire are the context of movement. Adam's story gets into motion when he is offered the fantastic opportunity to slip into a new, young body. The coming of age theme is here revisited by a mature protagonist who impersonates a young man fresh out of university.

Not without basis, Kenneth Kaleeta can thus compare Kureishi's stories to a Hollywood plot: "Kureishi sees stories in movement ... with his characters living out –or against- the Hollywood-movie dream of finding that "some place better." (10) Other critics see the protagonists as migrants. The protagonist perform what Susheila Nasta and John Ball have termed "local migrations" (Nasta 181) and "local, miniaturized versions of postcolonial migrancy and culture shock." (Ball 21) Being 'on the move,' like the bikers in the poem of the same title by Tom Gunn becomes the essential condition of existence in the narratives.

In the language of the novels, movement is a trope for the human capacity to find happiness and a meaning in life: People who are stuck in their life are literally "going nowhere" like Haroon, (BS 26) or Jay's father (I 46) who are both confined to a life as clerk. When Karim doubts the possibility to reinvent himself, he is reproached by Charlie that he's "not going anywhere" (131) Right at the start of the book, a foreshadowing to the plot of this Bildungsroman is expressed in a similar manner: "I am going somewhere," (3) says the protagonist. Stuck in the relationship with his partner, Jay holds that his home, there is "no movement." (I 100) "On we go, forward, forward" (GG 53) are the words with which Lester Jones leaves Gabriel after he has injected him with the confidence of becoming an artist. The plots express, similar to Victor Fleming's film *The Wizard of Oz,* "the joys of going away, of leaving the greyness and entering the colour, of making a new life in the 'place where there isn't any trouble.'" (Rushdie, c.f. Kaleeta 10)

The desire for the distant "Elsewhere" (10) is always connected to the discomfort with the status quo. The setting as a structure of conflict implies that the stories of development are stories of the rejection of a particular social character and a mentality which Kureishi connects to the society of the suburbs and its mentality. This is the socio-cultural space the protagonists desire to leave. As the following chapters will show, suburban England stands for the old-fashioned interpretations of society, resulting in a structure of feeling that is rejected by all protagonists. The rejection of these values sets the individual on the move. This story of the individual's overcoming of the limitations set upon him by the anachronistic values and ideas of certain society is always represented as a movement from a suburban society into an alternative one, a space open for new and alternative forms of individuality. This is London. The novels are show the kind of thinking that their author identifies himself with in his autobiographical sketch "Some Time with Stephen:" "I continue to think, in that now old way, in terms of the 'straight' world and the rest, the more innocent and lively ones standing against the corrupt and stuffy." (145) With England and London, Kureishi gives his way of thinking an embodiment and creates space of socio-cultural confrontation in which the movements of change take place.

Here, the "social formula" (Williams, The Long Revolution 308) aspect of his novels is most obvious: "England is primarily a suburban country and English values are suburban values." (STWS 170) Here, Kureishi confidently propagates a metonymy that reduces a complete country to a specific socio-cultural sphere, the suburb. By this, he disposes of all local specificity of society outside London and constructs it as homogenous society, which forms a contrast to London. This fictional landscape is mirrored in the narrative structure of *The Buddha of Suburbia*, which consists of two parts, one called "In the Suburbs" and the other "In the City."

The perception of a nation through the frame of a conflict between an urban and a non-urban society has always had great appeal to the British as Williams shows in *The Country and The City*. Looking at the discourse on rural and municipal society in English cultural history, he

observes the divergence between the high specificity of actual forms of social life and the widespread tendency to reduce them to a 'the country against the city' opposition. He concludes that "the contrast of country and city is one of the major forms in which we become conscious of a central part of our experience and of the crises of our society." (*Country and City* 8) The opposition is therefore a kind of conceptual metaphor used to make the world intelligible for the individual. The consequence is a general suitability of 'country' and 'city' for criticism of society and –by extension- to endow the setting with tension: "[T]he temptation is to reduce historical variety of forms of interpretation to what are loosely called symbols or archetypes." (8) Williams presents two different discourses on this binary social landscape: The urban perspective, which sees the city as the epitome of progress, whereas the village in the countryside is seen as an instance of an unchanged and backward society. From the opposite angle, a nostalgic perspective, the past is considered the more ideal and natural society compared to the degenerated and chaotic society of the city. The crucial issue are therefore stances on historic progress; from either angle, the countryside is identified with the society of the past, a point of origin, whereas the city is seen as place of innovation, the place where the future –either a desirable or a deplorable one- is developed. The city is the agent of history.

The closeness of Kureishi's London and its suburbs to the tradition characterised by William's concept has been pointed out by John Ball:

> The city is a space of discovery, experience, indulgence, and consumption called "London"; in this semiotic geography, Bromley and the other outer suburbs are not "London" but the equivalent of Williams's "country": the past one leaves behind, the "birth" that gives way to the city's "learning" (Williams 7). (21)

This country city contrast as integral part of the author's narratives is recognized by Sukdhev Sandhu as well, although he terms it the "geographical turn" ("Pop" 133) in writing on London. Sandhu holds that writing like Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* actually applies abstract concepts such as 'centre,' 'margin' and 'metropolis' to London and its suburbs. (133)

The standpoint of Kureishi's narratives in the conflict between social ideals that the country versus city dichotomy represents is unambiguous. The author who said that he has "*fled* to London" from Bromley (FTJ 87, emphasis added) clearly belongs to the discourse that celebrates urban civilisation. This is underlined in the way the setting of the novels affirms this interpretation of the country and city model. For one, Kureishi is a "local, even parochial kind of writer" (Moore-Gilbert, *Hanif Kureishi* 1) whose stories always chose London as central stage. With exception of parts of *The Buddha of Suburbia* and *The Body* the plot is constantly set in London. The country, which is in most cases represented by the London suburb, is featured exclusively in short flashback sections which narrate events from the childhood of the protagonists. Because of this, England literally represents the past. Fittingly, the retrospective sections centre almost always on the parents, accentuating the sense of generational difference. In the suburban sphere are the roots of the protagonists, whereas individual development takes them into the city, which in turn represents the agency of history and its progress. "In *The Buddha of Suburbia* the geographical itinerary that leads Karim from suburban Beckenham to London is clearly symbolical of the inner journey he embarks on – socially, mentally and culturally speaking - trying to manage the transition from heritage to choice." (Misrahi-Barak 89)

Moreover, his novels only deal with Londoners, such as Jay, Gabriel and Adam, or portray their struggle to affiliate themselves to the urban society, as with Karim, Shahid, and Gabriel as well. The alienation from England characterizes the whole body of his writing:

> [T]he rest of England, indeed the rest of the United Kingdom barely registers until recent work like the play *Sleep with Me*. (1998) The essay 'Bradford' (1986) has an anthropological feel which vividly expresses how alien Kureishi felt on his excursion to this provincial city ... barely two hundred miles from London. (Moore-Gilbert, *Hanif Kureishi* 1f)

This "anthropological feel" is a typical manifestation of an urban unease with the world outside the metropolis. For example, the father of Gabriel "refused to leave London: for him, the rest of the country was a wasteland of rednecks and fools, living in squalor and poverty." (GG 28) One novel later, Kureishi makes Adam mouth the same attitude. For the latter, the country outside

London is “a dreary place full of fields, boarded-up shops and cities trying to imitate London.” (TB 6) In a recent interview, Kureishi made clear that the opinion of his protagonists is in fact his own: “I don't think London bears any resemblance to England. It's a right crummy place without London. I think if England didn't have London, it'd be a fucking dump." (“When you’re writing” n.pag.)

The glaring dismissal of the non-urban is characteristic for a metropolitan mentality which considers urban culture the most advanced state of human civilisation. “The capital, the large town, a distinctive form of civilisation” (Williams, *Country and City* 1) is considered the embodiment of refinement. Everything else is considered deficient, backward and ultimately more primitive. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, a metropolis is “[a] chief centre or seat of some form of activity.” (701) The examples refer both to religious and cultural activity. “The metropolis in European thought was always constituted as the seat of culture.” (Ashcroft 138) The metropolis is thus considered culturally, politically and socially superior to what then becomes seen as its margins, its precursor and heritage. High esteem for living in the metropolis correlates with a coherently negative attitude to the unsophisticated world outside it. Even if the conflicts are taking place within London and among Londoners, as in *Intimacy* and *Gabriel’s Gift*, suburban mentality is associated with one person or a group of them. Especially mother figures embody the suburban within London’s territory.

2.4 Analysing the Setting

The following three chapters take a close look at the way the novels construct a setting that displays the above structure of conflict. Moreover, it tries to sketch how these differences endow the narratives with an inclined plane of necessity, since the presence of the deplored society never leaves any doubt that abandonment and change are a necessary and liberating

agency for the individual "in society." (SG 8) that the author is interested in. These chapters dissect Kureishi's setting according to several aspects. Chapter three analyses the novels in terms of class looking at how class difference is used to contrast positive and negative spaces and identities. Chapter four shows that the novels use notions of domesticity and the bourgeois structure of feeling for the same aim. In chapter five, conflicting attitudes towards identity within the novels are scrutinised, again suggesting that the setting contrasts a deplored and a desired space, since the contrasts a culture of essentialism with a progressive city as embodiment of pop culture. As the titles of these chapters suggests, they are focussing on "The Individual in Society." The sixth chapter, however, suggests that the novels do not only depict conflict in terms of an individual confronted with divergent structures of feeling. This chapter suggests that the mother-figure becomes the embodiment of the negative space. The country versus city contrast is thus also a gendered and generational contrast in which leaving is always a movement away from the mother.

3. The Individual in Society Part One: Class

3.1 Introduction

When Karim says that Jimmy "was lower middle class like us", (BS 270) or when Jay describes his parents as a "lower middle class couple," (I 45) or when Kureishi himself refers to Bromley as "lower-middle class England," (FTJ 87) the author shows that he is familiar with the typical English way of understanding society. In the nation that George Orwell described as "the most class ridden country under the sun," (208) the perception of social differences in terms of class is very characteristic. The "class obsessed" (Paxman 154) English live in a society in which "the class system is alive and well and living in people's minds in England." (Cooper 11) This aspect of Englishness is not just a stereotype but has been proven by several empirical studies from which Ivan Reid concludes that class is an existing factor in people's subjectivity and their way of locating themselves in society. (23) Kureishi's novels are very English in this respect. This chapter looks at the way class is used in Kureishi's oeuvre to construct differences and justify movements of leaving.

3.2 Kureishi and the Middle Class

3.2.1 Introduction

First of all it is important to state that not all classes are represented in the novels. Kureishi does not aim at drawing a big picture of the British social classes. Neither the aristocracy nor the working class are of central importance. The former is not represented at all, and the working class is only of marginal importance. The novels feature only one working class character, Heater. In *The Buddha of Suburbia,* he literally personifies this class, which underlines the remoteness of this social group from the urban middle class: "Heater was the only working-class person that

most of them had met. So he became a sort of symbol for the masses ... ." (BS 175) Although the novels indicates that Heater is a complex character, the narrator is neither sympathetic to the street sweeper nor interested in him, maybe because he uncannily mirrors Karim's own transformation into an exotic token by the urban middle class. The distance of this class from the centre stage of the narrative can further be seen from the treatment of London's working class areas, such as the East End. When the latter is represented at all, as it is in *The Black Album,* it is seen as an urban wasteland, with a "sombre sky, misty pathways and dead grass [that] bound the blocks together." (89) This cityscape is painted in a way that expresses both discomfort with this space but the language betrays also the sense of fascination with the otherness of this class.

However, neglecting the major class difference within British society, the novels contain class difference in the form of the internal hierarchies of the middle class. The latter are mainly the conflict between the lower middle class and the upper middle class.

3.2.2 The Dynamic of Middle Class Hierarchy

Kureishi's novels affirm the internal hierarchy of the middle class. From the perspective of his novels, being suburban and lower middle class is a "stigma," (BS 134) and they affirm that this class has the most "uncool" (Felski 41) identity available. One can argue that the novels get their system of value from the fact that within the middle class, "[b]eing lower middle class is [considered] a singularly boring identity, possessing none of the radical chic that is sometimes ascribed to working-class roots. In fact the lower middle class has typically been the object of scorn among intellectuals, blamed for everything from exceedingly bad taste to the rise of Hitler." (34) The novels thus take the position of the antagonist of this class, the community of intellectuals, the upper middle class. However, this contrast is not a simple opposition; the relationship between these two subclasses is more complex.

Philip Nicholas Furbank claims that speaking of the 'lower' middle class is a performative distinction within the middle class that defines the speaker as superior to what becomes distinguished as the lower segment of the middle class:

> '[U]pper middle class' and 'lower middle class' are concepts meaningful only for those who believe, or hope, that they belong to the 'upper middle class.' And no one ever, except for purposes of irony, called himself or herself 'lower middle class:' it is a concept purely for other. (Furbank 23)

Such internal differences prove that the "'middle class' is purely a middle class concept." (10) Furbank holds that if applied as self-description, the label 'lower middle class' is a special emphasis of social progress, a conscious affirmation of distance to one's original socio-cultural setting: "People will say that they were *born* into the lower middle class, but that will mean precisely that they no longer belong to it." (23) In her article on the representation of the lower middle class, Rita Felski comes to the same conclusion: The lower middle class "is a category usually applied from the outside, by those of higher status, or retrospectively, by those who once belonged to the lower middle classes and have since moved beyond it." (41) The consequence of this dissociation from ones' origin is an "intense, often visceral sense of alienation that intellectuals from the lower middle class frequently feel toward their origins." (44) Felski mentions Hanif Kureishi and Stuart Hall as examples that "[s]uch alienation is not necessarily to be lamented." (44) Indeed, as the novels of the former show, it is celebrated as the escape from a social setting that is made for being left behind. Leaving the suburb is something considered natural and logic, a necessary step for an upwardly mobile subject seeking self-realization. "The movement [of the characters] from periphery to centre is conflated with social mobility." (Doyle 110)

3.2.3 Communication of Class

How can a novel communicate a sense of class difference? By making use of the pattern of class-consciousness and the stereotypes shared by the community of the readers.

Ivan Reid evaluated a range of surveys on class consciousness in Britain and argued that "occupation is the primary basis for social class judgement." (26) Profession is a direct signifier of one's economic well-being; thus it affirms that the notion of class is in a process of transformation and that "money, in the form of conspicuous possession of a range of objects of prestige, is rapidly driving out other forms of class distinction [such as birth]." (*Long Revolution* 349) The important implication of this insight for the representation of class is that objects and attitudes towards them define the class positions which itself are defined in terms of economic status. Indeed, in Kureishi's novels one can see that objects are the most important signifiers of class status. Objects and the way they are evoking the structure of feeling of the respective partitions of the middle class. Like Orwell and Sinclair Lewis, and along the common stereotype, Kureishi portrays the suburban middle class as characterised by a craving desire for material goods which signify economic well being. The paradigmatic relationship to objects is based on the notion of "display." (BS 75; FTJ 88) Objects are the signs of economic well being and thus define one's status in the community.

This materialism is both ridiculed and resented from the perspective of those members of the middle class who are not in need of constant affirmation of their middle class status. Here rules a negative attitude towards the "semi-detached proletariat" (Williams, *Long Revolution* 359) of the lower middle class. However, one must be aware of the fact that this class defines itself through the same logic. The upper middle class values immaterial objects, which can be considered the insignia of culture and refinement: books, music, refined food, antique furniture, etc.... Internal class difference is thus the difference between two different systems of value. From this perspective, the internal class difference is thus read as the difference between the cultured and the uncultured. Here class ties in closely with notions culture and civilisation and the notion of the metropolis as the seat of culture and sophistication.

The following three sections show that Kureishi uses these patterns of seeing class in order to communicate class difference. The next section looks at professional occupation as marker of difference. Section 3.4 shows how objects and attitudes to them refer to the structure of feeling of a specific social class. Section 3.5 scrutinises a special category of immaterial objects that are traditionally used to signify class difference: culture. This pattern of representation suggests that Kureishi is constructing class difference along the well known lines of conflict within the middle class. The concluding section again emphasizes that the narrative dynamic created by class difference is based on the almost generally acknowledged notion of lower middle class deficiency compared to the educated upper middle classes.

3.3 Occupation in England and London

3.3.1 Suburbia

The lower middle class "usually includes the traditional petite bourgeoisie of shop owners, small business people, and farmers and the "new" lower middle class of salaried employees, such as clerical workers, technicians, and secretaries." (Felski 35) As the suburb is the space that the protagonists deplore and desire to leave, all of its inhabitants are shown to work in such lower middle class professions. Specific focus lies here on the representation of the parental home as lower middle class. Haroon, the father of Karim is a "Civil Service clerk" (BS 7), his mother works in "a shoe shop in the High Street." (19) The parents of Shahid Hasan are small business people as well, owning two travel agencies in Sevenoaks, Kent. (BA 7) Before they started their own business, his mother Bibi "was a secretary and his father a clerk in a tiny agency." (7) The parents of Jay are described as a "lower middle class couple" (I 45) by their son. Similar to Haroon Amir, Jay's father is a "civil servant who later worked as a clerk at Scotland Yard." (43) His mother works as "a school dinner lady ... in factories, offices ... [and] in a shop." (46) In *Gabriel's Gift*,

the situation is different from the other novels, because the parents are of a different generation than the parents of the other protagonists. The difference shows itself in the fact that Gabriel's family lives in Hammersmith, (36) a suburb which so close to the inner city areas that the narrator refers to it as "West London," (36) disguising its suburban status. Gabriel parents are closer to the centre than their parents because the grandfather of Gabriel was a "greengrocer with a shop in the suburbs" (14f) and his grandmother a teacher; (115) but still, they are outside inner-city London and living in Hammersmith thus affirms their marginal social status, for they can be deemed an example of downward class mobility. Rex, being a musician, whose style of playing was highly fashionable in the seventies, is now largely unemployed, having failed to develop his career. His wife, who worked as a tailor, "making party clothes for her young fab friends in the music business, and then for the bands, their managers and groupies," (5) is not able to found a profitable business and has to shift to working as a waitress in a "fashionable new bar" (7) after she abandoned. Rex. The fact that they manage to find their way into London's urban community at the end and then decide to change houses underlines that social mobility and migration go together. In *The Body*, the parents of Adam live on a "farm," (33) his father being "headmaster of a local school" (62) and his mother a librarian. (32)

There is an element in the first two novels which emphasizes that the existence in the suburb is directly connected with the lower middle class. This is the story of the Indian parents' migration *into* the suburb, which is always shown to imply downward social mobility. Kureishi stresses this with portraying the luxuriant life in India and Pakistan that the fathers of Karim, Jamila and Shahid led before coming to England. In their home country, they belonged to the upper middle class. Haroon's father was a doctor, (BS 23) his uncle a movie magazine editor in Bombay. In India, Haroon moved in quite elitist circles. "Dad and Anwar loved to show off about all the film-stars they knew and the actresses they'd kissed." (23) Haroon "went to school in a horse-drawn carriage" (24) and in the afternoon he "played cricket ... and tennis on the family

court" (23) Shahid's family is well known in Karachi. The father of Bibi "had been a doctor – everyone –politicians, generals, journalists, police chiefs– came to their house in Karachi." (BA 73) The move from England to Karachi for holiday is for Shahid social rise from the lower middle class into the aristocratic leisure class. Shahid's experience in Karachi illustrates this life style: With his brother Chili, he is "lying in hammocks beneath the mango trees in the courtyard and discussing which parties to attend." (6) This contrast between the glamorous living condition in the homeland and the comparatively downsized life in England's suburb contributes to the general impression that in comparison to the other places represented in the novels suburbia is essentially the lower middle class sphere, which in turn materialises this space as the one of a deplored condition of existence.

Furthermore, the aristocratic past of Haroon, Bibi and Papa adds the sense of failure. It suggests that the generation of the parents has failed in suburbia. Such a sense of individual failure is communicated through the characterisation of the parent as stuck and frustrated in his lower job. Haroon Amir has "ended up" (BS 26) in a "cage of umbrellas and steely regularity," (26) being "badly paid and insignificant," (7) whilst his son observes that his father is "going nowhere." (26) Shahid says of his parents that they "despise their own work." (BA 8) Jay's father is waiting his whole life for his breakthrough as novelist. (I 46) But unlike his son, he can never make his passion into a living. Thus he remains "spending most of his day's energy in unsatisfying work." (40) Rex Bunch does not get recognition for his talent as musician after his career ended. He is a tragic "Johnny-about-to-be-famous" (GG 26), who knows that "by his age you had either become successful, rich and pursued by lawyers, stalkers and the press ... or you found something else to do. 'Something else,' of course, was an admission of failure; 'something else' was the end." (26)

3.3.2 London

The London of Kureishi harbours a panoply of people. There are drug dealers, East European au-pairs, Punks, Yuppies, pop stars, college teachers, students, Buddhists, Muslim fundamentalists, Street-sweepers, actors, writers, designers, etc. The idea is that the city is beyond any uniform class culture, accordingly it is painted as a pool of various opportunities and possibilities of self-realization. With this, it forms a contrast to the suburban, uniform lower middle class England and at the same time reinforces the notion of the suburb as space of social restriction. But on close look, the city is not a space beyond class. Within this multitude of social positions, the central characters form a quite homogenous class. Kureishi's important Londoners are all upper middle class because they belong to the circle of the educated and intellectual liberals and most of them are associated with the art scene of the city. Thus underneath the above heterogeneity in terms of class, London forms a clear contrast to the suburb along the patterns of middle class hierarchy; what one encounters here is the country and city difference in terms of the internal hierarchy of the middle class.

That the novels favour the London upper middle class can be seen from the occupations of these central Londoners compared to those of the suburbanites. Whereas lower middle class profession is considered a negation of self-interest, the nature of the urban profession is genuine self expression through one's work; this is the desired ideal of the protagonists who all share the Gabriel's ambition, which he reveals movie producer Jake Ambler: "I want my work and my life to be the same thing" (GG 162) Ambler replies: "That's what the successful people –like Lester Jones- have." (162) The profession of the artist is the ideal of the promise the harmony of professional and individual fulfilment that the suburban life denies. All protagonists are artists or aspire to become one. Karim Amir manages to establish himself as a professional actor. His father is able to make his passion for Eastern philosophy into a job which earns him social recognition. Jay and Adam are professional, well-established authors. Gabriel is a painter and dreams of

becoming a film maker. At the end of the novel, he starts shooting his first film. The professional career of Shahid Hasan remains unknown, but he has the aspiration of becoming writer or a journalist in the field of art.

It is interesting to see that indeed all protagonists are somehow writers, even Karim and Gabriel. *The Buddha of Suburbia* is told by Karim in an autobiographic fashion; the story focuses on Karim's development into an actor, told by Karim the writer. Jay and Adam are writers, Shahid aspires to be one. Although the author made Gabriel into a film maker, this choice can be seen as connected to his notion that the new generation of writers is more interested in the cinematic forms of narration: "Most writers, these days, fancy writing and directing their own films, or at least having their work made into films, which is a good way of extending one's income and reaching a larger audience." (DS 263) This might suggest that the novels see writing as the principal agency of class mobility.

3.4 Class and Consumer Goods

3.4.1 The Suburb

In terms of the class hierarchy within the middle class, attitudes towards goods and property are important markers of class difference and by extension of the difference between the deplored suburb and the desired city. It is here that Kureishi most obviously uses well known class stereotypes which the educated reader immediately understands and –if one assumes that the novels are written for an educated and urban audience – shares. In this pattern, the class contrast is one between a superficial materialism and a consumer mentality characterised by refinement and taste.

Kureishi's suburban landscape bears a lot of similarities to Orwell's suburb, here condensed by Rita Felski:

> It is a world of small semidetached houses stretching into infinity, all equipped with stucco fronts, privet hedges, green front doors and showy nameplates. Orwell's characters are not waving but drowning in the accumulated detritus of lower middle class life: stewed pears, portable radios, false teeth, lace curtains, hire-purchase furniture, teapots, manicure sets, life insurance policies. (35)

Rita Felski suggests that Kureishi's image of the lower middle class is closely connected to George Orwell's: "In many ways, the petit bourgeois structures of feeling mapped out in *The Buddha of Suburbia* are remarkably similar to those described by Orwell almost fifty years earlier." (37) The representation of the suburban and lower middle class mentality is achieved through the representation of a canon of valued objects which signifies the difference of lower middle class culture from the one of the educated observer. "This material culture [of the suburb] is profoundly expressive, attesting not only to economic status but also to a complex blend of moral values and structures of feeling: respectability, frugality, social aspirations." (Felski 35) The following quotes from Kureishi suggest that sees the suburb in the same terms:

> This was the English passion, not for self-improvement or culture or wit, but for DIY, Do It Yourself, for bigger and better houses with more mod cons, the painstaking accumulation of comfort and, with it, status –the concrete display of hard earned cash. Display was the game. (BS 75)

> Look into the centre of the suburban soul and you see double-glazing. It was DIY they loved in Thatcherland, not self-improvement or culture or food, but property, bigger and better homes complete with every mod-con –the concrete display of hard earned cash. Display was the game. (FTJ 88)

The parallelism of the two quotes does not only illustrate Kureishi's tendency to "recycle a lot of material;" (Kaleeta 74) it further emphasizes that the discourse on the lower middle class knows a prototypical catalogue associated with suburban materialism. Double glazing, DIY, mod-cons, parading of wealth make the suburb to the place where "poverty and pretension go together." (I 22) All signs are combined to produce a uniform class culture, the culture of the petit bourgeoisie. This culture appears in several of Kureishi's novels. Especially in the first three novels, it provides the structure of feeling the protagonists grow up with, last but not least because it characterises their own family.

In *The Buddha of Suburbia,* Kureishi presents this class mentality in an amusing manner by reporting it from the self-ironic perspective of Karim Amir who tells of his life as a suburban lower middle class boy. Karim presents the fascination with expensive objects the "lower middle class equivalent of the theatre:" (BS 29) "'Ahhh' and 'oohh', we'd go, imagining we lived here, [in the big houses of the better to do suburbanites] what times we'd have, and how we'd decorate the place and organize the garden for cricket, badminton and table tennis." (29) He ironically refers to the suburban status anxiety: "[e]veryone I knew, Charlie and the rest, seemed to be living in big places, except for us. No wonder I had an inferiority complex." (39) In *Intimacy,* Jay refers to the fascination with new objects which is typical for the lower middle class mentality: "Every few months something new and shiny arrived: a car, a fridge, a washing machine, a telephone. And for a time each new thing amazed us." (17) Karim and Jay describe themselves as lower middle class. However, since this is in retrospective, it emphasizes that they have moved beyond this mentality. In *The Black Album*, Shahid's outsider-status in his family is emphasized by the way the family is described as materialistic and suburban, although they are quite well being. Like Ted and Jean in *The Buddha of Suburbia,* this family represent the segment of the middle class whose social progress is based on accumulation of material wealth. Yet from the perspective of the novel, such a progress is questioned, since there it does not imply the accumulation of intellectual capital. These people retain the lower middle class mindset. An example is Shahid's father who is characterised as a suburban by his fascination with the world of consumer capitalism and its steady offer of new, better objects and the status that the possession of these objects brings forth.

> Papa had constantly redecorated it, the furniture was replaced every five years and new rooms were necessarily added. The Kitchen always seemed to be in the front drive, awaiting disposal, though it appeared to Shahid no less 'innovative' than the new one. Papa hated anything 'old-fashioned,' unless it charmed tourists. He wanted to tear down the old; he liked 'progress.' 'I only want the best,' he'd say, meaning the newest, the latest, and, somehow, the most ostentatious. (39)

Since *The Buddha of Suburbia* is the only novel with parts set in the suburb, one encounters here an acid description of lower middle class mentality. The style of these representations of class suggests that the purpose it at least partly caricature. Take for instance the following references to the materialism of the petit bourgeoisie, which articulates itself in their exaggerated care for their status-objects. On Sunday, the suburbanites are "hoovering, hosepiping, washing, polishing, shining, scraping, repainting, discussing and admiring their cars." (BS 39) In the house of Ted and Jean one has to take off the shoes, "in case you obliterated the carpet by moving over it twice." (41) Karim also amuses the reader with other observations of the obsession to preserve the newness of an object. The above couple has "plastic over the seats of their car" (41) although they use it since three years and Karl and Marianne have put plastic around their books. (30) With Karim, Kureishi has send an observer into the lower middle class household, from which he reports amusing examples as the above of their structure of feeling. These descriptions emphasize that the protagonist sets himself apart from this community, although he is part of it. This is very obvious in Karim's acid characterisation of the suburbanites and their materialism. According to him, the people in suburban Chislehurst "would exchange their legs for velvet curtains, stereos, Martinis, electric lawnmowers, double-glazing." (51) For Karim, the suburb is a dead space, peopled only by humans turned objects; life is so focussed on status-objects that "when people drowned, they saw not their lives but their double-glazing flashing before them." (23) In *Gabriel's Gift* Rex, who has grown up in the same setting, reports his son Gabriel of the same objectification of life, and again the narrative assumes a satiric tone: "English never stop talking about property. The price of their house is the price of their life. They trade their souls for a sofa." (GG 30)

3.4.2 London

The Londoners, on the other hand, value a completely different set of objects, which in turn points to a different and –from the perspective of the novels- more desirable and valuable mentality. They are neither concerned with keeping up appearances, nor with the display of status. The culture here is not one centred on display and preservation, but on hedonism, enjoyment and refinement. Whereas Kureishi's suburb is "a world almost completely lacking in spontaneity, sensuality, or pleasure," (Felski 36) London's urban culture is the exact opposite.

According to Karim, the Londoners "never stopped eating, or talking or looking at people performing." (BS 151) They pay a lot of attention to "self-improvement or culture or food." (FTJ 88) The party Adam visits at the beginning of *The Body* conveys the same impression of a London society occupied with culture and pleasure both physical and intellectual: "There was a jazz combo, food, animated conversation and everyone in minimal summer clothing." (8)

The menu of the Londoners, which contrasts clearly with "packet of kebaps and chapatis so greasy their paper wrapper had disintegrated" (BS 3) Haroon brings home in the first chapter of *The Buddha of Suburbia*, is a typical way the novels point to different stances to consumption. For the refined and educated Londoner, consumer goods are most clearly not for display but for personal pleasure and sensual enjoyment. Whereas the suburb is a place of dull English fast food, of "curled up beef burgers, chips and fish fingers," (19) the urbane Londoners "threw a fit if the milk wasn't skimmed to within a centimetre of its life and the coffee not picked from their preferred square foot of Arabia." (GG 8) In Deedee Osgood's London house, Shahid comes into touch with a sophisticated cuisine. One of the first things Shahid observes there is a "piece of Gruyere." (BA 47) She serves Shahid with "pumpkin and coconut soup with ginger" (48), "grilled mackerel in a tikka sauce with fresh coriander ... and an avocado and mint salad." (262) *The Buddha of Suburbia* emphasizes the idea that the lower middle class protagonist enters a new world of sensual pleasures, for Karim states that Eleanor serves him food he "had never

experienced before." (BS 175) She prepares vegetables, "dunking them into frying butter and garlic for a few seconds. Another time we had red snapper, which tasted a little tough, like shark, in a puff pastry with sour cream and parsley. We usually had a bottle of Chablis too." (174ff) With eating, refinement of consumption is juxtaposed with mutual affection, quite in contrast to the paradigm of display of lower middle class materialism. The novels often show that people who love each other are sharing the pleasures of food. Gabriel's parents "loved anything involving cream and chocolate" (GG 3) and "often enthusiastically debated the subject of their favourite flavour [of ice-ream]." (114) Similarly Adam and Margot enjoy their "chocolate indulgences." (TB 17) In *The Black Album*, the arrangement of the plot juxtaposes love and food to a coherent image of mutual affection: the two lovers' night in the flat is followed by a very detailed description of their breakfast in a café. (121) The connection between food and fondness is so close that Kureishi can use it in *Intimacy* to subtly underline Jay's falling out of love with his partner. When Susan asks Jay about "his favourite ice-cream flavour at the moment," (21) his reply "I don't know" (21) which astonishes Susan, as "it is not like you to be unable to think of food," (21) is an index of the degree of his indifference to the relationship. The representation of eating habits also points to the status of the relationship. In *The Black Album*, the affection between Deedee and Shahid mirrors itself in the care the lovers invest in the preparation of their meal and the preparation of the table with a laid tablecloth, lit candles and music. (BA 262) In *Intimacy*, however, Jay's description of Susan's care towards food mirrors the deterioration the partnership:

> [S]he goes to a lot of trouble to shop well and make good meals. Even if we're having a takeaway, she won't let us eat in a slew of newspapers, children's books and correspondence. She puts out napkins, lights candles and opens the wine, insisting we have a proper family meal, including nervy silences and severe arguments. (9)

The magic of the candle light dinner has waned into a daily practice; Susan is depicted as coercing and dominating, and for Jay, the relationship is equally forced.

Another aspect of the material culture of the city is the refinement the upper middle class shows with respect to shopping. Compared with the catalogue of the suburbanites, the upper middles seek the aesthetic or intellectual rather than the functional mod-con. Susan "likes auctions" (9) and she and Jay "have a lot of lamps, cushions and curtains, some of which hang across the middle of the room, as if a play is about to start ... . There are deep armchairs, televisions, telephones, pianos, music systems and the latest magazines and newest books in every room." (9) "Every day there are deliveries of newspapers, books, alcohol, food and, often, of furniture." (22) The London of Shahid and Deedee "existed only to provide them with satisfaction." (BA 122) Here, they roam the shops, browsing through the various offers of clothes, jewellery, records, books and food. Their spending is characterised by spontaneity, taste and lack of restraint, quite contrary to the frugality that characterises the lower middle class (Felski 35) which is characterised in Orwell's novels by a "permanent anxiety about money." (36)

> Unlike [Kairm's lower middle class] mom, who took scarcity for granted, Eva bought whatever she wanted. If she went into a shop and something caught her eye – a book of Matisse drawings, a record, Yin and Yang earrings, a Chinese hat – she bought it immediately. There was none of the agonizing guilt over money we all went through. (BS 114)

There is a guiltless ease with money. The upper middle class displays, as Eva does here, an exaggerated carelessness in its relationship with money; with her, this could be seen as a conscious effort to set herself apart from the petit bourgeoisie and its frugality, which is an essential element of lower middle class identity. This restrained attitude towards consumption is best fictionalized in the novels with Margaret's amusing ritual of eating a whip:

> In the living room, Mum was watching Steptoe and Son and taking a bite from a Walnut Whip, which she replaced on the pouf in front of her. This was her ritual: she allowed herself a nibble only every fifteen minutes. It made her glance constantly between the clock and the TV. Sometime she went berserk and scoffed the whole thing in two minutes flat. 'I deserve my Whip," she'd say defensively. (6)

The lower middle class woman cannot come to terms with the pleasure of eating. Regulations and restrictions must always guard her consumption. If she breaks out of her self made cage, she immediately is confronted with guilt.

The diverging consumer mentalities affirm that the upper middle class is a far more desirable context for the protagonists. Here, refinement and hedonism do only serve the satisfaction of the individual's needs, whereas in the suburbs one encounters a hollow materialism, in which "display" (BS 75) and the respect of the community are more important than the actual use-value.

3.5 Culture and Class

3.5.1 Possession of Culture as Marker of Difference

Attitudes to culture are an important way of pointing out a "fundamental distinction between these class groupings [lower middle class and upper middle class] –irony vs. earnestness, cultural knowledge vs. ignorance." (Felski 41) In terms of the upper middle class, the possession of culture is the most important difference between them and the lower middle class of the suburbs. The latter is commonly associated with a lack of understanding of culture. Those people are generally seen as living "a rather restless, cultureless life, centring around tinned food, Picture Post, the radio and the internal combustion engine." (Orwell 255) The value system of the lower middle class is-as has been argued above- occupied with the consumer goods signifying status. A typical representative of this mentality is Sinclair Lewis' real estate dealer Babbitt, who has an "enormous and poetic admiration, though very little understanding, of all mechanical devices." For him, these modern conveniences replace culture as "symbols of truth and beauty." (Lewis 73) In the suburb, culture is of marginal importance. "We thought –I don't know why- that things would be enough," (I 17) says Jay about his youth. Shahid says of his parents that "[t]hey

can't love the arts," (BA 8) considering this a great shortcoming, but he soon realizes that his new Muslim friends can neither. In both *The Buddha of Suburbia* (75) and "Finishing the Job," (88) Kureishi contrasts the suburban obsession with display with the desire for refinement and culture. The suburb is coherently constructed as a "world largely without books, or music, or knowledge of art that nevertheless affirmed, from a respectful distance, the vital importance of education and the improving value of culture." (Felski 40) The latter suggests that the lower middle class accepts culture as marker of class difference. Kureishi's teacher Mr. Hogg is a prototypical example of the above idea that culture is valued as a sign of social superiority: "[He] had a somehow holy attitude to culture. 'He's cultured,' he'd say of someone, the antonym of 'He's common.' (EA 106) In this mentality, culture becomes an object, something whose sole purpose is its display, rather than the deep understanding of its message. The lower middle class has a "craving respect for high culture, accompanied by almost complete ignorance of its content." (36) However, the valorisation of education that one can observe in the characters can be said to be directly linked to this structure of feeling.

3.5.2 Class and Literature

Literature is a strong marker of the difference between classes. Kureishi's novels present class-specific canons and thus construct suburb and city as two distinct spaces, a representation which of course depicts culture in the lower middle class as non-existent. The cultureless culture of the suburb is expressed in a specific lower middle class canon which highlights obsession with tidiness, intellectual simplicity and practical-mindedness:

> [The stereotypical lower middle class woman] would read "home-improvement books, which she always wraps in brown paper, so the cover won't get soiled. Bryan's home-library of Do-It Yourself manuals and *Reader's Digest* condensed books are practically pushing the carved wise-owl bookends off the colour telly. (Cooper 309 ff)

The Buddha of Suburbia cites the above canon: In the house of Carl and Marianne, where Haroon holds one of his first sessions as guru, Karim beholds a "row of fat books handtooled in

plastic –abridged versions (with illustrations) of *Vanity Fair* and *The Woman in White*." (30) The latter prove that Carl and Marianne have "'culture'" (35) as Karim ironically comments. In Sevenoaks, where Shahid comes from, people are only interested in "gardening guides, atlases, *Reader's Digest*." (BA 27) The television soap opera is the dominant narrative genre. Karim says of his mother that "[s]he'd died for *Steptoe and Son, Candid Camera* and *The Fugitive*." (20)

The difference between these people and the protagonists is highlighted through the reading of the central characters. Especially the first two novels refer to specific authors and their works, underlining that the protagonists do not belong into the lower middle class. *The Black Album* abounds with references to writers and their novels, maybe because of the importance of literature as marker of different mentalities in this novel: Rushdie, Proust, Dostoevsky, Kundera, Garcia Marquez, Popper, Miller, Laski, Freud, Lawrence, Wilde, Wright, Ellison, Walker, Morrison, Thompson, - all of whom are read and appreciated by the protagonist. Karim frequently refers to specific books such as "*Tropic of Cancer* and *On the Road*, and the plays of Tennessee Williams" (BS 92) he is reading and Haroon's "favourite all-time writer" (BS 114) is Chekhov, just as of father and son in *Intimacy*. (41) The house of Jay and Susan is generally described as full of "latest magazines and newest books." (9) Moreover, the love for literature is made into a sign of social mobility. The almost fetishistic value attached to literature becomes clear when looking at the way books are standing for the initiation into urban culture. The reception of a text signifies people's aspirations and their initiation into the world of culture, of intellectual and social progress. In this respect, the novels function in terms of the lower middle class's own story of social mobility through education. After Karim moves in Eva's house, she gives him a book, Oscar Wilde's short story *The Selfish Giant.* (BS 93) Karim's reception in the London-bound family of Eva is emphasized by the reception of a book. Haroon's awakening passion for "Lieh Tzu, Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu" (26) whom he reads "as if they'd never been read before, as if they'd been writing exclusively for him," (26) is the beginning of his

estrangement from his wife and his friend Anwar. His passion for books is the start of his new life. Deedee Osgood's life fundamentally changes when "one of the other women [a fellow prostitute] gave me an article by Gloria Steinem." (BA 114) Her intellectual interest is sparked and she starts to get involved in the women's movement and subsequently enters university.

Particularly *The Black Album* is concerned with reading and attitudes towards literature as a marker of difference between groups. Attitudes towards learning and literature determine the lines of conflict within the story. Shahid's enthusiasm for culture is a sign of his willingness to be educated. (BA134) The ambition master culture brings him together with Deedee and separates him from his materialistic suburban family and from the Muslim fundamentalists. Interest in culture thus makes Shahid experience himself as someone who belongs, to Deedee and the world which she represents. At the same time, he experiences himself as an outsider, in his family and later in his peer group. The strife for education is thus a process of integration and affiliation and an overcoming of isolation:

In the family, Shahid has always been an outsider due to his "bookishness." (41) He has "a ton of books" (18) in his student flat "and many more at home," (20) whilst his Yuppie brother Chili, "who boasted of never having read anything" (43), says that "literature is a closed book to me." (43) Instead, he has drawers full of designer sunglasses and expensive suits. Their father's relationship to reading is illustrated as he and his sons visit an expensive tailor: "[H]e and the manager turned the fat books of cloth squares, patterned and plain, like scholars peering into manuscripts." (53) He is a scholar on appearances, and that is his closest contact with literature. Therefore he likes to read comics. (52) As Chili, he has no understanding of the purpose of culture. After Shahid has taken out a girl and read poetry by Shelley to her in a haystack in the countryside, his father asks him about the date. The dialogue shows that he is not able to recognize the romantic atmosphere as he concentrates on what happened on the physical level between his son and the girl.

> 'Did you touch her?' Papa stabbed at his own wheezing chest. 'or further down,' he continued, slapping his legs, as thin as a medieval Christ's. Chili was smirking in the doorway.
> 'No.'
> 'What have you been doing?'
> 'Reading poetry.'
> 'Speak up, you bloody eunuch fool"'
> 'Reading Keats and Shelley to her.'
> 'To the girl?'
> 'Yes.'
> 'Did she laugh at you?'
> 'I don't think so.'
> 'Of course she did!'
> Papa and Chili couldn't stop laughing at him. (52)

For both father and brother, the books worth reading contain tangible material or their reading must lead to tangible sensations. Being interested in culture as such is "effeminate". (41) Besides his family, his new found friends at university, the Muslims, do reject culture as well. Consider the following discussion between Chad and Shahid:

> 'Why do you read'em?'
> 'Why?'
> 'Yeah, what's the point?'
> Chad looked hostile. It wasn't an objective enquiry.[... But it was exactly to discuss such subjects –the meaning and purpose of the novel, for example, its place in society- that he had come so keenly to college.....
> He began, 'I've always loved stories.'
> Chad interrupted: 'How old are you -eight? Aren't there millions of serious things to be done? (20)

The cultural and political conflicts which are central to the book tie in with the motif of class difference. In the novel, the Muslims are -like the family - a group Shahid has to individuate from in order to progress on the path to integration into upper middle class culture, which comes to him in the person of college lecturer Deedee Osgood. For her, as for Shahid, literature is a heart-felt passion. (BA 134) Like food, culture is best valued when it is shared between people, and what is best –between lovers.

3.5.3 Upward Mobility and Integration

The lower middle class sphere is therefore one in which the protagonist is isolated with his full hearted interest in culture. In "The Rainbow Sign," Kureishi portrays this suburban ignorance and rejection of the individual taking serious interest in culture.

> When, later, I went to college, our neighbours would turn in their furry slippers and housecoats to stare and tut-tut to each other as I walked down the street in my Army-surplus greatcoat, carrying a pile of library books. I like to think it was the books rather than the coat they were objecting to –the idea that they were financing my uselessness through their taxes. Surely nurturing my brain could be of no possible benefit to the world. (109 ff)

Note how the possession of culture is again signified by the possession of books. Kureishi conveys the impression of himself as an outsider in a community that cannot understand the desire that someone wants to be an artist, someone solely concerned with culture. The latter is not considered useful. Shahid's father expresses this attitude holding that literature is only concerned with "flowers and trees and love and all." (BS 75) Kureishi paints the suburb as a space in which "thinking and argument are taboo" (TRS 50) and where one can observe "a Victorian fear of revealing so much as a genital of an idea, the nipple of a notion or the sex of a syllogism." (51) The individual in his desire for knowledge is thus essentially different from his community. Within this context, the story of the individual becoming an artist is the most radical dissociation the lower middle class since this profession is by definition beyond its scope. Therefore one encounters resistance to the protagonist's aspiration in the suburb. In *Gabriel's Gift*, Christine shows regression into such lower middle class thinking. She wants her son to become a lawyer in the film industry. (119; 162) This job would combine the useful and the artistic. The prospect of a son making a living of his creativity troubles her, understandably though, as she lives together with a failed artist herself, Rex. "She didn't want Gabriel to fail at school, for fear he would become an artist." (12) Her concern echoes that of Shahid's father that "these artist types are always poor." (BA 75)

Cultural sophistication and genuine interest in it are major ways to set characters apart from the suburban sphere and represent their affiliation with the upper middle class. However, just as houses and cars in the suburban lower middle class, eloquence and knowledge are the objects that are needed to be accepted within the middle class of the city. The desired integration into the urban society is thus based on the possession of cultural sophistication. Display is the game. The logic of the lower middle class is repeating itself here. The success of social mobility depends on a character's display of sophistication. Being in London is being in the territory of the upper middle class, "the most intelligent and most educated." (Cooper 32) If one wants to merge with this society one must have intellectual capital and be able to show this. So Karim observes when Eva "spoke of the new Dylan Album and what Riverside studios was doing, I saw she wanted to scour that suburban stigma right off her body." (BS 134) Cultural capital is the "easy talk of art, theatre, architecture, travel; the languages, the vocabulary, knowing your way round a whole culture." (177) Shahid is exactly after this when he "cursed himself for being inarticulate and ignorant, just as he had been when Chad had asked him why he loved literature. But it was a spur too: he would have to study, read more and think, combining facts and arguments in ways that fitted the world as he saw it." (BA 99) He is trying to understand "Rembrand, Picasso and Vermeer" (19) and to tackle the "migraine reads [,] Turgenev, Proust, Barthes, Kundera: what did they have to say? Why were they respected?" (135)

3.6 Narrative Dynamic

Here one can see that social mobility is indeed connected with movement which comes to be understood as intellectual progress in terms of education. In order to belong to London's community, one must actively change. The spur to progress is the fact that lower middle class identity is a source of shame, which is "a sense of failure or lack in the eyes of others." (Felski 39)

Social progress is therefore always double edged, juxtaposing the pleasure to escape the past with the feeling of being predetermined by it. One merit of the novels is their awareness of this ambiguity: "When I [Karim] compared myself with Eleanor's crowd, I became aware of that I knew nothing: I was empty, an intellectual void." (BS 177) Being confronted with Eleanor and her intelligent and educated friends, Karim's enthusiasm for London and his freshly awakened interest culture is contaminated with the feeling of inadequacy; his socialisation in the suburb is felt as inappropriate and worthless. Shahid is also anxious that in London he could be "with people who had knowledge which might exclude him." (BA 20) Thus he is reading and hereby educating himself "for fun and out of fear." (20) The fear is that one leaves oneself wide open and becomes recognized as lower middle class by one's peers, as the antagonist of the community to whom one desires access. Kureishi makes clear that the lower middle class individual has great difficulties to move beyond this sense of shame and insufficiency. Karim knows that as a suburbanite the social dialect of the intellectuals is always only a "second language, consciously acquired." (BS 178) Even towards the end of the novel, when his professional breakthrough is achieved, he keeps referring to himself as being lower middle class. (270) He sticks to the idea that class is "in the blood and not in the skin," (134) implying that –as with race- one is essentially marked by birth, and one cannot escape one's origin. (134) Equally, Jay characterises himself as "lower middle class and from the suburbs" (I 22) and although he lives in a household which is essentially upper middle class, (22) the middle classes remain referred to as "they." The person-deixis shows that he excludes himself from the class he obviously belongs to due to his money, education and profession. These are expressions of the awareness that "educational mobility is not quite social mobility." (Williams, *Long Revolution* 348) One might understand the following statement from "Some time with Stephen" in this context of ambiguous class mobility. "There should be a fluid, non-hierarchical society with free movement across classes and that these classes will eventually be dissolved." (145)

On the individual level, the dissolution of the class system is only possible by self-negation, by dissociating from one's past. Karim knows that in London "my past wasn't important enough, wasn't as substantial as hers, [Eleanor] so I'd thrown it away." (BS 178) That is both easy and necessary to guarantee movement: "It wasn't difficult. I'd left my world; I had to, to get on." (178)

One might read the admiration for the city and its culture and the negative representation of the lower middle class as a performative dissociation from one's past. The protagonists look down on their past. It is interesting that with respect to race, Kureishi openly speaks about himself as suffering under the English stereotypes, (TRS) and these are openly accused as an imposition on the individual. Being lower middle class, however, is acknowledged as an undesired identity even by the class itself. This treatment shows that indeed "lower-middle-classness is not so much an identity as a non-identity." (Felski 34) The novels use this vacuum to make development feasible and indeed seem natural. And due to the geographical location of class, the movement into the city becomes a self-generated dynamic in the novels. Moreover, the very structure of the setting that always transforms the past into a cage is an affirmation of the need to separate oneself from one's origin.

4. The Individual in Society Part Two: Domesticity and its Discontents

4.1 Movement and Stagnation

4.1.1 Introduction

This chapter is concerned with the way the novels structure the fictional landscape in terms of another form of social organisation, the family. Here, the focus of analysis closes in on the individual in relation to the private sphere. Parallel to class, one can observe that the setting constructs the domestic sphere of the protagonist's past as a cage, as a state one has to get away from. He again connects the suburb to a specific structure of feeling that is contrasted to London life. And again, the suburban past haunts the urban presence.

The family is an important factor of the desire to leave one's origin. Already at the beginning of *The Buddha of Suburbia*, Karim states that "I was looking for trouble, any kind of movement, action and sexual interest I could find, perhaps because things were so gloomy, so slow and heavy, *in our family*, I don't know why." (3, emphasis added) Like Karim, as will be shown, all protagonists take their sceptical attitude towards the institution of the family from their own experience as children in an unhappy family. Even more than with class one can here observe that the conflicts between urban and suburban life are manifested along the generational boundaries. Sukdhev Sandhu calls this aspect of Kureishi's writing the "attack on the cult of home," ("Paradise Syndrome" n. pag) a cult followed by the suburban parents. In this context, London's "chief glory is that it isn't home." (n. pag)

4.1.2 Escaping Stagnation

The novels associate the domestic sphere with personal stasis in a relationship. For Jay, "[at] home, for me, there is no movement." (I 100) Christine tells her son that the "petrification – that means things staying the same was killing me." (GG 115) Here, the connection to Kureishi's

main theme is emerging: the idea of change and movement as necessary aspects of human life. Leaving the home becomes a necessity and hereby the plots obtain dynamic.

> I have been trying to convince myself that leaving someone isn't the worst thing you can do to them. Sombre it may be, but it doesn't have to be a tragedy. If you never left anything or anyone, there would be no room for the new. Naturally, to move on is an infidelity –to others, to the past, to old notions of oneself. Perhaps everyday should contain at least one essential infidelity or necessary betrayal. (I 5)

As with the denial of one's lower middle class origin, the separation from one's original context is a basic way to effect change in life. What the characters who wish to leave their parents desire is the start of a self-determining life, which is a life outside the family. Sukdhev Sandhu identifies in *The Buddha of Suburbia* as the motivation for moving into the city the "urge to be free, mobile, and to escape from the shackles of domesticity." ("Pop" 135) In the whole first part of *The Buddha of Suburbia*, the text emphasizes the relationship between Karim's depressive home and the desire for leaving the home for London by making expressions of the latter follow scenes of domestic trouble. (3, 5, 8, 18, 19, 50) In *The Black Album,* the death of Shahid's father brings about the end of the extended family that centred on the father: "Without him, the family had seemed to fly apart." (16) For Shahid, London brings the promise of change: "The city would feel like this; there had to be ways in which he could belong." (16) The narrator emphasizes that he has "come to college to distance himself from the family." (7) Similar to Karim, Jay desires to leave his home because he cannot bear the unhappiness and the deadlock situation of his parents' marriage: "As a boy, I would sit in my bedroom with my hands over my ears while my parents raged at one another downstairs, convinced that one would kill the other and then commit suicide. I imagined myself walking away like Dick Whittington with a spotted handkerchief tied to a stick over my shoulder." (I 19f) This combination of imagination and the will to escape the family appears in *Gabriel's Gift* too, when Lester remembers that "[s]ometimes I think I became an artist because it was the only way I could avoid my parents. They argued and I escaped into the back room to read comics and draw and listen to records." (53) Jay's lover

Nina has "run away from home when her mother's boyfriend smashed through the glass in the front door with his hands, and she was forced to hide in a cupboard." (I 65)

The desire to "escape" the family and to seek less organised forms as temporary replacement is featured in three novels: In the evenings, Karim "often went to the park to sit in the piss-stinking shed and smoke with the other boys who'd escaped home." (BS 19) Jay runs away from home for a day, (I 20) and after this episode, he often goes to a hippie commune where "most of the kids were like me, fleeing something: their homes." (20) Gabriel also spends his afternoons in a commune for some time. (GG 15) Yet in this episode, Kureishi does not present the motivation for going there as a proper escape from home. Gabriel is not like the other kids in the commune who indeed are refuges, "blown down from the North" (15) to whom "[t]errible things had happened." (16) But Gabriel does not fit here. Yet his choice to hang around there emphasizes that the separation from the family is a necessary and universal step in the process of maturation: Gabriel goes there because he "required other worlds and needed to move away from his parents." (17) The episode in the commune might be seen as a first instance of Gabriel's process of self-realization, which becomes the main motif of the novel.

The need to gain distance from the family is what Karim learns as well: "[I]n London psychologists were saying you had to live your own life in your own way and not according to your family, or you'd go mad." (BS 62) Note how this idea of maturation is here connected to the city. Being liberated from ones affiliation to the domestic sphere enables the protagonists to develop and mature. Thus all men find their vocation when they are on the move, away from the family and the domestic sphere.

4.1.3 Domesticity and Space

The country versus the city dichotomy is a contrast between what is felt by the protagonists as an enclosed, regulated space and a wide, diverse and open one. Here, Kureishi's image of

the city is quite similar to that of Raymond Williams: "For a city like London could not easily be described in a rhetoric or gesture of repressive uniformity. On the contrary, its miscellany, its crowded variety, its randomness of movement were the most apparent things about it especially when seen from the inside." (*Country and City* 158ff) Sandhu brings forward a similar notion of the city as a space of liberation from "homes, from families, from 'bourgeois' constraints" ("Pop" 143) for the protagonists. This sense of openness and opportunity of urban life characterises the city in Kureishi's novels. It manifests itself in the metaphor of the two spheres as narrow and wide spaces. Kureishi's London is a far more open and less enclosed space than the suburb. This sense of urban wideness is best described by Karim, for whom "London seemed like a house with five thousand rooms, all different; the kick was to work out how they connected, and eventually walk through all of them." (BS 126) A similar idea of wide and narrow spaces appears in *The Black Album* as well, but here, the narrator uses it to describe the stifling atmosphere of the suburb. "Despite London, things could get small in England. You wanted to put your arms out and push everything open." (112) The same idea comes up in *The Body* as well; Adam sees Britain as "a dreary, narrow place full of fields, boarded up shops and cities trying to imitate London." (6) The paradigm of the suburb is the boarded up house, the closed window, the restricted space. This implies that moving to London always implies liberation, a breaking into the great wide open. In *Intimacy, Gabriel's Gift* and *The Body,* moving within London has the same meaning. The pattern Kureishi always uses is the adventure of a man in a non-domestic London: the story of moving into the great wide open.

4.2 Leaving the Bourgeois Family

4.2.1 Introduction

Bart Moore-Gilbert observed that all of Kureishi's novels are characterised by a general pessimism towards the family, which is "characteristically represented as a highly dysfunctional institution. ... It is hard to think of a family which functions with more than moderate success in Kureishi's work, and recent writing like *Intimacy* and the short story collection *Midnight all Day* (1999) reflects a deepening cynicism about its effects." (*Hanif Kureishi* 22) Yet the author is not pessimistic about relationships as such. The narrative resolution of *The Buddha of Suburbia* and *Gabriel's Gift* suggests that families can work. Eva and Haroon marry at the end of *The Buddha of Suburbia*, and it is reported in *Gabriel's Gift* that they remain so until their death. (125) And Karim, who -confronted with the strained marriage of his parents- tells his mother that he'll never marry, (BS 18) is reported to do so in *Gabriel's Gift*. (125) Rex and Christine marry after they have reunited at the end of the novel. After Jay has voiced his rejection of the concept of marriage, he asks Nina if she would marry him, (I 55) what she declines. Ergo, even *Intimacy* does not reject the idea of permanent relationships. But this novel is very eloquent in characterising a form of family Kureishi's characters abhor and flee. This is what one is here deemed the bourgeois family, which often manifests itself in the protagonist's home. It is this form of the family which represents the domestic low that Moore-Gilbert has pointed out above. It is a family whose negativity is amplified in especially in *Intimacy* by its suggested repetition in the relationship of Susan and Jay.

4.2.2 The Cage of Bourgeois Domesticity

Bourgeois domesticity and the negative narrowness experienced in most of the novel's families are closely related, due to the interdependence of the two ideas. Edward Shorter showed

for example in *The Making of the Modern Family* "that the bourgeois family emerged as a nest of domesticity, as a private world withdrawn from society, when the capitalist economy liberated individuals from community constraints." (Poster xiii) Mark Poster considers privacy a fundamental aspect of the bourgeois family: "The family was a private micro-world, a sanctum into whose hallowed chambers no outsider had a right of entry." (Poster 170) The parallel to Kureishi's notion of the family as enclosed and narrow space is evident. Yet here, it is a chosen isolation from the world. Kureishi wrote about this social indifference in "Some Time with Stephen:" "There is a refusal to admit to humanity beyond the family, beyond the household walls and garden fence. Each family as an autonomous, self-sufficient unit faces a hostile world of other self-contained families." (170) It is Sigmund Freud who has described the turn from self chosen isolation to neurosis that Kureishi's novels depict as well:

> Freud remarks: 'The more closely the members of a family are attached to one another, the more often do they tend to cut themselves off from others, and the more difficult it is for them to enter into the wider circle of life.' Positively stated, the nuclear family emphasizes intimacy, privacy and companionship; negatively stated, the intensity of family relationships are multiplied and the child must find all its emotional needs expressed in terms of the narrowest possible circle of people. The general result of these conditions, Freud states, is men who are sexual perverts and women who are neurotic. (Poster 14)

Freud did recognize that this bourgeois culture of isolation and its strict morality and especially its repressive attitude towards sexuality is at the source of childhood conflicts. But Poster criticizes Freud convincingly for neglecting the constitutive power of the parents on the child's individuality. For Freud, "[t]he fact that children become attached to their parents is simply a by-product of their individual quest to satisfy needs." (6) According to Poster, Freud hereby universalizes "the bourgeois family as a universal and necessary institution." (2f) For the author of *Critical Theory of the Family,* conversely, the child's psyche is developed by the parents. For instance, Poster sees the child's fixation on its penis in the phallic stage not as the child's in-born interest, but as a consequence of the parent's anxiety with the child's sexuality: "The parents repress the activity and at the same time give to the penis its extraordinary significance."(6)

> The parents teach the child to be phallocentric and to keep this phallo-centrism out of his consciousness and behavior. Because the threat is so ultimate the child learns the value of the penis to his parents and to society. To Freud, however, the value of the penis was somehow already there for the child. (7)

With this criticism of Freud he wants to underline that the individual is always already constituted by society and hence by a specific culture. This chapter suggests that following his argument, one can analyse the protagonist in the family as impeded by both the parents and their socio-cultural formation, the bourgeois family. This allows to shift the focus from the issue of individual psychology in the child – parent relation to the analysis of the socio-cultural setting in which the characters of the novels are placed. Movement into the city is a strike of liberation from the bourgeois family and its culture of restriction and self-denial which is represented by the parents.

In *Intimacy,* the protagonists describes the family as "machine for the suppression and distortion of free individuals," (55) referring both to his own and that of his parents. As Kureishi's novels are dealing with the possibilities of individual change, it is evident that the social structure family becomes seen as an obstacle for individual development. Being in the family gets equalled with a state of self-denial.

The fundamental state of self-denial is the repression of one's emotions. This is for example described at the way the institution family replaces love with its own principles after the fire of mutual affection has faded away. "The strange thing about the sentimental pattern of the middle class is that romantic love rarely outlasted the first few years, or even months, of the union. 'Happily ever after' meant living together not with intense passion but with restrained respectability." (Poster 170) Karim calls this process the "organization of love," a love that had once been romantic, "into suburban family life in a two-up-two-down semi-detached in South London." (BS 26) This transformation implies that the partnership can no longer satisfy the emotional needs of the individual. However, due to the sanctity of the family for the middle class,

the relationship continues, although the individual suffers the loss of its desire for emotional satisfaction.

4.2.3 Bourgeois Domesticity and the Parents

It is especially the suburban parents' marriages that display the primacy of family values over the desires of the individual. Being of a different generation with different values, Jay leaves Susan, and Christine throws Rex out of the house. But such strokes of liberation are not possible in the first post-war generation. Here indeed, Freud's assumption of the universal character of the bourgeois family seems to be valid. Therefore the generation of the parents has therefore a limited option of choices. Jay's parents stay together because "[s]eparation wouldn't have occurred to a lower-middle class couple in the fifties." (I 45) Karim's parents are in the same situation: "divorce wasn't something that would occur to them." (BS 8) For these people, the sanctity of the family prohibits any pursuit of individual happiness that brings forth the destruction of the former. Accordingly, the above statement of Karim is immediately followed by his view that "in the suburbs, people rarely dreamed of striking out for happiness." (8) Accordingly, the domestic sphere is a place of a limited scope of agency and therefore a space of resignation and self-denial. "Both he [Jay's father] and mother were frustrated, neither being able to find a way to get what they wanted, whatever that was. Nevertheless they were loyal and faithful to one another. Disloyal and unfaithful to themselves." (I 44) The narrator emphasizes this characteristic of the family by quoting his friend Victor; this shows that the interpellation by bourgeois ideals is not restricted to the generation of the parents. Victor calls the idea of marriage "a kind of mad idealism. I made a promise that I had to fulfil at all costs. But why? The world couldn't possibly recover from the end of my marriage. I believed it without knowing how much I believed in it. It was blind, foolish obedience and submission." (49) Family life, after the partner lost the emotional interest in each other, is nothing more than such a state of "foolish obedience and submission:" "What did Father's life show me? That life is a struggle and that struggle gets you nowhere and is

neither recognized nor awarded. There is little pleasure in marriage; it involves considerable endurance, like doing a job one hates. You can't leave and you can't enjoy it." (44)

Jay's remark illustrates the connection of marriage and lower middle class work. Both imply a considerable amount of alienation from one's own fundamental desires and a state of personal stagnation and depression. It further shows that the son has learned his lesson; he is going to avoid such domestic unhappiness by leaving his partner. The answer to stagnation is movement.

The self.-denial of the parents in the bourgeois family denial is emphasized by their submission to the social roles of father and mother. In the bourgeois family, the roles of father and mother are clearly split and these are the roles the man and the woman have to fulfil:

> The husband was the dominant authority over the family and he provided for the family by work in the factory or market. The wife, considered less rational and less capable, concerned herself exclusively with the home, which she cleaned and decorated, sometimes with the aid of servants, to suit the social status of the husband. The husband was considered an autonomous being, a free citizen, upon whom the wife was dependent. (Poster 170f)

The family-man considers himself the head of the family, as the one without whom woman and children could possibly not survive. Jay says that his father could not imagine that "the women could take care of themselves. The man had the power and had to be protective." (43) This power is a vocation, an ethical responsibility at the same time: Thus, "to be accused of disloyalty would have been like being called a thief [for him]." (I 43) It is this idea of male responsibility that restricts the agency of the father and it is again a norm considered universal: "Being a father wasn't a question then." (87f) In *The Buddha of Suburbia,* one finds the same situation. Although Karim's father Haroon leaves his wife, he cannot overcome the feeling that this move is a transgression. He sees himself as "a criminal" (116) for leaving his wife and consequently as guilty: "There were occasions, when we were watching TV or just eating, when waves of regret rippled across his face. How badly he'd treated Mum, he told us." (116) Karim observes that the feeling of guilt "lay on him like water on a tin roof, rusting and rotting and corroding day after

day." (116) Haroon confesses Eva that he doesn't "believe in people leaving people." (116) His interior conflict shows that the process of separation is painful and takes a lot of consideration. (67) His belief in himself as centre of the family is underlines by his will rather to deny his wishes that to leave his family: "[Y]ou will all suffer so much and I would rather suffer myself than have anything happen to you." (67) This sense of fatherly responsibility is used to caricature Rex, who at the beginning of the novels is not of any use to his family. Yet he still sees himself as the head of the family:

> When I'm gone, you won't know what to do without me,' Dad used to say.
> 'When you're gone, Rex, we'll know exactly what to do. Our souls will soar. You're the ballast in our balloon, mate. We'll be better off in every way,' his mother replied. (GG 6)

The reality of his life caricatures the claim to be the head of the family. Christine has to fulfil this task. The novel thus optimistically shows how family-roles loose their power and gender specificity. Yet at the end of the plot, when Rex has found a new purpose in life and a livelihood and Christine's suffering under the strain of being a single mother, the story leads indeed to a restoration and affirmation of the traditional order of family-roles. The novel ends with a harmonious family in which Rex is the one who takes care of the family. He becomes the one who protects his wife: "Your mother suffered a lot over Archie. She deserves a break. I don't like her being a waitress. What I want is to support her financially, so she can do what she wants." (160)

Mothers are also characterised as victims of the bourgeois family, basically through the unequal distribution of work within the family, since they are the ones who have to manage the household. Although Kureishi's mothers do have jobs and are therefore on equal terms with the men, they are still solely responsible for the domestic work. The fact that there are no daughters in the families of the novels can be seen as a conscious choice that highlights the isolation of a woman within the family. The mother is always left alone with the domestic work. Take Karim's mother Margaret for instance: "Mum did all the housework and the cooking. At lunchtime she shopped, and every evening she prepared the meal." (BS 19) In her eyes, her family does not

give her any support: "[N]o one helps me. No one does anything to help me." (105) "Three selfish men, she called us." (20) Christine hits the nail on the head, when she answers a restaurant manager whether she has experience as service personal: "Experience, I said! I'm a mother and wife. I am used to wait on ungrateful, detestable people." (GG 7) As Haroon, Rex is not helping with the household: "After breakfast in the old days, [the time of the dysfunctional partnership, before their relationship gets transformed] when you'd [Gabriel] gone to school, he'd read the paper on the couch and ask what was for lunch." (158) In Jay's partnership with Susan, the latter is depicted as managing the household as well, doing both the cooking and the shopping. (I 22) According to Jay, Susan "likes to please," (I 23) because she had been brought up in that way. Therefore the position of the woman as the only one taking care of the household is not connected to male inactivity but to female socialisation. Women are educated into the role as only caretakers of the domestic sphere, as unselfish caretakers of the family, and they are not capable of individualism: "Women are brought up to think of others,' she [Eleanor] said, when I told her to protect herself more, to think of her own interests." (BS 176) Selflessness is socially expected for mother with children: "The ideal mother has no interests of her own ... For all of us it remains self-evident that the interests of mother and child are identical, and it is the generally acknowledged measure of the goodness or badness of the mother how far she really feels this identity of interests." (Alice Balint, c.f. Chodorov 77) Gabriel experiences the fact that he is Christine's son as a "wonderful power" (GG 76) that he has over her, since it allows him to "command her attention and make her his again." (76) But when he criticises Christine's new lover, she bursts out, showing that she suffers under the repression of her individualism as mother: "Kids –they only think of themselves. It's me, me, me with you lot. People don't know, or won't say, how much they hate their children." (118f) In a similar situation later, she tells her son to accept that she is not only his mother: "I've looked after you and now you're nearly grown. That was my duty and I've done it. Surely, now, I can live for myself a bit, eh?" (148) The idea of the

parents as existing only for the well being of their children appears in *Intimacy* as well, but from a different perspective, showing that Jay thinks within the same bourgeois patterns. When he leaves the house of his parents, he wonders what his parents will now do with their life: "Hadn't I rendered them irrelevant?" (46) He cannot imagine some other purpose in the life of his parents besides their 'being parents.' The fact that they rediscover their interest in each other shows that they themselves have been lifted from a burden. This focus on the partners as parents might be the reason why the novel never mentions their names but refers to them only with their parental role. In the family, "Father" and "Mother" have given up part of their identity, being defined through their parental responsibilities. Jay gets a glimpse of the demanding character of children as well, when his kids "demand ginger biscuits, as if I am a butler." (I 8) However, in their partnership Jay perceives that Susan actively excludes him from sharing her burden with him. "Susan cut me out too, keeping the babies and the competence to herself, her female friends and her mother." (86) This can be considered another aspect of Jay's negative characterisation of Susan. She is depicted here as actively supporting bourgeois patterns.

4.3 The Non-Domestic City

4.3.1 Alternatives

Although the partnerships of Jay and Susan, and Rex and Christine show that domestic discontent is not an exclusively suburban phenomenon, the city is a place where bourgeois notions of domesticity are overcome. In the city, one can strike out for happiness.

Looking at the relationships in the city, it becomes clear that the bourgeois patterns are closely related to generation of the parents. This becomes clear when the narrator says that Rex and Christine "weren't of a generation that got married." (GG 69f) It is the generation of the protagonists grown up in the late sixties and seventies, for whom "relationships were nonchalant

and easy, as if it had been agreed that confinement and regularity made people mentally sick." (I 18) In this sense, it is natural that Jay wants to move away from "Susan [who]... thinks we live in a selfish age. She talks of the Thatcherism of the soul that imagines that people are not dependent on one another. ... Fulfilment, self-expression and 'creativity' are the only values." (53) Leaving Susan becomes the rejection of her bourgeois values, "the unpleasant ones: duty, sacrifice, obligation to others, self-discipline." (53) In Jay's story, Susan turns their relationship into that of his parents and thus makes him recognize in his own relationship the unhappiness of his parents.

The non-domestic partnerships favoured by the protagonists are based on fear and rejection of the "confinement and regularity" (18) that they associate with their youth. For them, a relationship should not impede individualism. This notion of relationships is a product of the fundamental transformation of British culture and society in the sixties. The protagonists seek to live out the progressive concepts that imply the possibility of liberation from older, more inhibiting concepts such as the bourgeois family. This socio-cultural context will be presented in detail in the next chapter. Here it is sufficient to point to the emergence of the new paradigm of openness and self-centredness that the protagonists follow in conscious separation from the older generation. In this spirit, Deedee and Shahid decide to stay together "[u]ntil it stops being fun." (BA 276) The ideal relationship does not superimpose on the individualism of the partners. Adam and Margot form a good couple because they allow their partner his or her freedom: "[W]e didn't want to turn our marriage into more of an enclosure than necessary. We had agreed that I, too, could go on 'walkabout' if I wanted to." (TB 19) The novels always present individualism as a condition of happiness.

For one, this is highlighted in the representation of parents, who have been freed from the responsibilities of the domesticity. If the family falls apart, its members can be reborn as individuals. In *The Buddha of Suburbia*, Margaret's life changes in a positive way after Haroon has left her, Karim observes:

> I watched her transform the house from being their place –and it had only been a place, child-soiled, functional –into her home. She started to wear trousers for the first time, dieted, and let her hair grow. ... She cleaned as never before, with care and interest (this wasn't a chore now) ... . She washed down the walls and repainted doors smudged with our fingerprints. She repotted every plant in the house and started listening to opera. (144ff)

Here, Karim shows how much a woman can gain by not being restricted to being mother and wife anymore. "[W]hen she establishes her new identity, it is no longer merely that of being Karim Amir's mother, it is as a person in her own right." (Kaleeta 189) Jay reports a similar transformation in his parents when, being freed from the pressure of being parents after their sons had moved out, the two "started going to art galleries, to the cinema, for walks and on long holidays. They took a new interest in one another, and couldn't get enough of life." (I 46) Both cases are optimistic affirmations of the liberating potential of a disintegration of the core-family. This is felt by Christine, as well; her separation from Rex is accompanied by optimism for the future. She's confident that her escape from the domestic humdrum has done her good: "Look at me, don't I have some energy? Even more now, since he's gone." (115) But in this novel, the optimism is falsified by showing that she is not able to find a lasting new perspective in live. In the end, it is her husband, passive victim of the new domestic situation at first, who profits most from her act of liberation.

Secondly, one can observe that the disintegration of domestic structures is an important narrative device to bring dynamic into the plot, both the main plot and the sub-plot. With respect to the latter, there is the story of Chili leaving Zulma to chase his luck in the city, introducing both the story of the yuppie in crisis and the story of two different brothers into *The Black Album*'s plot. With respect to the main plot, the disintegration of the family after the death of the father is the context of Shahid's movement into the city. The main plots of *The Body* gets into motion by Adam's decision to leave the domestic sphere, and *Gabriel's Gift* gets its movement from Christine's decision to change her life. The same holds true of *The Buddha of Suburbia,* where the first chapter makes the reader notice Haroon's affair with Eva directly through the eyes of the

Peeping Tom Karim. It is the development of this affair that moves the plot into the city. The importance of this act is underlined by the fact that it is this episode of Karim's adolescent experience that Speedy tells Gabriel in *Gabriel's Gift*. (123)

4.3.2 Uninhibited Sexuality

The emphasis on individualism and the idea that the bourgeois domesticity inhibits the sexual satisfaction implies that leaving is connected to the search for the ideal form of sexual gratification. A central aspect of the new paradigms that allow the emancipation from the existing notion of domesticity is the belief in the importance and legitimacy of sexual gratification. This is again connected to the sixties challenge of the bourgeois structure of feeling. The author believes that due to the "excitement and originality" of these years (STWS 144) "openness and choice in sexual behaviour is liberating and that numerous accretions of sexual guilt and inhibition are psychologically damaging." (144f) Central here is the role of gratification of one's desire. "I am of a generation that believes in the necessity of satisfying oneself" (I 60) says Jay. London is a space that "has begun to come to terms with the importance of gratification" (TB 6) and where "life is bottomless in its temptations." (BS 8) the direction of the protagonist's movement is always heading into the city most often in search for sexual excitement.

In this respect the novels contain a very masculine sexual dynamic: there is the story of the man set on the move by his sexual needs. This correlates with the fact that with the exception of Adam, in the home of the family sex never takes place. Rex for example complains that his partner "could be a beautiful lover. ... That was when she bothered. But she stopped. It all stopped, and she started wearing those big grey knickers." (GG 95) When at the end of the novel, the two sleep together, (167) this reintroduction of sexuality into the domestic sphere signifies the successful transformation of the family. In *Intimacy*, Susan does not show interest to sleep with Jay. And none of the parents of the other novels are shown to have sexual intercourse

with their partner except Adam. Furthermore, this asexual domestic sphere is embodied by the figure of the mother who never gave her son the intimacy he desired. But this will be discussed in detail in the sixth chapter. Nonetheless, this makes clear that the protagonists are driven out of the house by the need for sexual satisfaction.

Intimacy is the best example of the idea that sexual frustration leads to movement. This is amusingly made clear by Jay's juxtaposition of his friend Victor's account of his last night's sexual adventure with his own reminiscence of the same evening: "I sigh. Wearing an old tracksuit and drinking beer in bed, coughing, smoking and listening to a late Beethoven quartet on my headphones." (12) Jay believes "in the possibilities of intimacy. In love." (I 101) The way he describes his affair with Nina suggests that physical intimacy and the sophisticated ways of its satisfaction are the basis of his love for her. Throughout the novel, Jay depicts himself as someone who needs the passionate confirmation of love through sex: he even states that "if she [Susan] lets me fuck her, here, now, on the floor, I won't leave." (103) Love and sexual gratification are inseparable, which leads to an odd form of pathetic love, since Jay states that "there are some fucks for which a person would have their partner and children drown in a freezing sea." (91) This statement emphasizes how much Jay rejects the bourgeois values of wife and family. In the novel, his male antagonist is Asif, for whom "marriage is a battle, a terrible journey, a season in hell and a reason for living." (33) He admonishes Jay that "[y]ou need to be equipped in all areas, not just the sexual" (33) Jay's –unspoken- reaction is an example of Kureishi's humour: "Oh, to be equipped in all areas." (33) Jay is unable to repress his sexual needs for the sake of the health of the bourgeois family. His universalism centres on his penis. In the conflict between social order and personal desire, Jay decides against the family, preferring gratification over repression: "Desire makes me laugh because it makes fools of us. Still, rather a fool than a fascist." (34)

As in *Intimacy*, Kureishi presents in *The Body* the conflict of responsibility and desire. Adam is a protagonist that rather like Asif holds that "impersonal love seemed a devaluation of social intercourse." (TB 59) Unlike Jay he values the web of social relations to which he belongs higher than his sexual needs. But he is not sure if this is the right stance: "Or was faithful love only an unnecessarily constraining bourgeois idiocy?" (59) There is a sense of conflict between principles and desire: "From the start of our marriage I had decided to be faithful to Margot, without, of course, having enough idea of the difficulty." (48) Although Adam constantly emphasizes his love for Margot, there is the sense of being tormented by social responsibility: Remembering his life as husband, he concedes that "it is hell to live in close proximity to and enforced celibacy with someone you want and with whom contact, when it occurs, is of an intimacy that one has always been addicted to." (48) Control of one's desire becomes a process of being policed by the super-ego. Conforming to his ideals "took as much maturity as I could muster, as did the realization that you have to find happiness in spite of life. I became a serial substitutor: property, children, work, raking the garden leaves, kept the rage of failure at bay." (48) The possibility to change into Leo offers him the chance of liberation from self-policing. Immediately after the above introspection he acts out his need for sex, by picking up a woman. Freed from his responsibility, he can rhetorically ask: "What were refinement and the intellect compared to a sublime fuck?" (49)

The libinal nature of individualism is affirmed by the way the novels present pornography and masturbation as the ideal form of sexuality in the context of the conflict between social responsibility and desire. In pornography and masturbation, as the narrator of *The Black Album* holds, "[t]here was no need to think of anyone else." (149) Adam can achieve the same effect through his use of the body of the young American model. In this respect, the book can be considered a big masturbation fantasy. Hiding his true social identity from the world allows him to enjoy sex without his former inhibition. As Ralph puts the ethics of newbody-ness into a nutshell:

"It's okay to be unfaithful ... It isn't you doing it." (TB 40) But the novel shows that the same disguise prevents him from forming social relationships and finally drives him into isolation. Yet initially, the story gets its movement from his enjoyment of slipping into the ideal male body with the perfect sexual organ. Adam's "guy" (25) is "as classically handsome as any sculpture in the British Museum ... neither white nor dark, but lightly toasted, with a fine, thick penis and heavy balls." (25)

The most detailed description of love making occurs in *The Black Album*. Here, sexuality, pornography and masturbation are juxtaposed. In the books' longest scene of sexual intercourse, the theme of observation of the other's body is already part of the setting. Madonna's song "What are you looking at?" (BA 117) harmonises with Deedee's invitation to Shahid to "look" (118) at her while she displays her vagina and masturbates. For Shahid, "without loosing her soul she was turning herself into pornography." (119) Juxtaposing the natural dynamic of sexual intercourse with their mutual yet separate masturbation, the scene exposes the nature of sexual satisfaction: They remain objects for each other until "face to face they jerked off together, and fell over laughing when simultaneously, they came." (119) In *Intimacy*, "Susan is offended by my [Jay] solo efforts," (I 79) but the woman to whom Jay finally moves, Nina, turns herself willingly into pornography, when she "encourages" Jay "to masturbate on her back, stomach or feet while she slept." (79) Adam's description of his first love-making as newbody shows the same ideal of objectification: "We became machines for making pornography of ourselves." (49)

This world of pleasure contrasts with the world of social responsibility. In this respect leaving is motivated by the desire for a form of sexual gratification that blends out the complexity of relationships that one experienced in the childhood almost only as dead-end streets. At the end of *Gabriel's Gift* the protagonist states his desire to avoid the intricacies of domesticity in favour of career and sex:

> 'Still, it's worse to think that we're going to turn out like our parents, don't you think?'
> 'I've never thought about that,' replied Zak. 'Christ, that's a hell to look forward to.

Never marry, I say!'
'Never marry!'
'Just screw and work!'
'Screw and work!' (*GG* 169)

5. The Individual in Society Part Three: Pop, Nostalgia and Identity

5.1 Introduction

Besides class and the family, Kureishi's novels take on different attitudes towards contemporary Britishness as a marker of difference between the suburb and inner-city London. This has already been touched upon in the last chapter with the issue of sexual liberation. Kureishi uses the general sense of the sixties as a breaking point in British culture and society. The major context of this dynamic is generational difference:

> I think we should, because the 'two nations' of our society may perhaps no longer be those of 'rich' and 'poor' (or, to use old-fashioned terms, the 'upper' and 'working' classes), but those of the teenager on the one hand and, on the other, all those who have assumed the burdens of adult responsibility. Indeed, the great social revolution of the past fifteen years may not be the one which redivided wealth among the adults in the Welfare state, but the one that's give teenagers economic power. (MacInnes 87)

Colin MacInnes holds that with the first post-war generation, the baby-boomers, English culture becomes divided along generations. Kureishi's novels capture this transformation. They present the thriving multiplicity of British subcultures, from hippie culture, mysticism to Punk and Rastafarianism. And these subcultures represent "in a spectacular fashion the breakdown of consensus in the post-war period." (Hebdige 17) The protagonist's affinity to these subcultures and their ideas makes them into "iconoclasts who shatter received representations to open a new space for invention, for new identities." (Oubechou 101) They embody adolescent rebellion against a petrified system. By rejecting old patterns of society, the protagonists reinvent themselves in the city.

The novels depict and draw energy from a Britain undergoing a two-pronged cultural transformation. Traditional Englishness is contested both from the country's own youth-cultures and by a process of transculturation inaugurated by the coexistence of different national cultures within one territory. Both processes challenge traditional conceptions of national identity, the hierarchy of culture and the subject's sense of a fixed stable self. Kureishi's protagonists are set

within this cultural context characterised by change. Their development mirrors Britain's coming to terms with this state of cultural plurality. Kureishi's protagonists are always seeking independence from preconceived identities. "Kureishi is less concerned with questions about the morality of Karim's supposed collusion with neo-colonialist versions of his 'otherness' than with the ways in which political positionings, whether of right or left, nationalist or pluralist, radical or traditional, can limit individual freedom." (Nasta 201)

What is central for Kureishi is the way society manages difference. The following sections lead to the conclusion that the desire to develop beyond fixed identities is a major narrative dynamic in the novels. Through dividing the British public sphere in two conflicting cultural positions, the novels gain momentum. The individual is initially set in a culture of essentialism, which slows down the development of the protagonists' identity by confronting his erratic search for happiness with the demand of fixation on a clear cut identity. Especially *The Buddha of Suburbia* and *The Black Album* present the quest of liberation from both internal and external dependence on essentialist identities and the development towards the awareness of identity as "theatrical performance." (Schoene 126) But in his most recent novel, Kureishi also explores this issue with the idea of the newbody.

However, even more than the actor, the pop star is the epitome of this culture. The pop star represents both social rise and a quintessentially urban form of liberation from predetermining essentialist forms of identity. "[P]op is part of an urban culture which constitutes an important feature of the book and of Kureishi's work in general: 'The city is a mass of fascination' says Sammy in *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid*." (Oubechou 107) "Swinging London," (Crosby n.pag.) both the habitat of The Rolling Stones, The Beatles and David Bowie becomes the epitome of change and hereby of the basic human condition Kureishi is interested in: "London represents an ideal, that of possibility, change, the transformation of both self and society." (Sandhu, "Pop" 141)

5.2 Different Approaches to Contemporary Culture

5.2.1 Redefining Britishness

Britishness is certainly one of the major topics of Kureishi's writing. Bart Moore-Gilbert has pointed out that "one of the key questions posed in his work is 'so what does it mean to be British?'" (*Hanif Kureishi* 4) Kenneth Kaleeta states in his monograph on the author *Hanif Kureishi Postcolonial Storyteller*: "Kureishi's stories illuminate a distinctive new national identity," (4) Similarly, John Ball sees Kureishi as taking on what he calls "Britain's traditional racial-national culture." (16) Kureishi himself has repeatedly made clear that he sees a need to redefine Britishness. For example, he states in "The Rainbow Sign:" "Now it is a more complex thing, involving new elements. Ergo, there must be a fresh way of seeing Britain and the choices it faces: and a new way of being British after all this time." (55)

The redefinition of Britishness is based on the paradigmatic shift from the notion of culture as a closed and uniform system of meaning to the concept of culture as a heterogeneous web of subcultural relations. It is a move away from the Anglocentrism that is the traditional core of Britishness. This constellation is based on the fact that Britishness is an identity that is first and foremost political, as Jeremy Paxman has pointed out. The term subsumes different ethnicities under one unifying political construct, the monarchy. Thus 'British' refers to all people subject to the crown, the English, the Scottish, the Welsh, the Irish. It does ignore specific ethnic differences. With the emergence of the 'British Empire,' first mentioned in 1604, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary* ("British" 563) 'Britishness' came to include a host of other ethnicities, expanding its frame of reference with the expansion of the British Empire. The imperial undercurrent of Britishness affirms that it is a hegemonic concept based on the expansion of English power. Englishness, imperialism and Britishness are highly confused. "Until the rise of Scottish nationalists it was common, even among the highly literate, to confuse Britain and England." (Bogdanor n.pag.) For Paxman, the reason for this is that the English based their

national identity completely on the idea of the United Kingdom and the British Empire. Being the dominating ethnicity in the British Empire, they "extinguished their [ethnic] identity within the idea of being British." (13) The English "have not spent a great deal of time defining themselves, [as English] because they haven't needed to." (23) Thus Britishness is the product of the most powerful peer-group within the nation metonymically identifying itself with the whole structure.

> Englishness is itself also uncertainly British, a cunning word of apparent political correctness invoked in order to mask the metonymic extension of English dominance over the other kingdoms with which England has constructed illicit acts of union, countries that now survive in the international arena only in the realm of football and rugby. The dutiful use of the term 'British' rather than 'English,' as Gargi Bhattacharyya observes, misses the point that in terms of power relations there is no difference between them: 'British' is the name imposed by the English on the non-English. (Young 3)

An example of the attitude that Young is exposing is Winston Churchill: "He was talking about Britain and the British Empire, but the values of that empire were the values which the English liked to think were something they had invented." (Paxman 2) Churchill's British patriotism was essentially English patriotism. Another example is George Orwell. Already the title of his patriotic essay about Britain "England your England," shows that one can find the same Anglo-centric essentialism here.

A major aspect of the discourse on British culture today is the process of dismantling Anglocentrism and its exposition as a hegemonic strategy to contain the existing heterogeneity of the national-political entity Britain. In an interview with Jonathan Rutherford, Homi K Bhabha points out this characteristic of the British public sphere:

> The changing nature of what we understand as the 'national population' is ever more visibly constructed from a range of different sorts of interests, different kinds of histories, different kinds of cultural histories, different postcolonial lineages, different sexual orientations. The whole nature of the public sphere is changing ... . (207)

This situation is the consequence of several developments in post-war Britain concerning history, society and culture, such as the process of decolonization, the growing influence of global pop culture or the movement of migrants from former colonies into Great Britain. The effect is that the distinctively English cultural tradition of Britain becomes challenged and supplemented on its

home turf. England is no longer exclusively England. For Berthold Schoene, Kureishi's novels deal with this issue: "The traditional Anglo-British identity has become untenably anachronistic. Its nationalistic representations are invariably out of time and place, and either evaporate, or calcify and crack in the tropicalized, polycultural climate of the 1980s and 1990s." (113) In "Bradford," Kureishi illustrates Bhabha's general description of contemporary British cultural reality on the level of everyday culture and thus gives a notion of how his setting represents modern Britishness:

> If one were compiling such a list [as the one of T.S. Eliot] today there would have to be numerous additions to the characteristic activities of the British people. They would include: yoga exercises, going to Indian restaurants, the music of Bob Marley, the novels of Salman Rushdie, Zen Buddhism, the Hare Krishna temple, as well as the films of Sylvester Stallone, therapy, hamburgers, visits to gay bars, the dole office and the taking of drugs. (78)

T.S. Eliot's list is often cited as the 'classical' Anglo-centric representation of what is typically British. Such an attempt to grasp a national character constructs what Raymond Williams has termed the "social definition of culture." (*Long Revolution* 57) According to the latter, culture is a "description of a particular way of life, which expresses certain meanings and values not only in art and learning but also in institutions and ordinary behaviour." (57) The presence of new religions, new forms of gratification and new tastes in food, music and literature implies that the notion of what is typically English must be revised. But Kureishi's novels show that such a revision does never leads to a new fixed list of Britishness, instead, the new notion of Britishness is based on the feeling of fluidity: "Change is everywhere in the book [*The Buddha of Suburbia*]. People change houses, sartorial styles, accents, cultural frameworks... and these constant changes point to the volatile nature of the British urban and modern identity in the 60s." (Oubechou 102) The novels are taking part in the discourse of reassessing Britishness. The following sections take a close look at what is here considered the centre of this discourse. This is the redefinition of culture from a non-essentialist point of view. Hereby it is very crucial to see how such theories contribute to the construction of a setting characterised by tension.

5.2.2 Hybridity

A central contemporary theoretician who tries to formulate a concept of culture based on fluidity is Homi K. Bhabha. Drawing on Derridean post-structuralism, he deconstructs the notion of culture in order to show that no culture is pure and essential. Cultures are in a constant state of flux, because they cannot be based on an essential structure. "[A]ll cultures are continually in a process of hybridity." (Bhabha 211) Bhabha's term 'hybridity' is referring to two different notions of hybridity which have been defined by Bakhtin as 'organic' and 'intentional' hybridity (Young 20ff): Organic hybridity refers to natural science, where it denotes the process of cross-breeding different species into a new one. This "organic hybridity" describes how through the interaction of different species, or cultures, something new emerges. But this productive process of synthesis is not possible in "intentional hybridity." Here, instead a unified whole becomes doubled and its meaning unstable and ambiguous: Hybridity is here linked to language and is inherent instability due to the arbitrariness of the sign:

> Hybridity describes the condition of language's fundamental ability to be simultaneously the same but different. This insight, often identified with Romantic irony, is central to the contemporary work of Derrida and de Man, who point to it as a general characteristic of language, an undecidable oscillation in which it becomes impossible to tell which is the primary meaning. (20)

Building on a poststructuralist understanding of the Saussurean signifier - signified relation, Bhabha asserts that cultures "*are* forms of representation," (Bhabha 210) and hence "have within them a kind of self-alienating limit." (210) Due to the very fact of arbitrariness, no culture can be considered a transparent system of meaning, a system which is irony-proof, because "meaning is always *constructed* across the bar of signifier and signified." (210, emphasis added) Because of this artificial nature, culture is always already open to hybridisation, to change and reinterpretation: "the 'originary' is always open to translation, so it can never be said to have a totalised prior moment of being or meaning –an essence." (Bhabha 210) Translation is a concept Bhabha borrows from Walter Benjamin and which – similar to intentional hybridity - does not

refer to the production of a faithful copy of the original but to a "way of imitating ... in a mischievous, displacing sense –imitating an original in such a way that the priority of the original is not reinforced by they the very fact that it *can* be simulated, copied, transferred, transformed, made into a simulacrum ...." (210)

Although Bhabha deconstructs the concept of culture, his theory holds that hybridity is always emerging out of the confrontation between two essentialist cultures, two "monoliths." (Moore-Gilbert, "Hanif Kureishi" 206) Therefore his notion of culture as fluid and non-essential "necessarily assumes its opposite, that there are such things as non-hybrid cultures." (206) His theory has been criticized for containing an essentialist agenda: "For all his anti-essentialist talk, Bhabha is, perhaps, the King Midas of essentialism." (Ahmad 75) Indeed, essentialism is the only way Bhabha might answer the following question posed by Bart Moore-Gilbert:

> If –as the post-structuralist thinking on which Bhabha relies so heavily teaches, as *The Buddha* seems to confirm –the identity of all social beings is not ontologically grounded but differential and relational, the question must be asked is: what is specific about the migrant and postcolonial identity and forms of agency? ("Hanif Kureishi" 206)

One must move away from the idea of his theory as a purely descriptive and look at it as having a specific agenda. He seems to need this constellation of two incommensurable cultures on either side of the "border-line" (206) because essentialism provides hybridity with a frame for a postcolonial identity that makes it appear innovative and progressive. It endows the persons standing between the two cultures with a dialectic advantage and transforms them into a new avant-garde. Bhabha uses hybridity to show that especially for the postcolonial migrant or the second generation immigrant there is no need to either assimilate into Western culture or to remain completely outside it. Instead, translation allows assuming a position 'in between' the two. This 'in betweenness' "involves a rejection of simplistic binarisms and oppositions such as colonizer/ colonized, heterosexual/ homosexual or margin/ centre in favour of a more conjoined, 'hybridized' explanation of identity in which, as it were, forever the twain shall meet."

(Sandhu, "Pop" 142) Bhabha's theory is concentrating on the enabling possibilities of an anti-essentialist concept of identity in the context of ethno-cultural differences.

This sense of avant-gardeness of hybridity is crucial to the analysis of culture that one finds in Kureishi's fiction. However, it is important to depart from Bhabha's exclusively postcolonial notion of hybridity. Such a notion of hybridity is in danger of preserving ethnicity as fundamental difference-creating category within the public sphere and hereby perpetuating the patterns of racism. Robert J. C. Young acknowledges this danger in *Colonial Desire*: "Hybridity here is a key term in that wherever it emerges it suggests the impossibility of essentialism. If so, then in deconstructing such essentialist notions of race today, we may rather be repeating the past than distancing ourselves from it or providing a critique of it." (27) Young, like Tzvetan Todorov, holds that "culture and race developed together, imbricated within each other" (28) Hybridity is therefore inclined to become a form of limitation on identity if considered too closely in connection with ethnicity. In Kureishi's novels, an exclusively postcolonial notion of hybridity cannot sufficiently describe the hybridity in the London of the non-ethnic novels *Gabriel's Gift, The Body* and *Intimacy*. The entanglement of hybridity and ethnicity in cultural studies might be the reason why most of the criticism of Kureishi's novels focuses on those works which deal with the issue of ethnicity, his films *My Beautiful Laundrette, Sammie and Rosie get Laid* and *My Son the Fanatic* and his novels *The Buddha of Suburbia* and *The Black Album*. Especially *The Buddha of Suburbia* is considered as a "paradigmatic example of post-imperial ethno-English writing." (Schoene 111) Thus it is no wonder that *The Buddha of Suburbia, Sammie and Rosie get Laid* and *My Beautiful Laundrette* receive 90 Percent of the academic criticism written on the author's work. (Moore-Gilbert, *Hanif Kureishi* 193) But in his recent novels, Kureishi's departure from Asian-British protagonists while at the same time retaining the motif of London as embodiment of a space of free play, of hybrid indeterminacy makes clear that one must look beyond post-colonialism to understand his affirmation of cultural heterogeneity and fluidity. Therefore one must

reconsider the set of people within the Third Space. In Kureishi's novels, the inhabitants of this progressive space are not only postcolonial identities but the whole generation of adolescents shaped by pop culture. It is thus of crucial importance to acknowledge the status of pop in the writing of an author who grew up in the Swinging Sixties.

5.2.3 Pop Culture

Far more than postcolonial hybridity, pop culture is shaping the identity of the protagonists. The hybrid potential of pop becomes clear when looking at the way it functions as subculture. Dick Hebdige has argued in his book *Subcultures* that subcultures achieve something similar to Benjamin's translation, since the "challenge to hegemony which subcultures represent is not directly issued by them." (17) Instead of being in direct opposition, "[the challenge] is expressed obliquely, in style. The objections are lodged, the contradictions displayed at the profoundly superficial level of appearances: that is, at the level of signs." (20) The rebellious character of subcultures lies in their use of the fact that everyday commodities, such as

> safety pins and tubes of vaseline [...] are indeed open to a double inflection: to 'illegitimate' as well as 'legitimate' uses. These 'humble objects' can be magically appropriated; 'stolen' by subordinate groups and made to carry 'secret' meanings: meanings which express, in code, a form of resistance to the order which guarantees their continued subordination. (17ff)

Subcultures use the material available in a culture to invent new meanings. They appropriate the present patterns of cultural signification and bend them to their own end. This is both translation and intentional hybridity. Due to their challenge of mainstream discourse from within its own unstable structure, subcultures possess the same hybridizing power as Bhabha's ethno-cultural hybridity. And the aim of subcultures is to create a third space, which "displaces the histories that constitute it and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives, which are inadequately understood through received wisdom." (Bhabha 211)

> They [Bowie-ites] were attempting to negotiate a meaningful intermediate space somewhere between the parent culture and the dominant ideology: a space where an alternative

> identity could be discovered and expressed. To this extent they were engaged in that distinctive quest for a measure of autonomy which characterises all youth sub-(and counter-) cultures (Hebdige 88)

Pop celebrates the indeterminacy of the sign and uses this feature to play with received values and concepts of British culture in order to express alternative positions. It thus creates the Third Space. "English pop is one of the few areas where class, race and background become subordinated to the eternal 'now' that is at the heart of pop music and where, as Rakim rapped, 'it ain't where you're from – it's where you're at." (Gilroy 120) Kureishi celebrates especially the pop star as the exemplary iconoclasts that "shatter received representations and open a new space for invention, for new identities" (Oubechou 101) One can consider pop stars as the role models for people who accept and live with the idea of culture and identity as "always fluid, complex and hybrid." (109)

Throughout Kureishi's oeuvre, the central hybrid culture is pop culture, not ethnicity. Kureishi's novels hold, as Bhabha, that hybridity is framed by monolithic cultures, hereby constructing a country versus city difference that celebrates the latter as progressive and liberating. Kureishi's novels show that such a perception of the coexistence of hybridity and its antagonist is not paradox but an observable characteristic of the British public sphere. Culture as such may be by nature hybrid, but at the level of the British public sphere, hybridity is just a specific intellectual position, "this new awareness" (Bhabha 213) that results from an understanding of the signification process. Yet people are free to choose what they consider right or wrong. Monolithic cultures are those in which essentialism provides the fundamental paradigm of the community. In this sense, hybridity is – as in Bhabha's theory – the progressive challenge to specific and manifest forms of essentialism as upheld by specific groups.

The development of the protagonists is Kureishi's novels are stories of migration, of being born into an essentialist community and moving into the world of pop. The implication of what one can deem a culture of essentialism is its notion of identity that due to the demand for an

essence or origin can be seen as limiting compared to a hybrid concept acknowledging the always already inherent potential of transformation of identity. The next sections look closely at the culture of essentialism and its antagonist, analysing the question why there are different cultural paradigms and how they enfold in the novels into an antagonistic space.

5.3 The Culture of Essentialism

5.3.1 Introduction

In Kureishi's novels, the essentialist concepts of identity that restrict the characters are connected to a society that is still characterised by traditional images and values. Kureishi attacks especially the Conservatives as the force within society that perpetuates anachronistic images of society. In his essays "Bradford," "The Rainbow Sign" and "Finishing the Job" he makes them responsible for the fact that the representations of the past still shape people's way of seeing society. But he shows that a society defining itself along its traditional paradigms can also breed new forms of essentialism. A case in point is Muslim fundamentalism. In Kureishi's *The Black Album* the fundamentalists are all second-generation British-Asians who challenge in their terms what they consider the hegemonic Anglocentric mainstream, constructing a counter-identity based upon the Koran.

But Kureishi also shows that those members of British society that consider themselves most progressive are also influenced by essentialist thinking. Especially *The Buddha of Suburbia* is presenting the urban liberals and their fascination for the marginalized subject. It shows that the liberals in fact perpetuate essentialist differences instead of stepping beyond them. Thus three groups are united in their upholding of non-progressive concepts of identity. All of them propagate non-progressive identities either connected to a past ideal, to the truth of the scripture, or based on the tolerance of an exotic other.

5.3.2 Nostalgia

Kureishi's protagonists grow up in a society that tries to come to terms with the liberating plurality of its public sphere by containing this difference. This hostility to change is best explained in terms of nostalgia. Nostalgia provides a good way to connect the heterogeneous hybridity of British society with both the notion of a culture of essentialism and generational difference, because the concept explains a felt unease with transitional periods in history.

> Sociologists have argued that nostalgia can develop only if three conditions are met. First, the occurrence of nostalgia is restricted to societies that share a linear view of time, in light of which the past is forever gone and the future unpredictable. Second, nostalgia occurs when the present seems deficient in contrast to the past, but third, only, if the past is somehow available in symbolic representations –images, objects, associations and so on. (Ritivoi 32)

Nostalgia emerges in periods of paradigmatic changes, such as the increasing hybridisation of British society in the sixties, when historic progress cannot be connected to a teleological explanation, to a contemporary master-narrative. Things seem to fall apart. Therefore, the past image of society and its paradigms are upheld. In such situations, "[n]ostalgia projects a mythic world, which is not only perfect, but also primordial, a world from which everything else unfolds." (Davis 35)

In *Yearning for Yesterday,* Fred Davis conceptualizes nostalgia as a psychological strategy at work in the constitution of identity. He is one of the "20th century sociologists [who] see nostalgia as positive process to reflect on one's past, analyse it and to incorporate change into the more familiar background of previous experiences." (Ritivoi 30) For Davis, "nostalgia can be defined as an effort to discover meaning in one's life, to understand oneself better by making comparisons between the past and the present, and thus integrating experiences into a larger schema of meaning." (29) But in nostalgia, the comparison between past and present always prefers the former over the latter. The feeling of nostalgia is "infused with imputations of past beauty, pleasure, joy, satisfaction, goodness...in sum, the positive aspects of being." (Davis 14) Compared with this idealized, almost pastoral past, the present is seen as more "bleak, grim,

wretched, ugly, deprivational, unfulfilling." (15) Davis explains this phenomenon as a psychological mechanism of identity formation, as "one of the means –or better one of the more readily accessible psychological lenses – we employ in the never ending work of constructing, maintaining and reconstructing our identities." (31) Nostalgia is both an emotion and a mode of consciousness: (122) It is the ego's reaction to a state of anxiety and instability, caused by transitions in society or personal history. If the present does cease to be intelligible for the individual, due to phases of transition such as the one from childhood to adolescence, an economic depression, a war, a revolution, the ego tries to counter the threat of what Davis deems identity "discontinuity." The ego always desires stability and continuity. It demands that events and experiences made in the course of one's life can be fit into a coherent history. If the red threat gets lost, nostalgia emerges. "In the clash of continuities and discontinuities with which life confronts us, nostalgia clearly attends more to the pleas for continuity, to the comforts of sameness and to the consolation of piety." (33) The main individual motivation to be 'nostalgic' is thus the maintenance of identity in the context of a "threat of identity discontinuity." (34) This refers to the conflict between an identity that is based on the idea of sameness and permanency and the fact that world, society and individual are undergoing constant processes of change. The discomfort comes from the fact that the individual desires a teleological perspective in which all events – present and past- combine to a coherent history. "Nostalgia thrives on transition, on the subjective discontinuities that engender our yearning for continuity." (49) As such, nostalgia is helpful in "establishing and maintaining a sense of personal identity." (Ritivoi 30) For Davis, nostalgia is a way of negotiating a connection between diverse parts of one's history under the unifying dualism of a past and a present. Because the individual lacks critical distance from the presence, the availability of the past as "reified object of analysis and interpretation" (Ritivoi 29) makes the latter a good "vantage point from which we make sense of our experience and identity." (29)

Davis makes clear that nostalgia is therefore an expression of an actual crisis: "Nostalgia tells us more about present moods than about past realities." (Davis 10)

> The nostalgic evocation of some pastoral state of affairs always occurs in the context of present fears, discontents, anxieties, or uncertainties, even though they may not be in the forefront of awareness, and it is those emotions and cognitive states that pose the threat of identity discontinuity that nostalgia seeks to abort or at the very least deflect. (34f)

For Berthold Schoene, the English middle class is clearly in a state of crisis that makes them susceptible to nostalgia: "The English middle classes, who find themselves demoted from the cultural centrality of colonial civil stations to the politically inconsequential realm of post-imperial suburbia, are presented as especially suffering from severe cultural dislocation." (112) The critic points out that the suburban middle classes are "especially suffering from severe cultural dislocation. Their dislocation is exacerbated by the fact that they now see their socio-economic status, cultural prestige and national identity challenged by immigrant populations from the British ex-colonies, who gradually ascend the social ladder to further equality and sameness." (112) The result is a resentment of disintegration affirming that "one of the most insistent desires articulated about the idea of nation [is] that above all else nation constitute a *unity*." (Derrida, c.f. Easthope 21) This need for an essentialist, coherent notion of Britishness is the nostalgia is the England of the past, both the pastoral England and England as colonial power. The result is that the English "are inclined to mistake themselves for who they once were," (BS 113) as Haroon puts it. It is not difficult to see that nostalgia connects directly with Raymond William's notion of the country. The latter is traditionally invoked as the unharmed idyll of the youth. It is an organic society, an older, better order. (*Country and City* 11) This is exactly the England rejected by the urban protagonists and desired by all those who cannot come to terms with the transformation of society.

5.3.3 Nostalgia and Conservatism

Kureishi attacks especially the Conservatives for sticking to the Englishness that Robert Y.C Young characterises as follows: "Today, the Englishness of the past is often represented in terms of fixity, or certainty, centredness, homogeneity, as something unproblematically identical with itself." (Young 2) This is the stable continuous identity that is re-invoked by nostalgia in a context where the meaning of British identity is re-negotiated from different sites. Especially his essays politicize the generational conflict by identifying the Conservatives as main social force concerned with a preservation of essentialist and limiting conception of Britishness. The suburb becomes the manifestation of this attitude, being seen as "Thatcherland." (FTJ 88) According to Kureishi, the Conservative nationalist tenet is that "the consciousness of nationhood is the highest form of political consciousness," (BF 76) and such a Britishness implies the necessity of "a unity of national sentiment." (76f) Their policy, as Kureishi observes, is aimed at ridding Britain of differences and plurality, returning to a state of national and cultural unity. They react to the multiplicity of contemporary culture by keeping alive an "outdated but still virile nationalist rhetoric, a rhetoric which sought to repress any real assertion of diversion from the status quo-view of region, class, economic and sexual preference." (Nasta 175) This is what Svetlana Boym calls restorative nostalgia:

> Restorative nostalgia conveys the desire to 'rebuild the lost home and patch up the memory gaps.' Restorative nostalgia taps into nationalism and/or political conservatism, and since it counts on the availability of a past situation beyond strictly symbolic representations, it is inevitably naïve, retrograde and even paranoid insofar as it tends to read its necessary failure to restore the past as sabotage, conspiracy, or persecution. (Ritivoi 32)

The ideal past that the Conservatives want to restore –or at least from which they bolster their concept of national identity- feeds from two different yet interrelated discourses. These are the rhetoric of imperialism and the patriotism of the Second World War. Restorative nostalgia suggests that all people who are different are declared enemies of society, since their difference, either cultural or racial, contradicts the paradigm of a uniform society. In his novels, Kureishi

shows how the individual suffers from being in a society which does not tolerate diversity. Most protagonists grow up in the England of the seventies and eighties that is characterised by the rise and the rule of the Conservatives, they live in a society pervaded by this nostalgia for what can broadly describe as pre-war England The suburb is the place where narrow Englishness is so condensed that the protagonist feels alienated from a society who does not fit their sense of themselves and even reject them. The solution in all narratives is the abandonment of the suburb for the city, which is more at ease with the fact of hybridity.

5.3.4. Nostalgia and the Empire

One of the central manifestations of British nostalgia is the glorification of colonial history. "[C]ontemporary Englishness is still, in Kureishi's eyes, defined too much in relation to the imperial past." (Moore–Gilbert, "Hanif Kureishi" 199) According to the critic, the author "felt himself to be growing up in a national culture which still took deep pride in its history of conquest and domination overseas, long after decolonization." (*Hanif Kureishi* 74) This imperial nostalgia bolsters the national self-image in a time of crisis because it "focuses on the [imperial] past; this enables the nation to be represented as a great international power, with all the glamour and prosperity which this entails." (78) It is therefore evoking a highly uncritical and celebratory notion of British history, one that for Salman Rushdie is centred on the British belief of their cultural superiority:

> Four hundred years of conquest and looting, four centuries of being told that you are superior to the Fuzzy-Wuzzies and the wogs, leave their stain. This stain has seeped into every part of the culture, the language and daily life; and nothing much has been done to wash it out.
> For proof of the existence of this stain, we can look, for instance, at the huge, undiminished appetite of white Britons for television series, film, plays and books all filled with nostalgia for the Great Pink Age." (130)

Kureishi makes Haroon express the divergence between the British self-image and the post-colonial reality: "[The English] still think they have an empire when they don't have two pennies to rub together." (BS 27)

In the eighties, especially the Conservatives evoked this Anglo-imperial nationalism, profiting from the yearning of their voters for a positive and glorious sense of national identity. They evocated a glorious imperial past that "seemed to support -or at least give comfort to- the New Right's vision of the need for a new national mission which would redirect a stricken Britain back to the path from which it had been seduced by welfare socialism." (Moore-Gilbert, *Hanif Kureishi* 72) The Tories offered a feeling of nostalgia based on colonial ideology and its inherent claim of British superiority to a nation in a state of crisis. And as the run on cultural products offering imperial nostalgia shows, there is an eager audience of such a vision of the past. They appeal to "the 'mimetic self' of an imaginary nation shaped both by 'stories of imperial greatness' and the lingering political rhetoric of such figures as Disraeli, Churchill, Enoch Powell and Margaret Thatcher." (Nasta 174)

Kureishi is highly critical and perceptive of the presence of imperialism in the contemporary British cultural production in the form of nostalgia:

> [A] lot of English 'art' also dwells, gloats on and relives nostalgic scenarios of wealth and superiority. It's easy therefore for Americans to see Britain just as an old country, as a kind of museum, as a factory for producing versions of lost greatness. After all, many British films do reflect this .... Even the recent past, the Beatles, punks, the numerous Royal Weddings, are converted into quaintness, into tourist mugs and postcards, into saleable myths. (STWS 149ff)

For Kureishi, the tendency to render the past –even the subcultural one of the sixties- into a nostalgic commodity seems to be a general tendency in British society.

5.3.5 Nostalgia and the Organic Community

Another important aspect of English national identity is a nostalgia that idealizes the English rural landscape and the things that are considered 'typically English' as the essence of the

British nation. Such an image of Englishness is closely connected to the representations of the past. Raymond Williams calls this the "escalator." (C*ountry and City*) Each period has its own idealized past whose form is determined by present concerns. Kureishi's novels are concerned with post war notions of Englishness. The latter are invoking English society as a homogenous culture. This is exactly what the Conservatives and their followers desire for contemporary England. The pre-war representation of Englishness which is invoked is mostly based on the ideas of T.S. Eliot and George Orwell.

For the former, English culture is "all the characteristic activities and interests of a people," and the latter are: "Derby Day, Henley Regatta, Cowes, the 12th of August, a cup final, the dog races, the pin table, the dart-board, Wensleydale Cheese, boiled cabbage cut into sections, beetroot in vinegar, 19th century Gothic churches, the music of Elgar, ..." (cf. Hebdige, 7) Karim is initiated into this Englishness by his uncle Ted: "We ate corned-beef sandwiches and drank tea .... He gave me sporting tips and took me to the Catford dog track and Epsom Downs. He talked to me about pigeon racing." (BS 33) In his wartime essays, such as "England your England," Orwell does the same as Eliot, namely trying to grasp a national character in terms of everyday culture: "Seeking to define a country that corresponded more closely to the reality of the lives of most of its citizens, he described a place of red pillar boxes, Lancashire dogs, smoky towns, crude language and lines outside labour exchanges." (Paxman 8) Orwell tries to capture what he considers the "distinctive and recognisable" (Orwell 193) English civilisation by referring to "solid breakfasts, gloomy Sundays, smoky towns and winding roads, green fields and red pillar-boxes," (193f) the English addiction to hobbies and spare time occupations which he optimistically reads as a sign of English individualism and an anti-official culture. He holds that Englishness is based on this everyday culture, rather than on abstract ideas: "The sweet puddings and pillar boxes have entered our soul." (194) Such a representation of English culture considers the countryside as the essential embodiment of Englishness. Accordingly, in *The Black Album*, Kureishi call is the

national self-image of the English the "whole Orwellian idea of England." (89) And in "Bradford" he says of the guests of a pub in Bradford that "this was not one large solid community with a shared outlook, common beliefs and end established form of life; not Orwell's 'one family with the wrong members in control'. It was diverse, disparate, strikingly various." (64)

The nostalgia for the country which Kureishi attacks as anachronistic is still defining contemporary Britishness in both culture and in politics.

In culture, the film genre of "Heritage Cinema" is seen by Moore-Gilbert as a tradition which is consciously confronted by Kureishi with his own films. In the former, Britain is seen as "impressively unified and harmonious nation, symbolised by the cosy village in *A Room with a View*." (*Hanif Kureishi* 80) "Heritage-Britain" (80) is ethnically homogenous, (82) has an unquestioned and thus natural social order. (82) Such an image is "reinforced by its construction of the nation as a rural, non-industrial culture." (82) Heritage cinema thus clearly privileges the country-side over the city. Moreover, as these films reject feminism and homosexuality, they are fully in line with the values of the New Right. (85)

In politics, the nostalgic notion of national culture, denoting "a whole way of life, manifesting itself in the individual, in the group and in society," (BF 78) is "often used by the New Right" (78), the reformed conservative party of Margaret Thatcher. Although Kureishi concedes in "Bradford" that the Labour party has basically the same mentality, he is much more focussed on the Conservatives as the representative of such an anachronistic nationalism .And indeed, it is basically the latter that consciously use the Orwellian imagery in formulating the national identity. For example, in 1993, John Mayor described England as "the country of green suburbs, dog lovers and pools fillers and –as George Orwell said- 'old maids cycling to holy communion through the morning mist.'" (cf. Paxman 142) This is what Homi K Bhabha calls the "obfuscatory nostalgic Arcadianism of the Conservatives." (Bhabha 217) Their anachronistic idea of England

is ironically synopsized by Kureishi in *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid,* where Rafi states: "For me, England is hot buttered toast on a fork in front of an open fire" (SR 4)

Kureishi's rejection of nostalgia is based on his awareness that any concept of identity motivated by unity and homogeneity is not able to represent contemporary plurality without suppression. "Among all the talk of unity on the New Right, there is no sense of the vast differences in attitude, life-style, and belief, or in class, race and sexual preference that *already* exist in British society." (BF 78) For Kureishi, the nostalgic predicament of unity achieves exactly its opposite, namely the division of society: "And for them, [the Conservatives] unity can only be maintained by opposing those seen outside the culture. In an Oxbridge common-room, there is order, tradition, a settled way of doing things. Outside there is chaos: there are barbarians and philistines." (78) The conservatives, who sing 'England's green and pleasant Land' "at least three times a day" (FTJ 102) on their party conferences, see their dear England under siege from foreign influences. Such a lager mentality considers the country beleaguered by hostile foreign influences which threaten to destroy the national character of the British. The most notorious mouthpiece of such an attitude is Enoch Powell, for whom immigration is leading to revolutionary changes in British society, to a "total transformation to which there is no parallel in a thousand years of English history." (282) In his notorious "I See The River Tiber Foaming with Much Blood" speech, Powell characterises immigration in terms of foreign occupation: "In this country in fifteen or twenty years time the black man will have the whip hand over the white man ... Whole areas, towns and parts of towns across England will be occupied by different sections of the immigrant and immigrant descended population." (282) The Commonwealth citizens succeed in what the Nazis failed, not the least so because of their superior sexual powers: "already 1985 those [strangers] born here would constitute a majority." (282) Margaret Thatcher took up this rhetoric: "People are really rather afraid that this country might be rather swamped by people with a different culture. We do have to hold out the prospect of an end to immigration except, of course,

for compassionate cases." (Reitan 25) The author remarks that "almost immediately [after this statement] the conservatives shot up 10 % in the polls," (25) which underlines society's susceptibility to such inundation rhetoric. In *The Black Album*, Zulma's Tory friend Jump speaks about Muslims in a manner that echoes the invasion-scare ideas of Enoch Powell: "[T]hey are entering France through Marseilles and Italy through the south. Soon they will be sweeping through the weakened Communist regions, into the heart of civilised Europe." (159) The implication of such a social ideal is the claim that the individual must seek conformity to the social norm in a way that deprives it of all its genuine identity. For Powell and his supporters, "to be integrated into a population means to become for all practical purposes indistinguishable from its other members." (Powell 288)

5.3.6 Manifestation of Essentialism in Kureishi's Novels

5.3.6.1 The Outsider

The concept of the public sphere implied in the nostalgia for the organic community is that diversity is both marginalised and despised. This is the mentality that is rejected and contested in Kureishi's novels. "For Kureishi, the cultural unity aimed at by Thatcher was spurious to the extent that it was predicated on the suppression of such difference." (Moore Gilbert, *Hanif Kureishi* 84) But the suppression of difference goes along with a highlighting of it. In order to construct a coherent and unified English identity, anything that does not conform to this ideal is seen as outside. Deviation leads to expulsion from the centre of society.

The Buddha of Suburbia and *The Black Album* both present protagonists who are not allowed to identify with the mainstream society. They become outsider figures in their original community and always are confronted with the fact that their ethnic difference is seen as an essentialist difference. Both novels show that the sense of otherness is something that is always imposed on the protagonists. The most often quoted passage of Kureishi's novels is the best

example of this sense of being excluded a community one feels part of: "I am an Englishman born and bred, almost. *I am considered* a funny kind of Englishman, a new breed as it were, having emerged from two old histories. But I don't care - Englishman I am, (though not proud of it) from the South London suburbs and going somewhere." (BS 3, emphasis added) From his own perspective, Karim is English, but the disjunct "almost" enters this self-description because he "is considered" a special, "funny kind" of Englishman. The latter is his identity within the community, who does not recognize him as Englishman. He is not considered a normal English suburban boy, but something special, in positive and negative terms.

The second generation youth is often identified with the ethnicity of his parents, without being considered part of English society. Kureishi himself grows up to be a normal suburban boy, but for his teacher "Hanif comes from India." (TRS 28) Karim Amir knows that "to the English we were always wogs and nigs and Pakis and the rest of it." (BS 53) The integration into the community that society demands is prevented by the same: "The British were doing the assimilating: they assimilated Pakistanis to their world view. They saw them as dirty, ignorant and less than human –worthy of abuse and violence." (TRS 29) Often enough, the "Englishman born and bred" (BS 3) Karim is "called Shitface and Curryface." (63) Shahid and Karim are this isolated within society, they are made into outsiders. Shahid remembers that "[e]verywhere I went I was the only dark-skinned person. How did this make people see me? I began to be scared of going into certain places. I didn't know what they were thinking. I was convinced they were full of sneering and disgust and hatred." (BA 10) Kureishi depicts in his novels a society that is characterised by a culture of xenophobia and contempt for foreigners, especially the Pakistanis: "In the mid-60s, Pakistanis were a risible subject in England, derided on television and exploited by politicians. They had the worst jobs, they were uncomfortable in England, some of them had difficulties with the language. They were despised and out of place." (TRS 25)

Representing a protagonist as a "Paki" thus strongly affirms his outsider status. In the context of essentialist cultures, the mixed-ethnic protagonists are always aliens and what is more important they are denied recognition within the system. Shahid knows that someone with Asian origin is a "third class citizens, even lower than the working class." (BA 209) The only choice open for them is leaving.

5.3.6.2 Racism

The most direct rejection of the protagonist can be found in the racism that the novels connect to the lower class suburban community. He associates this attitude with the older generation, which are set in the lower middle class and its mentality. In the community Shahid grows up, " [the] *parents* [of his school-friends were] usually patriotic people and proud of the Union Jack ... ." (BA 26f, emphasis added) The father of Karim's friend Helen tells him that "We're with Enoch." (BS 40) In the memory of his own youth he also refers to the racist parents of his school-friends. (TRS 28) This rejection of the immigrant represented as going hand in glove with notions of class. "Parents of my friends, both lower-middle-class and working-class, often told me they were Powell supporters. Sometimes I heard them talking, heatedly, violently, about race, about 'the Pakis.'" (TRS 28) That hatred of such outsider is connected to low class status determines the novels' few references to the working class as well. Karim states that the "proletariat of the suburbs did have a strong class feeling. It was virulent and hate filled and directed entire at the people beneath them" (BS 149) The house of one racist, Helen's father Hairy Back is big, but in decay. (BS 40) In the Penge of Jamila's family, racism is far worse and violent than in Karim's respectable lower middle class Bromley, because the area is much poorer. (53) In the East End, in the poor and run down working class districts of London, Shahid and the Muslim brotherhood protect a Bengali family which is besieged by the hostile community. Here,

Chad and Shahid are abused by a young mother: "Paki! Paki! Paki! [...] You stolen our jobs! Taken our housing! Paki got everything! Give it back and go back home!" (BA 139)

5.3.6.3 Exoticism

It is basically the lower middle classes and the working classes of the suburbs and the socially underprivileged parts of the city that display hostility towards anything foreign. But one cannot conclude that the upper middle classes, which the author seems to esteem, as chapter three suggested, have a completely positive stance towards difference. Yet they are shown to have a different and more ambiguous stance to cultural heterogeneity. On the one hand, they are open for everything other and cherish difference. Although this allows the ethnic protagonists to enter the urban community, it leads to the same essentialism and exclusion, because there is still the notion that essentialist differences exist. The latter are just valued as something positive and desirable. As Homi K Bhabha points out, there is a close interrelationship between the celebration of cultural otherness and the claim to be cultured, which as chapter three has shown is a typical characteristic of the upper middle class:

> In fact the sign of the 'cultured' or the 'civilised' attitude is the ability to appreciate cultures in a kind of *musée imaginaire*; as though one should collect and appreciate them. Western connoisseurship is the capacity to understand and locate cultures in a universal time-frame that acknowledges their various historical and social contexts only eventually to render them transparent. ... This is what I mean by a *creation* of cultural diversity and a *containment* of cultural difference. (208)

Even more than Bhabha, class-sensitive Kureishi locates and emphasizes the connection between this multiculturalism and liberal middle class identity. The latter's self-image is based on the notion of being cultured, and the mastery of cultural difference is part of this class identity in a heterogeneous society. The educated upper middle class, or the people that aspire to be part of it, such as Eva, but also lower middle class people who consider themselves progressive such as Carl, Marianne or Fruitbat are parading their familiarity and ease with cultural differences.

Knowledge of non-European cultures shows both that one is open and tolerant and able to understand and appreciate the heterogeneity of cultures. Multiculturalism is therefore just a further expression of Western epistemic superiority and is thus basically a neo-colonial stance. This complicity is highlighted when Karim has to observe an ethnic performance by Haitian dancers in traditional costumes in the apartment of a New York intellectual: "It made me feel like a colonial watching the natives perform." (BS 244) The tolerance and knowledge of the liberals is in fact a continuation of colonial Orientalism. Jeremy Shadwell says to Karim in a serious tone: "Everyone looks at you, I'm sure, and thinks: an Indian boy, how exotic, how interesting, what stories of aunties and elephants we'll hear from him." (141) Karim, who never went to India and who considers himself surely more English than Indian is made into an exotic Oriental. Karim is thus connected to an Oriental "place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences," (Said 1) something completely alien to him. This identity is forced upon Karim. Consider Karim's first role as an actor, which is off course that of Kipling's Indian boy, Mowgli. Shadwell's insistence on Karim's authenticity takes bitter and yet comic characteristics, for example when he tells him to imitate an Indian accent:

> 'What d'you mean authentic?'
> 'Where was our Mowgli born?'
> 'India.'
> 'Yes, not Orpington. What accents do they have in India?'
> 'Indian accents.'
> 'Ten out of ten.'
> 'No, Jeremy. Please no.'
> 'Karim, you have been cast for authenticity and not experience.'(147)

Moreover he is made to wear a "loin-cloth and brown make-up, so that I resembled a turd in a bikini-bottom." (146) That Karim's exoticness is highlighted by this "shit brown cream" (146) is a strong trope for the violence of exoticism: dirt is smeared on the other who is transformed into an imaginary Oriental. And the novel clearly depicts Karim's pain at being made to embody the exotic stereotype. Kureishi never forgets to show the bitter side of it, namely that the exotic others always "represented whatever was projected onto them by the societies into which they were

introduced." (Ashcroft 95) Karim is not allowed to express his true self in acting, which is what he should do according to Mathew Pyke. (BS 219) His 'true' self is expected to be different from the others. He's made an outsider. In Pyke's theatre group, Karim is to embody "someone black," (170) here his difference is meant to signify marginality in terms of Marxism. Similar to Shadwell, Pyke denies Karim's individuality by identifying him with a specific stereotype: "Pyke creates the ethnic subject whose emancipation he purports to facilitate. ... The members of his Pyke's theatre group fail to register Karim's actual multitude of intrinsic differences." (Schoene 123) Both in *The Black Album* and *Gabriel's Gift* it is hinted that Karim does not manage to get other roles. In *Gabriel's Gift*, he is reported to have recently played the leading part in "that big film with all that sand," (122) an allusion to the genre of *Raj* film. This film is produced by Jake Ambler, one of the mentors of Gabriel; this hints at the ambiguous position of the cultural establishment in its complicity with the patters of representation of imperial nostalgia. The producer, a positive figure in the novel is complicity in the distribution and perpetuation of exoticism and imperial nostalgia. Thus even in Gabriel's Gift it is hinted that the demand for imperial nostalgia makes the latter still "very big business." (Davies 118)

The Asian British is therefore always the object of admiration for something which is not part of him at all. This is funnily and aptly described in the first related encounter between Eva and Karim: "Then, holding me at arm's length as if I were a coat she was about to try on, she looked me all over and said, 'Karim Amir, you are so exotic, so original! It's such a contribution! It's so you!'" (BS 9) This underlines how the other becomes "an object of consumption by the centre." (Moore-Gilbert "Hanif Kureishi" 201) Karim becomes an exotic object among the "bamboo and parchment scrolls with tubby Orientals copulating on them," (BS 15) "Indian sandalwood stinkers [Karim's term for incense]," (15) "a silk cushion from Thailand" (186) "Indian friezes," (199) and "cane tables." (261) The lower middle class boy Karim is not interesting for what he really is, but for the exotic Oriental he is in the imagination of the English.

The Buddha of Suburbia shows that the exoticism of the upper middle class and their fascination with the Oriental provide the Asian British with the admission ticket to London's society. "To be at the centre, one must be radically marginal." (Doyle 113) Haroon and Karim sell their Indianness to the British, the former voluntarily and ardently, the other reluctantly. Haroon seems to have internalized the image of himself as Buddhist Indian, possessor of wisdom. Orientalism gives him a positive identity, a way to affirm his felt difference to the British and feel superior to them at the same time. He is thus thinking within essentialist patterns as well. But Karim is of another generation. For him who has not the "bonus of an Indian past" (BS 213) and who feels himself rather as an Englishmen, this exoticism always demands him to be somebody else. His experience gives credit to Rasheed Araeen's observation that "non-white artists must enter the dominant culture by showing their cultural identity cards. Even when they produce something new, it must display the signs of their Otherness." (16) Araeen criticises that heightened awareness to ethnic difference excludes such people from the modern culture of the metropolis that they seek to become part of. Therefore one must not forget that all protagonists are indeed united beyond ethnic differences by British pop culture. The latter proves to be a unifying experience for a whole generation. Looking at pop, the protagonists become part of a non-essential cultural movement. Here, they fully belong and can be considered participants in a fully British socio-cultural transformation.

5.3.6.4 The New World of Pop

The alienation from essentialist cultural paradigms is an articulation of the conflict of generations. Kureishi and John Savage write that the "arrival of the Beatles marks the moment when the post-war babyboomers claim their time." (FBP 177) References to the youth of Karim, Shahid, Jay and Gabriel always point to their fascination with pop culture. This is the culture they grow up with and which turns them into outsiders in a non-essentialist manner.

The reason for this alienation is the fact that pop presents an even more direct challenge to the traditional sense of community than ethnic difference because here, deviation and change come from within society. The result is that the youth culture gets under pressure in the suburb. The implication is that the protagonists cannot even live out their only positive identity. The result is complete rejection, because for the community of mostly the older generation,

> [Subcultures express] forbidden contents (consciousness of class, consciousness of difference) in forbidden forms (transgression of sartorial and behavioural codes, law breaking, etc. they are profane articulations, and they are often and significantly defined as 'unnatural.' These terms used in the tabloid press to describe those youngsters who, in their conduct or clothing, proclaim subcultural membership ('freaks', 'animals .... who find courage, like rats, in hunting in packs') would seem to suggest that the most primitive anxieties concerning the sacred distinction between nature and culture can be summoned up by the emergence of such a group. (Hebdige 91ff)

Similar to ethnic difference, pop is interpreted in the suburb and lower middle classes as a signifier of primitiveness, low status, intellectual deficiency and aberration. Here, subcultures "go 'against nature,' interrupting the process of 'normalization'. As such, they are gestures, movements towards a speech which offends the 'silent majority,' which challenges the principle of -unity and cohesion, which contradicts the myth of consensus." (Hebdige 18)

The rejection of pop culture is best articulated in a piece by Paul Johnson, whom Kureishi has identified among the "upmarket crowd" (FTJ 99) present at the annual conservative party conference in Brighton in "Finishing the Job." Kureishi and Savage included his diatribe on pop culture, published in *New Statesman* on February 28, 1964 in their *Faber Book of Pop*. The following quotation from this article is represented in length because it aptly captures the notion that pop culture is seen as a menace to received notions of culture and thus implies social deterioration:

> If the Beatles and their like were in fact what the youth of Britain wanted, one might well despair. I refuse to believe it –and so, I think, will any other intelligent person who casts his or her mind back far enough. What were we doing at 16? I remember the drudgery of Greek prose and the calculus, but I can also remember reading the whole Shakespeare and Marlowe, writing poems and plays and stories. It is a marvellous age, an age of intense mental energy and discovery. Almost every week we found a fresh idol –Milton, Wagner, Debussy, Matisse, El Greco, Proust, some, indeed, to be subsequently toppled

> from the pantheon, but all springing from the mainstream European culture. ... We would not have wasted 30 seconds of our precious time for the Beatles and their ilk. (198)

Johnson's reference to his own adolescence and education shows that the phenomenon pop enacts a conflict of generations. His concept of culture opposes a canon of 'high' culture, a "pantheon" of European cultural monuments with the 'low' mass culture of which the Beatles are an example. This notion of cultural superiority is connected to the setting of social hierarchies, in which the young pop fans are turned into intellectually deficient problem cases. For Johnson, the Beatles fans are "the least fortunate of their generation, the dull, the idle, the failures." (198) Social mobility and being a pop fan are mutually exclusive. Almost like the "Paki," the adolescents involved in pop culture form the bottom of the social system. Kureishi's own class-room experience underlines this rejection of pop-culture:

> For him, [Kureishi's teacher Mr Hogg] there was hierarchy in the arts. At the top were stationed classical music and poetry, beside the literary novel and great painting. In the middle would be not-so-good examples of these forms. At the bottom of the list, and scarcely considered art forms at all, were film ('the pictures'), television and finally, the most derided, pop music. (EA 107)

The author considers this rejection of pop the reaction to the sense that notions culture undergoes a paradigmatic change. For the likes of Johnson and Hogg, the sixties are experienced as a "cultural vertigo" (107) in which established certainties are dissolved:

> He [Hogg] thought he knew what culture was, what counted in history, what had weight, and what you needed to know to be educated. These things were not relative, not a question of taste and decision. ... That particular form of certainty, of intellectual authority, along with many other forms of authority, was shifting. People didn't know where they were anymore. (107)

This is the basis of the suburbanites' negative relation to pop culture. And this makes exhibition of pop into an act of rebellion. The adolescent whose (sub)culture is not accepted by the generation of the parents is turned into a rebel. Kureishi's protagonists are not rebels themselves. In *The Buddha of Suburbia*, it is Charlie who plays the rebel. Kureishi alludes to the emergence of the punk when he reports about Charlie's appearance on TV: "Two outraged parents were reported as having kicked in TV screens" (BS 153) after the early evening broadcast of an interview, in

which Charlie Hero publicly swore and abused the audience. This narrative detail is modelled on the appearance of the Sex Pistols in Bill Grundy's early evening BBC show *Thames TV* in December 1976, which led to the sacking of the presenter and –as the *Daily Mirror* reported in an article called "The Filth and the Fury"- to a man kicking in the screen of his TV. Shock and rebellion are expressions of liberations from the world of the adults, and thus the protagonists are fascinated by it. Jay remembers that in his youth "the rock-'n'-roll world –the apotheosis of the defiantly shallow –represented the new. It was rebellious and stood against the conventional and dead." (I 17) In *Gabriel's Gift*, Kureishi makes Gabriel in art that exactly has the former message: Gabriel does "rather prefer the stronger stuff: toilets, blood and pierced eyeballs with titles like 'Pulsations of the Slit.' The pretty pictures that had so shocked people in the old days had lost their power." (21) In *The Buddha of Suburbia* Kureishi plays with the subversive character of cloth style. "I [Karim] wore turquoise flared trousers, a blue and white flower-patterned see-through shirt, blue suede boots with Cuban heels, and scarlet Indian waistcoat with gold stitching around the edges. I'd pulled on a headband to control my shoulder-length frizzy hair." (BS 6) This is a clear reference to the Beatles who dressed in their LSD period "ironically and effeminately ... beyond the constraints of the ordinary." (EA 114) The reaction from Karim's mother shows that she disapproves of this style: "'Don't show us up Karim,' she said, continuing to watch TV. 'You look like Danny La Rue.'" (BS 7) Her reference to the female impersonator, an actor of her own generation, proves that she cannot read the flamboyant outfit of her son. Her reaction underlines that Kureishi presents Karim here as the adolescent "rebel" of David Bowie's song 'Rebel rebel:' "Got your mother in a whirl/ She's not sure if you're a boy or a girl." (Bowie 1-2)

In *The Black Album,* attitudes to pop culture are an important factor in the novel's attitude towards its characters. There is the contrast between the Deedee, who with her sexuality, drug consume and intellectualism comes to symbolise London, and the narrow mindedness of the Islamic fundamentalists, who have a similar attitude to pop as the suburban Conservatives. For

Shahid and Deedee, music is essential to life; it is more a natural diet than a drug: "their ears were yearning for music much as one's stomach complains for food." (BA 64) Chad is the Muslim brother who most fervently tries to convert Shahid to the cause of the brotherhood. Chad rejects the music of Prince on the grounds of his new Islamic convictions which rejects pop as low entertainment. Chad tells Shahid: "We are not dancing monkeys. We have minds and sense. Why don we want to reduce ourselves to the level of animals? I am not descended from an ape but from something noble. ... Get clean! Gimme those Prince records! ... We are slaves to Allah, ... He is the only one we must submit to!" (80) For Chad, Islam represents truth, and Shahid observes that Chad thinks that his religion does offer "truth on a plate." (79) Chad considers Western culture a dangerous drug that prevents the individual from realizing the truth of religion. But Kureishi makes clear that Chad's fundamentalism is the product of a process of loss –Chad converted only recently to Islam, before this, he was known as Trevor Buss, a typical clubbing and drug dealing London kid, similar to Stratford "Strapper" or *London Kills Me*'s Clint. The rejection by society drives Chad into the arms of the fundamentalists. Kureishi makes salient that cultural nationalism is not a solution to the difficulty of finding a stable identity as a second generation immigrant. Chad is shown to repress his love for pop, which he so much liked before his conversion: "Chad banged his palms over his ears while simultaneously, Shahid observed, bouncing his foot." (78)

5.4 Undoing Essentialism: Swinging London, Global City and the Pop Star

5.4.1 Swinging London

> In bed before I went to sleep I fantasized about London and what I'd do there when the city belonged to me. There was a sound that London had. It was, I'm afraid, people in Hyde Park playing bongos with their hands; there was also the keyboard on the Door's 'Light My Fire'. 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 bookshops with racks of magazines printed without capital letters or the bourgeois disturbance of full stops; there

> were shops selling all the records you could desire; there were parties where girls and boys you didn't know took you upstairs and fucked you; here were all the drugs you could use. (BS 121)

This is the last paragraph of "In the Suburb," the first part of the novel, as Karim is about to move to London. At this stage, the city is for him synonymous with the blessings of both popular and postmodern culture. The city Karim desires is an ideal that promises liberation from the life of the suburb. The above quote shows that the narrator is conscious that this London is not a real city, but the cliché of a suburban boy reading *Melody Maker* and *New Musical Express* and *Rolling Stone*: "It [London] was, *I'm afraid*, ..." (121, emphasis added) Hence there is some pointed awareness that Karim is "definitively a child of the swinging London of the sixties." (Helbig 77) The label "Swinging London" was coined by the New York TV columnist John Crosby who celebrated the city in an article in the *Weekend Telegraph* in 1965. In Crosby's apotheosis of London, the place is "the gayest, most uninhibited, and - in a wholly new, very modern sense- most wholly elegant city in the world." (Crosby n. pag.) Swinging London soon became a catch-phrase, who even got on the cover of the *Time* magazine in April 15, 1966. Karim's image of the city is first and foremost betraying the boy's fascination with Crosby's representation of a city full of young and free people, hip clubs, music and fashion, and a host of beautiful and willing "birds," who "take to sex as if it's candy and it's delicious." (n. pag.) This shows that his desire for the city is constituted through the influence of the media, mostly through pop magazines and sixties music. Like any other youth of his generation, English or Asian-British, he is shaped by a subculture that stands not outside and against the mainstream culture but is also a highly marketed part of it and therefore a highly disseminated culture. One can turn to "Some Time with Stephen" in order to see to what extent Kureishi's representation of the sixties is based on the available representations of the sixties: "Though I was at school and not politically active in 1968, I was obsessively aware of the excitement and originality of those years. I had the records, the books, the clothes; I saw the 1960s on TV and was formed by what I missed out on. I wasn't

involved enough to become disillusioned." (144) Kureishi acknowledges that he fell in love with the way the sixties were represented in the media and especially how they were sold to young suburban boys like him. So neither Kureishi, nor Karim, nor any of the other suburban boys that later move to London is an insider with respect to 'sixties urban culture. Their contact with urban culture is second hand, mediated by the media. *Melody Maker, New Musical Express* and radio Caroline provide Karim with a glimpse into "a world of excitement and possibility." (BS 19).

The marketability of a subculture like the sixties youth culture opens central possibilities for the protagonists who aspire of becoming a part of the glamorous city. Dick Hebdige shows how the mainstream culture can easily assimilate a subculture, because, due to its spectacular nature, sub-culture can easily be converted into a mass-produced style. (Hebdige 94) Frequent publication turns shock into a spectacle, a sign of subversion becomes reintegrated into the mainstream system of signs, as style. Then one can adopt a subculture as pose. In this sense, commercialisation is a consequence of the subculture's own anti-essentialism. Hebdige sees it as a social strategy of containing subversion. Yet Kureishi's novels reflect that the proneness for integration into the mainstream and the power of the market put them into the reach of a lot of people, with the result that the subculture can unfold their enabling potential even in the conservative suburb. Karim watches in a Bromley pub this colourfulness of suburban society. (*Buddha of Suburbia* 8, *75*; see also TRS 26) For the author's protagonists it is especially the mainstream, highly successful and famous pop of The Beatles, Prince and David Bowie that gives them ability to distance themselves from their own suburban background, to overcome their class and its culture. Moore-Gilbert is therefore right in pointing out that novels such as *The Buddha of Suburbia* celebrate pop despite of its commercialisation:

> [W]hen Karim enters a pub to be faced by various knots of Teds, Punks, Skins and Mods, Kureishi is keen to stress the liberating new (sub-)cultural identities made available through the massive developments in the industry (he never discounts the commercial interests driving "pop" music) over the years covered by *The Buddha*. ("Hanif Kureishi" 196)

Paradoxically, the system that tries to contain difference by turning it into pure signification, into a spectacle, furthers the access to the possibility of expressing resistance by giving adolescents a wide range of models to identify with. Through the media, suburban boys get a position from which they can articulate the conflict with the restricting values of the petit bourgeoisie.

5.4.2 Beyond Britishness

In the context of the issue of ethnicity that is often discussed in connection with Hanif Kureishi's oeuvre, London is celebrated as a space where cultural difference is accepted. Although multiculturalism shows that there are still restrictions on the free enfolding of one's identity, London is by and large a space where ethnic difference is not turned into a stigma as it is in the suburb. In England, London has always been the major point of attraction for immigrants. East European Jews, Germans, Italians, Chinese and colonial subjects from the pink spots of the world map established themselves rather in the cities of the British Islands than in the countryside, with the capital London being their major destination.

Due to this diversity, the centre looses its English character. This diversification is not always seen in a positive way. In *The Black Album*, the eighties city is a host of different social groups, who do not connect to a coherent whole. Thus the city is not a national community. It is no community at all. The novel underlines what Moore-Gilbert has already remarked of *The Buddha of Suburbia*: "[The book] provides a sobering perspective on the optimism expressed both in Said's *Culture and Imperialism* and Bhabha's *Location of Culture* about the possibilities of a new, non-conflictual and non-hierarchical inter- and *intra*-cultural dispensation." ("Hanif Kureishi" 205) Yet this patchwork-character becomes only a condition of the individual's isolation when identity is seen as essentialist. *The Black Album* ends with Shahid's awareness that there is no need to affiliate himself to any essentialist identity. Then, the multitude can be seen in a much more positive, non-conflictual manner. Accordingly, in post-Thatcherite London of the nineties, as

they are represented in *Gabriel's Gift* and *The Body,* diversity is seen in a less sombre manner. In the former novel, conflict is taken out of the patchwork character of London; the city is a functioning social system whose members are ethnically as diverse as the globe itself: "The city was no longer home to immigrants from the colonies ... every race was present, living side by side without, most of the time, killing one another." (8)

The idea of London as completely detached from Britishness developed gradually throughout the novels. In the eighties, the author has seen the city as constituting a category of one's own with respect to the British nation; London is 'fourth England:'

> In 1993 [*sic*], when J.B. Priestley was preparing his English Journey, he found three Englands. There was guide-book England, of palaces and forests; nineteenth-century industrial England of factories and suburbs; and contemporary England of by-passes and suburbs. Now, half a century later, there is another England as well: the inner city. (MBL 129)

Kureishi sees a new kind of national condition emerge with the growing heterogeneity of the metropolis. In contrast to his negative notion of Englishness, which is closely connected to the idea of the countryside, the city presents an alternative idea of Britishness. But the city becomes more and more detached from Britain. It becomes an entity of its own, connected to a global network of metropolises. These cities present the last step in the evolution of the city. Accordingly, in his two most recent novels, Kureishi describes London as "this new international city called London", (GG 8) and as a "semi-independent city state." (TB 6) Thus the city is not only an un-English space, it becomes increasingly difficult to see the city as British. Therefore London becomes a space that contrasts with both the country and the nation surrounding and including it: The "culturally and demographically hybrid nature of major cities like London disqualify them from being appropriate sites through which to represent the nation." (Moore-Gilbert, *Hanif Kureishi* 83) The condition of contemporary London is not postcolonial but global, shaped by immigrants from all parts of the continent. The author underlines this point in *Gabriel's Gift* with the obese Au-pair Hannah, an immigrant from Eastern Europe, who comes to London for economic reasons.

That she comes from a country called "Bronchitis" (9) shows how less the narrator cares about notions of nationality.

This implies that London becomes a site in which all kinds of identities can exist outside the restraints of the demand to form a coherent national culture. It is the ideal place to avoid the demand of assimilation into an English community: "[L]ike many contemporary cultural commentators Kureishi is concerned to demonstrate how the modern inner city is an easier 'England' to identify with for diasporic populations than the rural, industrial and suburban 'Englands' which Priestley [in his *English Journey*] anatomized." (Moore-Gilbert, *Hanif Kureishi* 12) This "easier England," however, is not England at all. The cultural difference between country and city become that between two different orders, the national and the global, the past and the future.

5.4.3 City of the Young, City of Change

> Like his heroes the Beatles and Bowie, Kureishi believed that only London could provide his characters with the stimulation and excitement they craved. His metropolitan landscapes are populated by young people who have abandoned their scabby rooms to cruise through the streets, past myriads of multi-ethnic shops, restaurants and diversions; they'll smile, laugh, absorb both high and low culture, usually to the accompaniment of pumping dance music which captures the skelter and dense medley of young London. (Sandhu, "Paradise Syndrome" n. pag)

Adolescent rebellion and the resulting liberation of the young generation determine the image of "Swinging London." The city is seen as a space of the young:

> In that period, [the sixties] youth captured this ancient island and took command in a country where youth had always been kept properly in its place. Suddenly, the young own the town. Brian Morris, who runs the Ad Lib Club, and who is himself only thirty, says, 'This is a young people's town." (Crosby n.pag.)

It is explicitly in Kureishi's novels. When Deedee and Shahid stroll through a city brimming with subcultural colourfulness "[i]t was rare to see anyone over forty, as if there were a curfew for older people." (BA 112) Adam, himself an old man, perceives the city as a young city: "The elderly seemed to have been swept from the streets" (TB 7) The two statements imply that age is

suppressed and pushed out of London, accentuating the notion of generational difference. London is claimed by the young generation. This is closely connected to the idea that the city as such is the most adequate space for creativity, freedom, individualism and all other values associated with pop culture.

> My love and fascination for inner London endures. Here there is fluidity and possibilities are unlimited. Here it is possible to avoid your enemies; here, everything is available. In the suburbs, everything changes slowly. Heraclitus said: 'You can't step in the same river twice.' In the inner-city you can barely step in the same street twice, so rapid is human and environmental change. (STWS 170)

Kureishi here talks of the city in the same celebratory tone as Raymond Williams, who has stated that "new kinds of possible order, new kinds of human unity [are possible] in the transforming experience of the city." (C*ountry and City* 151) This socio-cultural sphere characterised by fluidity is ideal for an individual that fears getting stuck in a specific situation. Here, "you never feel stuck in the same way. You always feel that somebody is going to walk in through the door and change everything. So there's a sense of possibility in London, always. That was something I always wanted." ("Kureishi on London" 46) The author stands clearly at the side of his Adam, who, though living in London for almost his whole life, "is still excited by the thought of what I might see or hear and by who I might run into and be made to think about." (TB 6) And indeed, he soon runs into a person that will fundamentally alter his life. Thus London is an ideal space for people that seek separation from all permanent affiliations. This links with the self-centredness of male desire. The fluidity of London guarantees that individual control is never impeded by petrified structures. The urban individual is not dependent on fixed essences in his life. Accepting the provisional character of urban life is the development that Shahid accomplishes at the end of *The Black Album*: "Now he would embrace uncertainty. Maybe wisdom would come from what we didn't know, rather than confidence. That's what he hoped." (BA 227) In his youth Jay learned the same attitude from Tom Gunn's poem "On the Move" which he used to read aloud at parties (I 20) "At worst, one is in motion; and at best/ Reaching no absolute, in which to rest,/

One is always nearer by not keeping still." (Gunn 38-40) This is the feeling that the city promises, a city that "Kureishi values ... not for the stability and assurances it offers, but for its disruptions and upheavals, qualities missing in the suburbs. London is still a centre for Kureishi, but one, he hopes, where things fall apart, where the centre cannot hold." (Sandhu, "Pop" 152)

5.4.4 The Pop Star as Role Model

5.4.4.1 Introduction

The development of Kureishi's protagonists into an urban character is closely connected to the pop star. The latter becomes an idol whose success stirs the desire to move beyond the rigid patterns of the society determined by the generation of the parents. The adolescents of Karim's generation "wish, increasingly, to identify themselves personally with the singers they admire." (MacInnes 87) Although Jay considers solitude "necessary as the Beatles" (I 41) pop stars are not central in *Intimacy* and *The Body*, where the protagonists are adults. This underlines their function as role models for adolescents, such as Karim, Shahid and Gabriel. Jay and Adam both rather fall for Beethoven than for pop. Their taste has matured. Although Jay enjoys "long discussions about English mod groups of the sixties," (60) the days when he "was too rebellious to like music that didn't sound better the louder it was played" (40) are gone. Pop is more of an issue in those books that centre on the theme of adolescent aspiration. A mutual characteristic of these novels, *The Buddha of Suburbia, The Black Album* and *Gabriel's Gift* is the use of a pop star as embodiment of a character's dream of development. All novels, but especially the above three contain references to The Beatles, David Bowie and Prince, but Kureishi also develops his own pop stars, such as Charlie Hero and Lester Jones, who of course, refer back to the first group. Charlie Hero appears in all three novels: After his development into a famous icon of punk has been told in Kureishi's first novel, Shahid and Deedee are shown to hunt for bootlegs of his records in London's record shops (BA 122) and Gabriel can meet him personally. (GG 122)

However, unlike Charlie, the central protagonists never move into the city to become singers or musicians. Karim becomes an actor, Jay is a writer, as Adam and Shahid, and Gabriel is rather working with images, both as director and painter. This seems to underline what Kureishi stated in an interview with Colin McCabe: "[I] was often more interested in the writing than I was in the music, to be honest." ("Kureishi on London" 47) What counts is the idea that the pop star stands for. These are the central ones of the novels: rise above one's origin, possibility, change, freedom, hedonism.

5.4.4.2 The Beatles: Initiation and Social Mobility

The fundamental importance of pop music lies maybe in the fact that it is the music that always establishes the first contact of the adolescent with the above ideas:

> Music was integral part of my life, growing up in the sixties. Also it was – it was culture, man, those kids in mop wigs. The Beatles as a whole. They were fun. They were making art. They were like twenty-one, twenty-two. And they were free, making money. That influenced me, you know what I mean? That made me think, oh, I can do that. I don't have to be a bank manager. I'll make money. I'll be a writer. ... If you grow up in the suburbs, you either usually get married quite young and you have a family and have a job and buy a house. Or you try and make a break and run away and get away, which a lot of the kids in the sixties and seventies obviously were doing. (Kaleeta 9)

For Kureishi, as he the told Kenneth Kaleeta in a language that underlines his fascination with the Beatles, it was pop music that freed the lower middle class boy from the destination of his class. Kureishi agrees with Alan Ginsberg that the Beatles were "the paradigm of the age," (EA 114) embodying what Kureishi considers the spirit of the period, opening up new ways of class mobility: The Beatles "came to represent opportunity and possibility. They were career officers, a myth for us to live by, a light for us to follow." (110) Their social rise is so desirable because it sidesteps the traditional path to success: assimilation and conformity to the system. This defiance of bourgeois social patterns is the liberating individualism sought by Kureishi's protagonists, because "[e]verything about the Beatles represented pleasure ... without conscience, duty or

concern for the future, everything about the Beatles spoke of enjoyment, abandon and attention to the needs of the self." (110ff)

When Karim obtains the role of a "rebellious student son of an Indian shopkeeper" (259) in a TV series, he sees this way of life within reach at last: "Millions watched those things. I would have a lot of money. I would be recognized all over the country. My life would change overnight." (259) Elizabeth de Cacqueray sees Karim's fixation on the "financial, rather than the social benefits of the role" (163) in a negative way, "undermining" (163) Karim's moral development. But such -an interpretation can only emerge when one ignores how much this role and its financial benefits represent for Karim that his dream of leading the life of the pop star is about to come true. After Charlie, it is now Karim's turn to stage himself as rebel. And about ten years later, he is a "fashionable" (BA 86) actor who appears on the cover of the celebrity magazine *Hello!*. (BA 86)

5.4.4 3 Prince and Bowie: Play with Identity

Shahid Hasan of *The Black Album* is a protagonist that can be said to actually 'be' this rebellious son of an Indian shopkeeper for he is resisting the plans of his mercantile Pakistani parents to get involved in their travel agency. As Shahid is shown to be struggling with the expectations of family, lover, and peer-group, the topic of identity is more important than the idea of a career in the city. Here, again, pop culture provides the positive and finally liberating subtext of the novel. The notions of identity connected with Prince form the aim of the development of Shahid's identity, because the American musical genius represents pop in its most hybrid form:

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

The fascination of Shahid and Deedee with the black artist is based on the latter's celebration of indeterminacy and ambiguity: "He's half black and half white, half man, half woman, half size, feminine but macho too." (BA 25) The non-essential eclecticism of his music expresses the liberation from essentialist affiliations, as Sukdhev Sandhu points out. Prince is an idol because he lives hybridity:

> Prince plunders freely from various musical genres, from rock or disco or funk or rap. To popular amusement he is forever adopting new personae: a satyr, an androgyne, a symbol - the latter, along with 'The Artist Formerly Known As Prince', being one of the numerous names by which he has at times insisted on being known. Polymorphous, perverse, self-transforming, limitless in ego and imagination (although increasingly limited in genius), Prince was an understandable idol for Asians who felt themselves constrained by the order of things. (Sandhu, "Paradise Syndrome" n.pag.)

The central story of *The Black Album,* a novel named after Prince's self-censored1994 Album, is Shahid's development beyond the essentialist notions of identity to the acceptance of the fact that life can offer neither fixed essences nor pure truths: "How could anyone confine themselves to one system or creed? Why should they feel they had to? There was no fixed self; surely our several selves melted and mutated daily? There had to be innumerable ways of being in the world." (BA 274)

The American Prince and his music represent the hybridity of pop culture in this novel set in the eighties. However, in *The Buddha of Suburbia* and *Gabriel's Gift* a native British artist pervades the characters and their development, which underlines to what extent the novels are shaped by a distinctively British pop culture. In an interview with Colin McCabe, Kureishi stated that "Bowie and Pop were a big influence" on him. ("Kureishi on London" 48) In *The Buddha of Suburbia*, the artist has divine status for the suburban boys who "were often to be found on their knees before this icon, [a portrait of David Bowie] praying to be made into pop stars and for release from a lifetime as a motor-mechanic." (BS 68) Bowie is the third and maybe the most important pop star who represents the possibility of liberation. Kureishi and John Savage write in the introduction to Chapter 6 of their anthology of writing on pop, *The Faber Book of Pop*, that

David Bowie marks an important stage in the development of pop: "With David Bowie and Roxy Music, pop became self-conscious. Both pop star and cultural hero, Bowie hand an enormous influence in the UK, crystallizing a new pop generation marked by an extreme, theatrical androgyny –'Glam.'" (377) David Bowie is here presented as one of the central protagonists of a new form of public performance, the staging of a public persona in the context of challenging traditional conceptions of gender. Dick Hebdige asserts this: "In glam rock, at least among those artists placed, like Bowie and Roxy Music, at the more sophisticated end of the glitter spectrum, the subversive emphasis was shifted away from class and youth onto sexuality and gender typing." (61f) His merit lies in the fact that he opens new areas to hybridity that up to then had been never been considered as non-essential. He is the first pop artist who plays with concepts of gender, saying of himself: "I'm gay," but with "a secret smile at the corners of his mouth." (Watts 394) He provokes the question: "Is he, or isn't he?" (394) Bowie evades any certainty, gender ambiguity is highlighted, pointing to the "confusion surrounding the male and female roles." (394) He thus challenges social conceptions in a most profound way. His bisexuality mirrors that of Karim Amir, for whom sexual preferences are not a matter of biology but of taste: choosing between girls and boys is like having to decide between the Rolling Stones and The Beatles. (BS 55) Bowie is the major cultural background of the theme of "gender-role and sexual experimentation" that function in the novel the "key avenue towards the liberation of the individual from conventional conceptions of identity and traditional, often coercive, expectations of gender roles." (Moore-Gilbert, "Hanif Kureishi" 194) It further echoes in Shahid's (BA 117; 150) and Gabriel's cross-dressing. (GG 17) In the latter case the parallel is accentuated by the Gabriel listens to Lester Jones while he "painted his toenails in some dainty shade and was wearing his mother's rings, necklaces and shoes." (17)

The central importance of Bowie can be seen from the fact that Kureishi's two invented pop stars both bear strong references to Bowie. For one, he appears in *Gabriel's Gift* in the guise

of Lester Jones. The name already betrays the identity: Bowie's real name is David Robert Jones. The characterisation of Lester's music points both to Prince and Bowie:

> At that time, [the seventies] Lester was one of the world's biggest pop stars, idolized and followed by millions of fans in dozens of countries, his songs and style imitated by many other groups. Like most pop heroes, Lester contained the essential ingredients of both tenderness and violence, and was neither completely boy nor girl, changing continuously as he expressed and lost himself in various disguises. (GG 38)

A further connection is established through Charlie Hero. In *Gabriel's Gift,* Lester's band "The Leather Pigs" (40) are made into the idols of Kureishi's first own pop star. Charlie hero is a "follower of Lester Jones whose music resembled Jones's." (40) Lester thus replaces Bowie, whom Karim recognized in *The Buddha of Suburbia* as the inspiration of Charlie's first transformation: "Bowie's influence, I knew." (68)

As Lester and Bowie, Charlie starts to stage himself in public. But Charlie is more than the "second-string David Bowie" (Kaleeta 73) Kenneth Kaleeta sees in him. Kaleeta might not have understood that the imitation of the pop star is an important step to liberation from preconceived notions of identity. Bowie's adoptions of personas such as Ziggy Stardust, Aladdin Sane, Mr Newton, the Thin White Duke or the Blond Fuehrer are exemplary transformations that put the anti-essentialist stance of pop into practice. "And it was Bowie whose escape from suburbia and 'from class, from sex, from personality, from obvious commitment' into London's wide realm of free play, make-believe and self-gratification, is a trajectory that comes closest to he odysseys undertaken by Kureishi's characters. (Thomson xxii)" (Sandhu, "Pop" 136) Escape is the "meta message" (Hebdige 60) of both Bowie's music and Kureishi's novels.

But it is Charlie that learns from Bowie, not Karim. The following scene after a punk concert, the first one Charlie and Karim have seen, neatly presents how he has learned from his idols, and how progressive he is compared to his friend Karim:

> Charlie was excited. 'That's it, that's it,' he said as we strolled. ... They're the fucking future.'
> 'Yeah, maybe, but we can't follow them,' I said casually.
> 'Why not?'

> 'Obviously we can't wear rubber and safety-pins and all that. What would we look lie? Sure, Charlie.'
> Why not, Karim? Why not, man?'
> 'It's not us.'
> 'We got to change. What are you saying? We shouldn't keep up? That suburban boys like us always know where it's at?'
> 'It would be artificial,' I said, 'We're not like them. We don't hate the way they do. We've got no reason to. We're not from the estates. We haven't been through what they have'
> He turned on me with one of his nastiest looks.
> 'You are not going anywhere, Karim. ....' (BS 131ff)

Charlie has realized that one must unlearn and hereby transcended one's specific social background and its limitations and invent oneself anew in order to be successful. This is exactly what Lester did in his youth, as he tells Gabriel: "I was brought up to be neat, but I was able to teach myself to be messy and disorganized, noisy and loud. It took some learning. Good boys achieve nothing!" (GG 49) Charlie has learned that one cannot have commercial success by being 'oneself.' When he realizes that Punk is the coming thing, he quickly adopts its pose. He confirms the idea that being a pop star implies a certain kind of detachment from one's true self. This is what he accuses Karim of: he restrains himself due to his origin. Like with Shahid, Karim's development is presented gradually with more the narrative focusing on the difficulty of living with restrictions, with the well-meaning exoticism and the Muslim-nationalism. This suggests that the novels centre on the actual conflict; the central theme is the protagonist in a structure of conflict. The liberation of the individual comes only at the end of the novel, as in *The Black Album* or is even further delayed into the future, as in *The Buddha of Suburbia*.

Gabriel's Gift is different in this respect, for it concentrates on the story of becoming an artist. Gabriel does not have to struggle against expectations from society beyond the fact that his mother wants him to become a lawyer. (119; 162) Pop again represents initiation and guidance, but here, pop is more than an enabling cultural context, because the pop star appears as a parental figure, a mentor and teacher, who directly influences the development of the central character. The theme is thus juxtaposed with the theme of fatherly mentorship: "The experience with Lester had taken him [Gabriel] into another world, where he seemed to belong." (GG 75)

The message of pop is communicated in a face to face situation: "[H]ear my words and carry them wherever you go." (50) The meeting with Lester Jones is important narrative element of the plot, because Jones directly supports Gabriel's artistic ambition. The belief in his giftedness is the true gift that Lester gives Gabriel: "With his face close to Gabriel's, Lester began to talk of himself as a young man, before he was known or successful, and the difficulty of keeping alive self-belief when there was no one to confirm it. That was the hardest time for any artist." (51) At the end of the noel, Speedy's commission of a portrait and Jake Ambler's support for Gabriel's film deliver the recognition that establishes Gabriel as artist.

5. 5. Kureishi's Nostalgia

The fact that Kureishi's ideas of pop refer to the sixties and early seventies adds an anachronistic feel to his novels and suggests that he is not interested in the contemporary cultural landscape. In *The Buddha of Suburbia*, setting and pop cultural background fit, so that the book according to the producer of its TV adaptation Kevin Loader "captured that feeling of being in London in the seventies very well ...." (c.f. Kaleeta 73) In *The Black Album*, the references to Prince, Madonna and rave music also present a contemporary cultural context. Yet the interest in Prince and Madonna is basically its connection to the ideas of identity and play that David Bowie already experienced with in the seventies. The electronic beats Shahid and Deedee dance to are just a soundtrack for drug consume. This music does not bring a new message. Moreover, there are no references to the inventiveness of the next generation of Asian-British artists such as Asian Dub Foundation or Cornershop, neither is there a critical discussion of contemporary pop cultural developments such as Britpop and "Cool Britannia." Mature protagonists such as Jay and Adam rather fall for Beethoven than for new pop music. (I 12; TB 71) In *Intimacy* and *The Body,* the lack of references to contemporary pop culture is not important, because it mirrors the cultural horizon

of these protagonists. But in *Gabriel's Gift* it gives the story an anachronistic and unconvincing feel, for Gabriel lives in the world of his father. Although Kureishi caricatures Rex as one of those "'superannuated long-hairs in dirty jeans', saying how the latest 'beep-beep' music wasn't a patch on Jimi's or Eric's," (GG 26) the novels show no interest in such "'beep-beep'" music either, and Gabriel does not contradict his father when he holds that "pop nowadays is panto for young people and paedophiles." (137) The song with which Gabriel is able to call up his dead twin brother Archie is "Two of Us" by The Beatles. (21) Although this song might fit here, one must point out that the Beatles are not a convincing pop-cultural context for a teenager in the 'nineties. Shahid and Gabriel, share the taste of the first pop generation, Karim, Charlie, Deedee, Lester or Rex rather than developing an independent taste of their own, which is independent from their creator and his idols. This primacy of the early seventies shows that the novels are not interested in the representation of the evolution of pop culture. The novels are interested in an individual and his liberation from restrictions. For this theme, the chosen pop cultural frame is well suited, although it becomes increasingly clear that the novels are written from a generation-specific perspective, which cannot evoke *The Buddha of Suburbia*'s 'pop-feel' in Kureishi's nineties' London.

6. Mothers and Fathers

6.1 Introduction

The preceding chapters have dealt with the conflicts between the individual and society, arguing that the novels are getting their dynamic from differences in terms of class, domesticity and culture. The latter are construed as social differences. The conflicts that make individual development necessary and thus generate a narrative dynamic are related to the individual's placement in an undesirable society. This is the lower middle class, the bourgeois family and essentialist cultures. Agency is expressed as leaving, via social mobility, rejection of domesticity and hybridity. In all cases, it is closely related to the detachment from a specific social setting and the search for its antagonist.

This chapter closes the analysis of Kureishi's novels by directing the attention to another interesting feature of the setting in which the protagonists are placed. It argues that the novel's mothers are so closely associated with the rejected social sphere that they can be said to embody this condition. Leaving a specific social condition is therefore always a wish for distance from the suburban mother. At the same time, one can observe a high degree of affiliation between the male protagonist and his father or father-figures, or between him and an older un-motherly woman. These two types of character are closely connected to the novel's central theme: the development of the protagonist.

6.2 The Mother of Suburbia

The mother is much closer connected to the domestic sphere than both father and son. If a partnership is coming to an end -through the break up of the relationship or even the death of the husband - the woman is left in the house, whereas the men move out. This holds for Margaret,

Bibi, Susan, Jay's mother, Christine and Margot. The recurrence of this aspect in all novels shows that within the world of the novels, the domestic sphere is a female domain. The novels' rejection of the traditional form of domestic culture squarely affirms the latter's basic paradigm, which is the notion of the woman as the centre of the household. Hence, whilst fathers and sons are represented as stuck in the family, the mothers simply 'are' the domestic sphere. What one can observe here is a metonymy which condenses the unease with bourgeois domesticity on the person of the mother. The mother comes to embody the structure of feeling that the male protagonists reject. "[T]he values and attitudes traditionally associated with the lower middle class are also identified with women." (Felski 42)

Thus the central theme of change is always associated with the leaving of the home and the leaving behind of the mother. All kinds of progress are connected with the contact to people representing the cultural and sexual incandescence of the city, which embodies the non-domestic realm: These people are Eva, Mathew Pyke, Deedee Osgood, Nina, Lester Jones, Speedy, Jake Ambler, Ralph. The positive role of Eva, Deedee and Nina suggests that one cannot see the embodiment of the deplored condition with the mother as case of a gendered setting, or the author as a misogynist. It is the domestic mother who is rejected.

The negative association of the mother and the domestic sphere manifests itself in different ways. Mothers represent narrowness, the repression of sexuality and depression.

When Margaret makes her first appearance in the novel, she's the stark contrast to the father, who is introduced as good humoured and enthusiastic. (BS 3) She is "nervily aggressive," and her immediate complaints about her husband's behaviour make the "room immediately ... contract. Tension rose." (4) It is the mother who produces the stifling atmosphere which is so characteristic for the suburb. But it must be noted that the urban, modern powerful self-made woman are represented as having the same power – if she is a mother as well. Susan's first appears introduces the same theme. Her first direct speech brings up the theme of the locked

space: "Why don't you ever shut the bathroom door?" (I 6) Jay characterises Susan in this first scene as a phallic, hard woman, almost endowed with emasculating power: "She looks at me hard, in order to have me notice her. I feel my body contract and shrink." (7) In the domestic sphere, the man is the victim of the woman's aggression. Thus Jay is exposed to what he thinks is a partner with too high expectations and too less patience.

> Others, including me, infuriate and frustrate her. It is disturbing, the way I am compelled to share her feelings, though I don't know the people. As she talks I see why I leave the bathroom door open. I can't be in a room with her for too long without feeling that there is something I must do to stop her being so angry. But I never know what I should do, and soon I feel as if she is shoving me against the wall and battering me. (7)

Jay sees himself as victim of domestic violence, so strong is his partner.

Another urban mother has a similar power over the men in her family:

> She [Christine] could enter an airless tunnel of silence that would wither Rex and Gabriel until they felt like dried sticks; or she could put together words and noises of a force that could fling them against a wall and leave them shaking for days. Whichever method she selected was guaranteed to ensure that her 'common-law' husband and son felt it was them –bad guilty men, both- who had strangled and stifled her. (GG 6)

Note here that Kureishi uses the same image, the woman emasculating –making the man feel like a "dried stick" and pushing him against a wall. This power links Christine with Susan.

That female power emasculates the men in the domestic sphere refers to the idea of the home as a space that cannot provide sexual gratification. This is emphasized with the representation of the mother as alienated from her own body, and shown to be unable to give affection and support to both father and son. Karim describes his mother as "a plump and unphysical woman with a pale round face and kind brown eyes. I imagined she considered her body to be an inconvenient object surrounding her, as if she were stranded on an unexplored desert island." (BS 4) She "never used to have more than one bath a week." (270) Jay's description of his mother is even more negative. His mother is almost clinically depressed:

> Mother was only partially there. Most of the day she sat, inert and obese, in her chair. She hardly spoke –except to dispute; she never touched anyone, and often wept, hating herself and all of us: a lump of living death. She wouldn't wash; there were cobwebs in all the rooms; the plates and cutlery were greasy. We hardly changed our clothes. All effort was a

> trouble and she lived on the edge of panic, as if everything was about to break down. [...] She didn't know how to enjoy other people, the world, her own body. I was afraid to approach her, since with such a mother you never knew whether she would send you away or put out her arms for a kiss. My existence was a disturbance. (I 45f)

Adam remembers of his mother the same refusal of intimacy: She "never let me see her body or sleep beside her; she didn't like to touch me. She didn't want anyone's hands on her, saying it was 'unnecessary'. Perhaps she made herself fat to discourage temptation."(TB 33) The motif of the uncaring mother appears in *The Black Album* as well. Bibi does not give her son the support he needs in his youth. Unable to handle the racism of the English which her son has to endure every day, the mother chooses to ignore her son's pain: "Even when he vomited and defecated with fear before going to school, or when he returned with cuts, bruises and his bag slashed with knives, she behaved as if so appalling an insult couldn't exist." (BA 73) The result is that "she turned away from him." And the reason for this is her inability to cope with reality: "What she knew was too much for her." (73) That Susan is very much modelled upon the suburban mother betrays itself in the constant parallels Jay draws between them: "Susan is the one woman, apart from Mother, with whom I can do practically nothing." (I 15) Susan's lack of sexual interest in him and the prospect that "enthusiasm would be replaced by other consolations," by "contentment," (74) associates her with the idea of the repression of the body that one encounters in the suburban mothers. This makes Jay exclaim in resistance: "I am not ready for the wisdom of misery; I have had that with Mother. I am all for passion, frivolity, childish pleasures!" (75) Minna Proctor's perception of the character of Susan in *Intimacy* underlines this: Her characterisation as "impossible nag" and "one dimensional monster" is "not the characterization of a real person but rather a display of the construction of resentment." (Proctor 38)

Similarities between suburban and urban mothers appear in *Gabriel's Gift* as well. Here, the story depicts Christine increasingly as an unhappy person, which very much resembles the depressive suburban mother:

> However, his 'teenage mother,' as he [Gabriel] called her, didn't seem well. She looked as though she wept a lot; she was loosing weight and had begun to accumulate even more self-help books; her bed was full of chocolate wrappers and she drank Tia Maria in the morning. (136)

In this novel, the figure of Hannah is an interesting example of the presence of the suburban mother in the London household. Since she is taking care of Gabriel, she is a second mother-figure and with Christine being so unlike the mothers of Jay, Karim and Adam, and with no suburban mother referred to in the novel, Hannah comes to embody the presence of the suburban mother. She comes from an Eastern European former Communist country in which places are illnesses: "Bronchitis" and "Influenza." (9) Already the origin of this ersatz-mother points to pathology. Moreover, her obese body resembles the one of the suburban woman in its undesirability. "She was a big round woman, like a post-box with little legs, dressed always in widow black." (9) As Adam's mother, Hannah is constantly eating, not being able to control herself in a country of free and unlimited possibilities of consumption. "Hannah could eat for England; she saw any amount of food in front of her as a challenge ... . Once, Gabriel found her squeezing a tube of tomato puree down her throat." (10) Moreover, her constant watching of soap operas (11) is a characteristic feature of the mother figure which one finds with Susan and Margaret as well. For Gabriel, the presence of this woman in the domestic sphere is considered a punishment, "as if she [his mother] wanted to hurt everyone around her for what had happened." (9) Through Hannah, Gabriel's childhood experience is connected to that of the protagonists with a suburban mother.

6.3 The Friendly Father

The representation of the father sets off the mother as embodiment of the deplored condition. Whereas the representation of the mother implies escape, that of the father implies a close relationship, even a friendship. Moreover, whereas the mothers stand for the deplored

space and restriction, the fathers come to embody the enthusiasm for art and storytelling. In this sense, they are at the centre of the writing itself.

The contrast between father and son is much smaller as that between mother and son. Although he overlooks the –negative- role of the mother in Kureishi's oeuvre, Kenneth Kaleeta has a point in holding that the "father-son relationship remains more significant than any other relationship in Kureishi's work." (Kaleeta 190) What he says of *The Buddha of Suburbia* holds true for *Intimacy* and *Gabriel's Gift* as well: "Kureishi quickly propels Karim and Haroon from father and son into the role of 'pals' ...." (185) Haroon says to Karim that "I love you very much. We're growing up together, we are." (BS 22) The first thing he does when he comes home is kissing his family. (3) Similarly, Jay's father "loved kissing me," always smiling when his son enters his study, and they "kept one another company for years." (I 42) And throughout *Gabriel' Gift*, the son is more attached to his father. Like Haroon and Karim, Rex and Gabriel share the adventure of the father's leaving the house, their development is intertwined. Although he has a close friend called Zak, Rex seems to be the most important friend of Gabriel. And both seem to be growing up together as well, for they both find their artistic vocation realized.

Although the fathers of the protagonists are lower middle class people (see chap. 3) and therefore part of the suburban society, they are not fitting into this scheme as neatly as the mothers. With them, this identity is never natural. They stand out due to their affinity to creative, artistic work. Haroon is a lover of Eastern philosophy and becomes an Oriental guru, Jay's father is an amateur writer, Rex a musician.

What distinguishes the creative fathers from their sons, who in all novels are promising young artists or intellectuals, is the fact that in the eyes of the narrators, the fathers' creativity is always somehow flawed: Karim cannot take Haroon seriously when the latter imagines himself as one of those "wise old fools like the sophists and Zen teachers, wandering drunkenly around discussing philosophy, psychology and how to live?" (BS 266) Jay's father cannot push his talent

as novelist past the stage of mediocrity. Jay says of his father's novels that "weren't very bad and they weren't very good. He never gave up; it was all he ever wanted to do." (I 43) Rex was a professional pop star in the seventies. But in the time of narration, his style of playing is out of date. As he cannot re-establish the success of the seventies, his wife calls him a "Johnny-about-to-be-famous." (GG 26) But the narrator sees him in a very positive manner due to fact that "[a]t least Dad had never stopped loving music. It was just that he didn't get paid for it." (27) Like in Kureishi's own family, the sons in the novels are more promising than the fathers and eventually manage to become professional artists. With Gabriel one does not know, but the patronage by producer Jake Ambler makes failure less than possible. But it is the very fact that they are not successful that makes the fathers the more sympathetic, for it clearly highlights their genuine enthusiasm in creativity. As they cannot be discouraged from pursing their artistic ambitions, they embody the ideal of self-belief and determination that Lester Jones considers an essential characteristic of the artist. (GG 51) It is this love for art that is bequeathed to their sons.

One might take this further and suggest that the figure of the father embodies creativity and even the essence of the novel itself: Haroon, Rex and Jay's father have the same novelist's consciousness, listening with interest to the personal stories of the people on the street. On his way to work, Haroon is a sought-after listener to the suburbanites: "I heard them speak of their lives, boyfriends, agitated minds and real selves in a way, I'm sure, they never talked to anyone else." (BS 28) Jay's father is interested in the local peoples, asking them about the "minutiae of their lives." (42) Rex has the same habit: "Dad would ask the most intimate questions of people he knew only vaguely –How much do you drink? Do you still go to bed together? Do you love her? - which, to Gabriel's amazement, the person not only answered but elaborated on ...." (GG 3) These three father figures are connected to Kureishi's own father:

> He liked other people and would talk with the neighbours as they dug their gardens and washed their cars, and while they stood together on the station in the morning. He would give them nicknames and speculate about their lives until I couldn't tell the difference between what he'd heard and what he'd imagined he'd heard. ...

> It amused Father, and amazed me –it seemed like a kind of magic – to see how experience could be converted into stories, and how the monotony and dullness of an ordinary day could contain meaning, symbolism and even beauty. (SG 5)

Kureishi considers the interest in other people's lives, the will to illuminate the various facets of human subjectivity, a fundamental characteristic of the novelist and his perception of society. For the fathers, human society becomes a sea of story: "For Dad [Rex] the shops, pavements and– people were alive like nature, though with more human interest, and as ever-changing as trees, water or sky." (GG 2) The fathers open the eyes of the son to the mutability of the world, to the fact that change is a central aspect of life. In this respect, they are initiating the sons into the set up of the novels. Moreover, they bring the artistic spirit into the family, a spirit which ripens in the sons. Thus, the fathers are injecting them with the desire to be outside the suburb, taking part in the thriving culture of the metropolis. Whereas the mother always holds on to the domestic sphere and its suburban commitments, the fathers show the way to a different life.

6.4 The Teacher-lover as Embodiment of London

Chapter three pointed to the protagonist's desire for education and social mobility. Chapter four has ended with the focus on male desire and sexual gratification as a main motor of leaving the city, while the last chapter has pointed to the importance of the pop and the ideal of self-realization. The person who embodies all these aspects is the non-domestic woman. She is the un-motherly mother of the city that nurtures the adolescent protagonist into the urban life.

The most central character in this respect is Deedee Osgood, the teacher-lover who appears in *The Black Album, Gabriel's Gift* and *The Body*. One can see how Kureishi develops the idea of the teacher lover in *The Buddha of Suburbia* by moving from Eva Kay to the American women that teach Charlie Hero. Yet in all cases, their impact on the narrative dynamic is similar: Eva and Deedee literally draw the boys into the city. Karim comes to the city because Eva is

"determined to get all of us to London." (BS 30) Shahid comes to London after he met a "black London kid who reckoned he'd been taught by a great woman." (BA 25)

Although Karim confesses that "I'd always loved her [Eva], and not always as stepmother either," (BS 261) his sexual interest in her is very much subdued in the novel. Sexual desire is there, but not fulfilled. But far more importantly, she is stirring his senses, she stimulates his intellect:

> She'd explained to me the origin of the Paisley pattern; I had the history of Notting Hill Gate, the use of a camera obscura by Vermeer, why Charles Lamb's sister murdered their mother, and a history of Tamla Motown. I loved this stuff; I wrote it down. Eva was unfolding the world for me. It was through her that I became interested in life. (87)

Because Karim's relationship to Eva is restricted due to her status as his father's lover, it is Charlie who fully stands within the nexus of cultural and sensual stimulation: In the house of the pop star in New York there are "three or four smart serious New York women, publishers, film critics, professors at Colombia, ... whom he listed to for hours before he slept with them, later getting up making urgent notes on their conversation." (248) Charlie tells Karim: "They are educating me, man." (248) Charlie's teacher-lovers can be seen as predecessors of *The Black Album*'s figure of Deedee Osgood, the "street-wise woman" who "turns both academic and bedroom culture into exciting popular culture." (Degabrielle n. pag.) Deedee is both a personification of London's allures – uninhibited sex, culture and personal freedom - and the person that initiates the suburban boy into this realm. The teacher-lover is the novel's interface between urban culture and the human individual: "Deedee knew London and would enjoy showing it to him. Wasn't she an educator?" (BA 77) The fascination with this figure is so great that three novels later, Adam is made to report that she educates his son in the same manner: "He wouldn't allow us, [his parents] but only a female teacher, to turn him on to these pleasures [the pleasures of culture]." (TB 57) Deedee is the "college lecturer who seemed to educate him (in bed) ... ." (58) She personifies the desire for the city. Jake Ambler says of his son that they've "send him to that therapist that people have started seeing, the one who wrote the book, Deedee Osgood. ... Carlo seemed to get very attached to her, but it didn't cure him." (GG 107) What Carlo, interested in music and only

music, (107) needs is the mentorship of a musician. Similarly, Gabriel does not need a female teacher-lover. Both are relying on male mentors, affirming the novel's focus on fatherly characters. In contrast to the other novels dealing with adolescents, *Gabriel's Gift* abounds with male mentors: Rex, Lester, Speedy and Jake Ambler. Interestingly, the novel presents Gabriel's mother in the process of transformation into such a teacher-lover figure. After she threw Rex out of the house, she starts an affair with the young painter George, who "likes the idea of an older woman. He thinks there is a lot I can teach him. ... She said proudly, 'he tells me I'm wise.'" (GG 132) Her son immediately –and with an odd authority for a teenager- questions that her mother's lover is just giving her strategic compliments: "He flatters you. But he's really want someone more his own age, wouldn't he?" (132) This is in line with the novel's scepticism that a mother can reach full independence from men and find her own way. Christine is too dependent on men's affection and care, too much Gabriel's mother to be one of London's glorious teacher-lovers.

7. Conclusion

This paper has tried to show that the plots of Hanif Kureishi's novels are all constructed in a similar pattern of which abandonment is a central aspect. These plots are based on the presence of borders: between the individual and the setting, and between different socio-cultural spheres within the setting. These borders create tensions in the plots, and these determine the development of the protagonist. Moreover, they are central to an economy that builds up the expectation of a resolution. Kureishi's novels indeed satisfy this expectation; the ending of the novel is always connected with the idea of a release of tension. The novels end with the end of a stage in the protagonists life; there is always the sense that a certain period has ended and a new phase in his life is about to begin. The last scenes of the novels present this transition as a release into a state of ease and calm. Movement and development cease to be connected to the desire of leaving something behind. At the end, the protagonist has arrived in the city, has connected or reconnected to its vividness. Relaxation follows. But at the same time, this sense of achievement or arrival is juxtaposed with the awareness that the future is open. Because change is the fundamental condition of London life, the ending can only be ephemeral.

In *The Buddha of Suburbia*, Karim has found a place at a table in a fashionable Soho restaurant, from which he contently observes the lively London society. Having found a place here is having found a place in this society; this state of being located and reflective is stylistically nicely elaborated with the exclusive use of stative and stance verb senses and passives: "And so I sat in the centre of this old city that I loved, which itself sat at the bottom of a tiny island. I was surrounded by people I loved, and I felt happy and miserable at the same time. I thought what a mess everything had been, but that it wouldn't always be that way." (BS 284) Yet his oxymoronic feeling carries a bitter-sweet sense of fragility. There is no certainty whether his life will improve, although the scene is governed by his confidence and content. This hope, however, is partly

contradicted in *Gabriel's Gift*, where he is reported to be "fresh out of the clinic" (122) - a hint at a nervous breakdown.

The Black Album ends with a similar sense of reconciliation and openness. This is very beautifully captured in the characterisation of nature as pure and open, and the harmony of the short dialogue between Shahid and Deedee that ends the novel.

> He looked out of the window; the air outside seemed to be clearer. It wouldn't be long before they were walking down to the sea. There was somewhere she fancied for lunch. He didn't have to think about anything. They looked across at one another as if to say, what new adventure is this?
>
> 'Until it stops being fun,' she said.
>
> 'Until then,' he said. (276)

Shahid and Deedee are literally leaving past developments behind, and take a rest at the sea. The novel ends with the notion that the conflicts that determined the plot are over and that Shahid and Deedee have established mutual understanding. In this state of peace, movement eases to a couple's walk in nature. At the very end, the possibility of future change is highlighted. If the relationship turns out to be a structure of restriction, change will occur again. That Deedee is represented in later novels as having other young lovers, hints at the fact that both she and Shahid have moved on. It is interesting though that these instances of intratextuality show that the author's interest lies with the further life of the powerful woman-teacher rather than with that of her pupil.

Whereas *The Black Album* ends with the anticipation of a couple in love ambling in nature, *Intimacy* actually ends with such a scene. Kureishi's best and most poetic ending of a novel is seeped with expressions of intimate motions and the state of contentment that comes like a revelation to Jay:

> We walked together, lost in our thoughts. I forgot where we were, or even when it was. Then you moved closer, stroked my hair and took my hand; I know you were holding my hand and talking to me softly. Suddenly I had the feeling that everything was as it should be and nothing could add to this happiness or contentment. This was all that there was, and all that could be. The best of everything had accumulated in this moment. It could only have been love. (118)

The notion of a new beginning characterises the end of *The Body* as well, but here, Kureishi for the first and only time in his novels has chosen a negative ending, which can be considered a reversal of the above characterised endings. Here, the final scene confronts the reader with movement as escape, the loss of any location, and with it the sense of belonging somewhere: "I was a stranger on the earth, a nobody with nothing, belonging nowhere, a body alone, condemned to begin again, in the nightmare of eternal life." (126) Adam has lost his identity and he sees himself as isolated like the proverbial last man on earth; nevertheless, a sense of openness is retained: the first person perspective of the book provides this ending with a softening narrative frame. The fact that Adam is the retrospective narrator of the story suggests that he has found a new position from which he can tell his story. The end of the novel is again only the end of a period and the beginning of a new.

Gabriel's Gift ends with this transition as well. Gabriel's move into maturity as an artist is represented in a chapter that depicts the start of the shoot of his first film. The novel's end coincides with the beginning of his work as a director, thus clearly marking the end of a period and the beginning of a new, which the reader can only anticipate: "'Turn over!' he said. 'Turn over! And – action!'" (GG 178)

The fact that all novels use the motif of leaving as central engine of the plot and are based on a similar setting suggests that there is something like a characteristic narrative style in Hanif Kureishi's novels. The latter corresponds to a specific tone: Kureishi's writing is a declaration of love to "this old city" (BS 284) London and its inhabitants: "We love our city and we belong to it. Neither of us are English, we are Londoners." (SR 33) The novels are a manifestation of this sense of belonging. Leaving can be considered an act of affiliation with London, emphasized by the novels' plain rejection of England outside London. The resolution of the plot is the creation of a Londoner, or – in Jay's case - the reaffirmation of being a Londoner. In all plots, except the one of *The Body* however, leaving leads to a new sense of belonging.

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